

B2B: How to Increase Your Company Productivity, Profitability and Employee Engagement

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Many customers I talk to every day agree that a need to transform their business is one of the key criteria of staying ahead of the curve. Business agility is all about the ability to adapt rapidly and cost efficiently in response to competitive threats, opportunities, or changes. For that, businesses need access to the right information and insight from all corners of the organization.

The way we connect and interact with people, information and organizations is changing, and these changes are having a profound impact on the modern workplace. The line between tools we use for work and home has blurred, and many individuals and teams now choose how they get work done. Teams become more dispersed, creating the need for new tools that enable employees to stay connected to people, teams and information. Facebook, Twitter, etc. give people a voice, the ability to influence others, and the expectation for a direct, timely response from companies. This shift is driving businesses to re-wire internal operations for better responsiveness.

Leveraging the powerful capabilities of social networks in the everyday business process of a company, which is also known as Enterprise Social, helps organizations recognize and adapt more quickly to challenges and opportunities by reducing the distance between the center and corners of an organization. It also enables businesses to rally internal resources to resolve exceptions and respond to customer needs more quickly.

The easiest way to think about its impact: Social is fundamentally about giving power to a bottom-up organization; it is about removing the barriers to getting our jobs done and empowering each individual. Ultimately, this bottom-up organization has one of every business's key goals — to be more successful.

Studies have shown that companies with engaged workforces enjoy 18 percent higher

productivity, 12 percent higher profitability and 51 percent lower turnover. (Gallup Consulting "Employee Engagement, What's your Engagement Ratio?" 2008)

However, what does employee engagement mean? The definition often varies by company, but typically engagement means or is tied to the following: Employees feel their work is recognized, they also believe their work is contributing to the company's success, they have a voice and feel that it is heard, they feel a connection with the company culture, their coworkers, manager and executives. A short post on a company news feed can match experts from across an organization with local resources to address customer issues quickly, reducing response time from days to minutes.

Let me share an example. One of our customers, a major Russian oil company, decided to invest in collaboration tools with Enterprise Social on board. One of their current employees, who started as a common guardsman, is now working as a chief technology officer at an oil refinery in the Netherlands. He is a co-author of more than 30 innovative ideas that have been implemented to save this company millions of dollars annually. This is a good illustration of how empowering individuals and sharing ideas and information through technology can help businesses to develop and be more cost-effective.

In "The Social Economy" 2012 report, McKinsey argues that the potential for Enterprise Social technologies to improve communications and collaboration is huge, but remains largely untapped. They believe social technologies can raise the productivity of interaction workers and provide hundreds of millions in annual value.

However, for this technology to succeed in the everyday business environment, it must be used to get work done. At Microsoft we believe that social can only be successful when you weave it into the apps people are relying on every day. That is why we have integrated social functionality natively into our Office suite of productivity tools that are used by over a billion people all over the world.

Today, Enterprise Social is a key pillar of our commitment to helping people fully realize the benefits of cloud computing, through its all-inclusive approach to productivity. Given its unparalleled levels of investment, research and employee expertise, no other company is better suited to profoundly impact the workplace of today and tomorrow.

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