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Paving the way for Enterprise 2.0



Over the next few years social networking technologies are tipped to become as commonplace in large organisations as e-mail and the telephone. What's more, the adoption of Enterprise 2.0 looks set to be boosted by a new generation of technology-savvy employees eager to employ social networking in the workplace...

"Just think about it," explained Jeff Patmore, head of strategic university research at BT Group and an advocate for Enterprise 2.0. "If you want to see what a future employee looks like in our large corporations, just look at what students use today. They employ a tremendous range of communications tools such as instant messaging, text, social networks and e-mail. They use whatever is best at the time.

"When they come into business - if they don't see these same tools - they will feel as if their communication power has been taken away. We have to understand how younger people are communicating and make sure we provide very similar ways of communicating in their work environment. That way, we can enable them to maximise their potential."

Advocates of Enterprise 2.0 reject any idea that this is an exercise in pandering to the up-and-coming generation. Instead, they point to Enterprise 2.0 as solving one of the biggest challenges faced by large organisations; namely, how do you make the knowledge and expertise that exists within an organisation available to everyone whenever they need it?

"It's all about networking," said Jeff. "We're in a world of increasing complexity. And when you have that level of complexity individuals cannot be experts at everything. That's why you have to work through networks. It's the only way it can be done.

"So how do you maintain those networks when potentially you don't see people very often? How do you replicate that conversation around the water cooler when some people are perhaps thousands of miles away?"

"The answer is social networks...they allow you to fulfil that. They allow you to stay in contact. They allow you see what others are doing."

Social networking tools such as blogs and Wikis are making people and knowledge more accessible. This, in turn, helps improve efficiency and productivity.

Information sharing

Paradoxically, this openness and sharing of information can also lead to improved security. That's because all this information is accessed via a single portal. And as long as there is a secure connection, any device that runs a web browser can be used to access corporate information.

"If I can access data wherever I am, then I don't need to put it on a memory stick. I don't need to print it out. It's always available. So actually, security gets better," said Jeff.

"Far from being a liability, this becomes an asset. If you have the right access – and believe me, we've worked a long time to develop secure access - it means you're not carrying information. For instance, there is nothing on my laptop. It merely runs a browser...because I don't need anything else. So if my laptop is stolen they've just got a laptop – there's no information on it."

The good news is that Enterprise 2.0 is already being deployed in large companies that understand the benefits of using internet-base technologies to improve productivity and efficiency. But the widespread adoption of Enterprise 2.0 will take time to evolve.

"The key in here is that we allow people to learn how good these tools can be," said Jeff. "We don't impose them. We don't mandate that people use them. We just put them out there and let people discover how good they can be. The information gets about virally - and that's how the good news spreads."

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