

Enterprise Social Networking: People Productivity in a Web 2.0 World

In an era of heightened competition and a changing workforce, new models of social and real-time interaction and networked, community-based collaboration are creating exceptional business value.



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Introduction

Why Web 2.0 is important for business leaders

The notion of Web 2.0 as the foundation for the latest generation of web applications has received a lot of press lately. While it may not have fully lived up to its hype yet, it is already beginning to change the way that business executives – Human Resources (HR) and Training included – are approaching talent management. The philosophies and technologies underlying the Web 2.0 evolution give HR organizations a way to proactively address the realities that they have long known: that true people productivity requires informal collaboration and knowledge sharing across teams, and that true organizational knowledge rarely follows traditional managerial lines. Web 2.0 also provides the mindset needed to create the type of environment in which the younger generations of workers expect to work: a connected corporate community.

Key Web 2.0 concepts

There are three important concepts underlying Web 2.0 that can play a vital role in your company's ability to take better advantage of the informal interactions that drive productivity, learning, and innovation:

1. User-generated content,
2. Collective intelligence, and
3. The social networking that brings it all together.

Used in conjunction with each other, these concepts become the levers that drive exponential value from collaboration and knowledge sharing.

User-generated content is typified by information resources such as Wikipedia or YouTube.com. On these web sites, user-generated content is everything; take away the users, and there is no content. The community – not some individual author – creates the content; contributes it; governs it by determining its accuracy, usefulness, and relevance; and the community's collective wisdom ensures that the resource is updated as needed.

Collective intelligence describes how the grouping of opinions, observations, or impressions – if collected in a way that does not introduce bias – leads to better information. For example, if 100 individuals are asked to estimate how many jelly beans

are in a jar, the average of their guesses is likely to be highly accurate – and likely more accurate than the estimate of one individual would have been. Similarly, if a group of 10,000 movie-goers reviews a particular film, the group's consensus on that movie is more likely to be reflective of its audience appeal than the comments of any one reviewer.

“Web 2.0, is a major paradigm shift in the way people think. Thinking is now distributed across minds, tools and media, groups of people, and space and time.”

Chris Dede

Harvard Graduate School of Education

These are the concepts at play on sites such as Amazon.com or Netflix, which allow users to make more informed decisions based on recommendations and behavior of others (the “people-who-liked-this-movie-also-like-this- movie” concept). Collective intelligence is a fundamental strength of a site like Wikipedia: Millions of users who are continuously reviewing a large number of entries can be even more accurate than the small group of experts that edits traditional encyclopedias. The success of this site also shows the power that comes from mixing user-generated content with collective intelligence. In a learning situation, the collective intelligence of learners can help organizations determine what formal learning and which informal contributions from experts actually help their people learn most effectively. In collective intelligence scenarios, the simplicity of the process (for example, a simple point and click on a number of stars to contribute a rating and a high volume of responses are the drivers of success.

Social networking refers to the growing number of online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Social networking has –produced powerful new ways to communicate and share information because it creates a

critical mass of people who are able to easily connect and share information with one another and who understand enough about each other to trust in the collective intelligence they generate.

The fusion of formal and informal learning creates a powerful new model of blended learning: Learning 2.0

Let's look at how these new concepts are transforming the learning function. The U.S. Department of Labor has estimated that 70 percent or more of work-related learning is informal. With such a high percentage of workforce learning dependent on institutional knowledge or organizational memory – shared informally peer-to-peer – being able to effectively capture and capitalize on this community knowledge is critical to your success.

“The US Department of Labor reports that informal learning accounts for 70 percent of the learning that employees do on the job.”

CLO Magazine

Technologies to support formal learning, including learning management systems and virtual classrooms, already provide an organization with significant value today. But consider that the value of these technologies is largely derived from improving the efficiency and effectiveness of essentially 30 percent of the learning equation. Now imagine the extraordinary opportunity of even a small percentage gain in the management of or visibility into the informal learning process that comprises 70 percent of the knowledge transfer within your organization.

Effective informal learning solutions built on Web 2.0 ideas embrace user-generated content and collective intelligence in the workplace, helping to create valuable ongoing dialog amongst peer groups, and facilitating access to the enormous storehouses of knowledge within the corporate community.

“Getting other points of view and other pieces of knowledge into our learning system that might otherwise have escaped is key to our success as an organization.”

Brad Anderson
CEO, Best Buy

Instead of just attending formal training or scheduled meetings, people can also collaborate and learn continuously through multiple channels, with networked learning geared to their specific needs or assignments. And people can easily take advantage of the collective intelligence available to close knowledge gaps and find answers more efficiently and effectively. This shift to embrace Web 2.0 concepts and technology in your learning and collaboration efforts has been dubbed Learning 2.0, and you can expect it to impact your business in very positive and dramatic ways in the coming months and years.

The need for a connected corporate community

The Web 2.0 concepts we have described originally came to life on the consumer Internet; and no group of consumers has been more active in driving them than your youngest generation of workers. These 18 to 26 year-old “Millennial Generation” employees are accustomed to being online almost continuously; Facebooking, texting and blogging from their PCs, smart phones, or just about any other device. They are not thinking about Web 2.0 tools and ideas, they are living them. In their personal lives and on campus, they have been:

- Sharing information about themselves via personal profiles on MySpace or Facebook.
- Using these same sites to keep track of what their friends are doing in school or for fun.
- Sharing their online status through presence tracking so that their friends and classmates know when they can and can't be reached online.

As these technically savvy “Millennials” enter the workforce, they bring new ideas about how people across the workforce should interact with each other – they expect to work in a connected corporate community. A connected corporate community is one where they can find co-workers to help them solve a problem or contribute their own valuable ideas almost anywhere, anytime. And it is an environment where information about people is more transparent than it has ever been in the past. Just as they have been able to learn about what their peers are doing on Facebook, they expect ready access to relevant information about their colleagues at work – what they’re working on as well as their education, experience, and interests.

Why should business leaders pay attention to these trends? First of all, because the organizations that embrace the connected corporate community will be the ones that attract, engage, and retain the best talent. Also important is this inevitable fact: organizations that ignore these trends will face potential risks from collaboration that goes on through unsanctioned means. According to John Seely Brown, former chief scientist of Xerox and PARC director, “A lot of corporations are using (collaborative tools) without top management even knowing it.” Think about these risks:

- Customers, clients or even your competition could stumble across a public blog. Public blogs often jump to the top of search engine results because they are updated frequently.
- Employees may share trademark or copyright ideas or other confidential materials on a semi-secure collaboration site.
- Sales teams may discuss confidential pricing terms over a consumer instant messaging tool.

The best way to avoid these types of risks is to provide your employees with safe, productive ways to connect with each other through channels that protect both the organization and the individual from information leak and credibility damage.

Enterprise social networking forms the core of a connected corporate community

Most enterprises provide their employees with a variety of tools and technologies that help them share information. This includes e-mail, shared network drives and document repositories, or document management systems to name

a few. In general, these tools support collaboration in an information- centric manner. That is, the information might be organized into a knowledge taxonomy – or hierarchy of files and folders – but there is no context about who contributed it, why it was contributed, or if it is helpful. Searches on information- centric document systems tend to return lots of documents without giving an employee any way to determine what will be most relevant or valuable for a particular problem.

More importantly, there is very little incentive for employees to contribute into systems like these because they are disconnected from day-to-day work and normal peer interactions. E-mail is an obvious exception to that rule, but information exchange that occurs via e-mail is isolated and cannot be effectively or meaningfully captured for the benefit of the greater community. These are some of the reasons that organizations have struggled with traditional knowledge management efforts: users are not inclined to participate, and it is nearly impossible to build a taxonomy that provides enough context to give all workers the answers they are looking for.

A connected corporate community is built around a very different model of collaboration: an enterprise social networking model that revolves around people rather than

information. In this model, collaborative processes occur in the context of all of the rich information that you have about your people, and with full visibility to this information. This information might include their skills, job experience, education, and interests. All of this is available to the right people at the right time – when they have a problem they need to solve. And members of the connected corporate community can find information

People-centric models work. When we search for an expert we can search the phone book and perhaps get lucky, or we can reach out to a trusted network to see ratings and reviews and to seek recommendations and likely have a much better success at finding the right expert.

and assess its value based on who contributed it, not just where it lies in a corporate taxonomy. For example, if a new sales person is searching for effective sales presentations and collateral, he or she will quickly find the best material by seeing that a respected “star performer” in the sales

organization recommends a particular set of materials and that employees who have validated expertise (held competencies or certifications) on specific products have created useful technical guides.

Traditional HR systems have tracked a limited set of employee information, primarily basic demographics. Today's talent management systems contain rich personal profiles – profiles that go beyond demographic information to include skills, education, job experience, and interests and give members of the community a complete picture of their peers. The day-to-day investments that organizations make in HR and learning programs such as competency and certification management are generating people information that, when made available through enterprise social networking, can produce exponential value. Consider two basic examples:

- Information from formal learning and talent management processes: If you have a certification or competency framework in place, everyone will be able to take advantage of the work that you have done to define this framework. Just as visibility into these skills can help HR to identify development opportunities or determine which employees might excel in a particular position, they can likewise help your employees at large to identify which people will have the best insight into the problem they are trying to solve.
- Information from informal sources: As users create and share information, they leave a “trail” of knowledge in your system that the community can assess for usefulness and accuracy. That information becomes extremely valuable to the community in identifying expertise and adds to the organization's collective knowhow.

Enterprise social networking puts Web 2.0 into action for the enterprise

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Let's get back to the Web 2.0 concepts we discussed earlier: user-generated content, collective intelligence, and social networking. With a rich personal profile forming the foundation, these concepts are what make enterprise social networking different from traditional information-centric collaboration.

In either a traditional or Web 2.0 collaboration model, any user can generate content using tools such as such as Wiki's, blogs, team spaces, discussion forums, and web

conferencing. However, as the content is created or organized in a repository, an enterprise social networking model enriches the content with the full context of the people who created it and the value that people perceive it has for the community.

This context can then be exploited through collective intelligence of a network of people across the enterprise, or even the extended enterprise. Your people themselves are the best judges of what is most relevant and most valuable in a given situation, and the skills and experiences of each member of the community affect how their ratings are assessed by others in the organization. If the creator of a post on effective ways to rollout a new enterprise application is a top-rated IT person, that might make their contribution more credible. And it also is valuable to understand what training the contributor has completed on the new product before they made their posting. This combination of informal ratings and formal transcripts and experience tracking informs the value of social interactions, increasing the value of collaboration. As employees are able to network and group themselves not according to job or business unit but by competencies, experience, or interests, they find new avenues for sharing. In addition, their ratings and tags become more relevant to the people in their networks.

Enterprise social networking means that ideas are shared more freely, that previously unheard experts now have equal voices, and that more people across the globe are communicating with each other without barriers.

Web conferencing plays an important role in enterprise social networking

To move beyond this meeting-centric model, web conferencing tools need to be integrated with an enterprise social networking platform that provides broader access to both the content created and the context of meeting participants' knowledge and interests, their separate and shared roles and experience.

One of the biggest barriers to success for traditional collaboration and knowledge management initiatives has been getting the most knowledgeable people to take the time to contribute. Web conferencing offers a great deal of promise to remove this barrier, giving community members one of the easiest ways possible to create their own content. Whether you are capturing a conversation amongst experts, conducting a system demonstration, or simply discussing a few PowerPoint slides, the process just takes a few clicks. Subject

matter experts simply start a session, record it, and publish it. Effective, interactive real-time collaboration also extends informal, spontaneous interactions that happen face-to-face to colleagues across the globe. This can increase the depth of connections in a community, and it encourages contributions and involvement. However, much like traditional information-centric collaboration, Web conferencing tools typically operate

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in a meeting-centric model. You go to the Web conferencing tool to set up and conduct a meeting. The meeting might be recorded for the participants' future reference, but in most cases the knowledge that was shared in the session does not reach any further than those participants.

To move beyond this meeting-centric model, Web conferencing tools need to be deeply embedded in an enterprise social networking platform that provides broader access

to both the content created and the context of meeting participants' knowledge and interests, their separate and shared roles, and experience. During the meeting, participants can see the full knowledge network of meeting participants, and this information can lead them to ask better questions or find new experts to help them. Participants can even locate new experts, find them online, and bring them into a meeting on-the-fly. After the meeting, the whole community benefits from recorded sessions that can quickly be contributed to communities based on roles or other organizational divisions, and easily rated and/or tagged by the community. Each presenter's experience, competencies, and other relevant information from his or her profile can be seen not only by real-time meeting participants, but also by people viewing the recorded session.

The value of Web conferencing tools typically ends when a meeting is over; but the value of Web conferencing in the context of enterprise social networking extends indefinitely. A group of people should be able to take a discussion that is happening in realtime over Web conferencing and move it to an asynchronous format, where they can share documents and ideas whenever they have the time. Likewise, an established community of practice should have instant access to web conferencing from wherever they congregate online.

Enterprise social networking is a very important aspect of how organizations will use their web conferencing tools in the future. Organizations will get the most value out of their Web conferencing investments if they can embed Web conferencing deeply within all of their people processes, rather than keeping it as a separate infrastructure. It is the rich information about people that will enable Web conferencing to evolve from a meeting tool into strategic, enterprise social networking.

Leveraging enterprise social networking to get more value from your talent management initiatives

Enterprise social networking provides organizations with an unprecedented level of knowledge about its talent. Management can look at who are the most valuable contributors and where knowledge lies. It provides the organization greater agility in responding to a changing business environment. And enterprise social networking gives HR executives new insight into the value and potential of their workforce, providing new ways to identify star performers who should be rewarded and new ways to groom future leaders.

Engage new employees with peer-to-peer onboarding

Enterprise social networking provides a great way to engage workers in the connected corporate community from their first day on the job. Imagine a new research scientist logging into a system that has automatically assigned required learning and performance goals aligned to organizational objectives; and that also recommends the most popular knowledge assets based on the scientist's job role, business unit, and work location.

Not only do employees have instant access to valuable sources of knowledge that will make them successful, but they also have a way to explore strong networks of trusted advisors that will give them the informal guidance they need to become

star performers. By being able to connect with their peers, as well as experts and mentors, they may even develop interests they did not initially have, transforming them into a more engaged workforce with significantly higher productivity.

Reward people based on formal and informal measures of success

Today, the performance goals that many managers assign to their team members are narrowly focused on either achieving specific objectives, completing a task or project or developing the individual's skills. Consequently, this also means that performance reviews are typically based on pre-determined expectations. Often, they do not take into consideration activities the individual has done that are not related directly to his or her job description, even if those activities play a vital role in achieving the goals of the organization. And they rarely look at the unexpected value an individual provides in finding a new solution, helping a new employee, or driving a critical objective that wasn't established in their goals.

Employees want to be evaluated based on what they are doing to help their team and their organization. They want to be able to show their managers how they are contributing to a wide network across the organization and how highly their ideas are valued, so that they can make the right case for raises and promotions.

What if, as a manager, you could not only measure a person by how well they have met certain goals, but also by how much they have contributed to the community? Or better yet, as a Talent Officer, what if you could find emerging thought leaders based on not only how much they have contributed, but even more importantly, how well their thoughts have been received? What better way to assess the talent you have than by looking at the value of their contributions as measured by their peers? Business and HR leaders can engage and motivate their workforce in a much better way by defining true measures of success – a fusion of formal and informal measures.

Understand your talent

Today's competency and expertise management models in talent management solutions also must evolve to be able to assess the broader value of individuals within your organization. This will require sophisticated new tools that

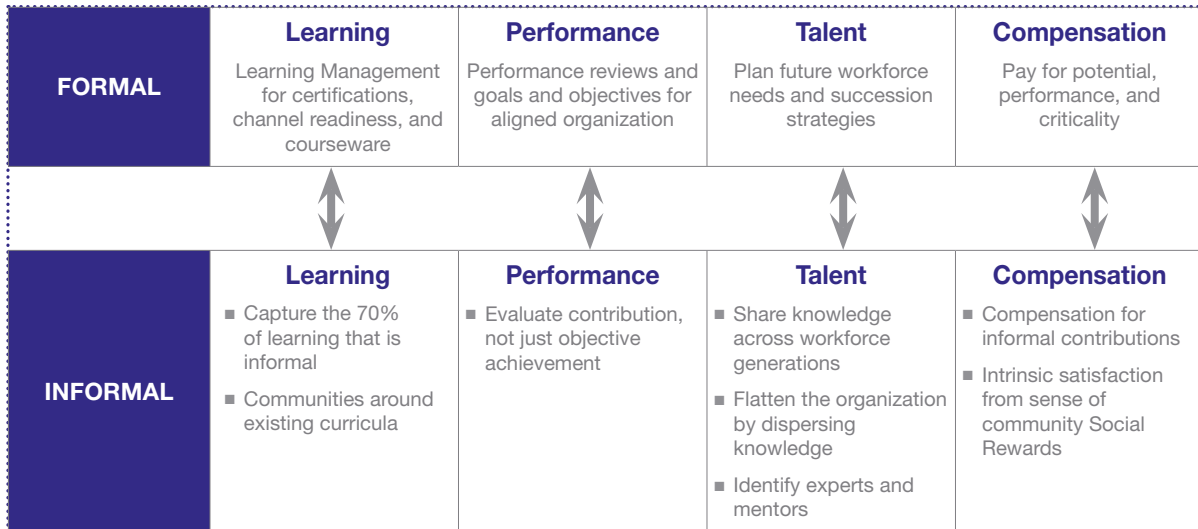
analyze each individual's role and value in informal learning using clearly defined metrics. These ratings can be extremely valuable in large organizations where a given employee couldn't possibly know all the people who could be helpful in a particular area. There are a number of ways for implementing the metrics, ranging from systems that reward people based on the number of times they supply helpful knowledge within a community, to something as simple as tracking how frequently a given user's contributions have been bookmarked as a measure of their relevance and value.

Based on the concept of collective intelligence, next-wave models for valuing people's contributions to the organization based on their reputations will be better, more accurate, and much more easily implemented than any attempts to create similar models in the past. Talent officers will be better able to find emerging leaders across the enterprise. And they will surface individuals who might not normally get the recognition they deserve, and worse, might end up leaving the organization with all the knowledge they have.

Couple this with sharing best practices internally and asking your leaders to monitor and own communities of practice, and you will not only be able to find new thought leaders, but you will also be able to engage them in mentoring programs, expand their skill sets, and create potential new jobs and directions for the organization.

Unify formal and informal processes in a single talent management platform

Enterprise social networking drives collaboration that is integrally tied to how you manage your talent. The rich people profiles tracked in a next generation talent management system provide the full context necessary to build a connected corporate community; and the visibility that you get into people's informal contributions can drive more informed decisions about how you manage your talent. A unified talent management platform for both formal people processes and informal, enterprise social networking enables the bi-directional flows that strengthen both sets of processes.



Connections within a unified platform for formal and informal people processes.

The Saba Advantage

One platform for enterprise social networking and end-to-end talent management

Through its seamless unification of real-time collaboration (Saba Centra Web Conferencing), anytime collaboration (Saba Live), learning (Saba Learning), and people management (Saba Performance and Saba Talent), Saba is the only vendor to offer a single, best-in-class platform to support the connected corporate community.

Saba Centra is a powerful, full-featured Web conferencing solution that is ideal for virtual classrooms, webinars and workshops, scheduled online meetings, and impromptu collaboration among large or small groups. Leading businesses, government organizations, and universities worldwide rely on it.

Saba Centra sessions take full advantage of video, audio, text, and graphics – as well as mechanisms for the interactive review of materials such as application sharing or similar functions – to effectively capture and share community-based knowledge. Another critical capability built into Saba Centra is a set of powerful, yet easy-to-use recording and content-editing tools to quickly create, manage, and publish professional-quality, media-rich content – online and offline. The solution’s intuitive interface lets first-time users capture informal knowledge within minutes – with little or no training

– and add any session to your corporate knowledge base as a knowledge object. All of this functionality is available on any browser, anywhere and on mobile devices such as your Apple iPhone and iPad.

Saba Live is a fully-featured enterprise social networking platform that brings anytime collaboration – such as groups, document sharing, discussions and self-authored web pages (wiki) – to connect people to expertise throughout your organization. Saba Live streamlines informal learning through the easy exchange of information and ideas regardless of where people may be geographically located. It also makes it easier for teams working on cross-functional initiatives to interact and facilitates a host of mentoring programs and other talent development initiatives.

Saba Centra and Saba Live take advantage of the rich user profiles that are at the core of Saba’s unified suite to provide a full context around collaboration. In addition, the collaboration capabilities available with these solutions are readily accessible within formal learning, performance, and talent management processes. Because of Saba’s deep knowledge of people in the workplace and our robust Web conferencing experience, the company is uniquely capable of providing one platform that brings together all the capabilities needed for collaboration and a full range of talent management requirements. Saba Live and Saba Centra are available in one bundled unified Saba Collaboration Suite.

According to Bersin & Associates, “Saba’s vision with Saba Centra is to solve (the Blended Learning) problem in a single, enterprise-wide solution...As organizations (evolve) they realize that the vast array of learning assets they build needs to be managed, reused, and leveraged across ‘on-demand’ learning needs. This new era of e-learning...requires an even higher level of integration and content management. We think that Saba’s vision for this solution is right on track.”¹

Conclusion

For virtually every business, your employees represent by far the most important investment. An efficient, productive workforce offers the potential to deliver a higher return on your money than any other asset. The ability of your people to identify opportunities, innovate solutions, and provide unanticipated levels of service can drive your growth in even the most crowded and competitive segments. Smart businesses are adopting innovative people management practices to establish and maintain meaningful differentiation in the marketplace, and achieve faster innovation and better productivity.

¹ “Saba Acquires Centra”, online post by Bersin & Associates, May 12th, 2007, <http://bersin.wordpress.com/2007/05/12/saba-acquires-centra/>

Many of these businesses are discovering that applying new models of collaboration and networked, community-based learning is an essential people management practice for an evolving workforce. Web 2.0 has provided a whole new set of tools – and more importantly, a mindset – that helps people engage with their peers and mentors, connect and collaborate more effectively, and capture the vast amounts of informal knowledge that are otherwise lost after a single interaction. It is an opportunity to provide people with the means to create content, leverage community-based knowledge, and connect with anyone who can help them get their jobs done better. It is also an opportunity for the connected corporate community to identify, mentor and groom its future leaders.

Only Saba provides a single, unified platform for enterprise social networking – both real-time and business oriented social networking – and end-to-end learning and performance management. This unified approach delivers organizations the insight and visibility to drive exponential value in their people processes through higher productivity, faster innovation, and more effective learning.

For more information about the unified Saba Collaboration Suite, including Saba Live and Saba Centra, please visit www.saba.com.



Saba ■ Power Up Your People

Saba is the premier provider of people systems that enable today's people-driven enterprises. By combining learning, people management and collaboration technologies, Saba delivers solutions that help mobilize and engage people to drive new strategies and initiatives, align and connect people to accelerate the flow of business, and cultivate individual and collective knowhow to achieve exceptional results.

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