

SharePoint has always been in the ‘leader quadrant’ of Gartner’s Magic Square and is one of the dominant players in the enterprise collaboration space. And, perhaps because of its sheer size, SharePoint poses many questions to organisations seeking to implement. So, what better way to round up our series of white papers on collaboration than to answer six of the most pressing questions with the help of our expert panel?

One of the big board-level questions I get is about why we need to invest in something like SharePoint. What should I say?

SharePoint provides the environment to knit together project teams in multiple locations, organisational boundaries and time-zones with seamless knowledge management and integration. Time is money – collaborative working links people and information together instantly with no time wasted and the maximum business value extracted from every team interaction.

It is also important to lay the collaborative foundations in the workplace to ensure staff satisfaction and retention. Many of your existing staff will already be playing with SharePoint-like technology at home. And the SharePoint-based Virtual Learning Gateways being deployed across UK schools are making the collaborative environment second-nature to your future workforce as well. This is a generational change and will be seen as a competitive gap if adoption is ignored.

Studies in the US have already shown that the current generation of new recruits are specifically avoiding job opportunities with organisations that lack technology for collaborative working, such as Instant Messaging. The collaborative tools that SharePoint provides are critical for success in today’s global economy and are actually now being demanded by workers.

But implementing collaborative technologies is such a complex process. How should I set the board’s expectations?

It is vital that the right architecture is in place first. To some extent, you need to bet on the technology as a platform upfront. Then, you can approach projects in bite-sized pieces rather than all at once, using SharePoint to address specific

business pains in one area before moving on to the next. After all, just because the technology is useful and valuable in one part of an organisation, it doesn’t mean it can be used effectively everywhere. Deployment should be approached strategically and tactically, letting the technology grow within your organisation to better see the value in it. And, where there’s little value in a certain area, reassess how it is used.

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The key here is to define your approach and there are two ways to achieve this. One is the Rapid Application Development (RAD) approach, where small amounts of SharePoint functionality are introduced incrementally and your implementation partner grows the infrastructure around it. As total costs are difficult to judge with this approach, it makes sense to adopt the RAD approach only with a trusted partner.

The more cautious alternative is to work with a consultancy, establishing a benefit roadmap of all possible gains and the initiatives needed to achieve them. This will include the most effective size of pilot group the technology will be rolled out to initially, identifying general requirements then drilling down to specific areas. In both cases, it is vital not to try too much too soon.

How can social networking tools, such as MySite and Facebook, be used as a business solution?

Nowadays, many organisations are globally situated with many independent agents working out of the traditional confines of the office building. These social networking tools have great currency in people's home lives, but they offer a great deal for effective collaborative working for businesses as well.

With Facebook, the idea of presence – knowing when a colleague is available and contactable online – has developed from a purely user-driven event to one that links in to RSS and social feeds to highlight even menial tasks that are currently being undertaken by an individual. Likewise, when integrated with Office Communicator, SharePoint uses presence as a business tool by providing an instant level of awareness that was not previously possible. Now, even on ad hoc projects involving internal and external participants, the working conversation can be continued for as long as possible without the delay of waiting for an email that may not be read straight away. With traffic-light presence indicators, you know who is available to answer a query, so you can rely on instant communication.

MySites can be used as a library accessing a user's Workspace where documents are held. One click will bring up the latest document, allow a colleague to see what changes have been made and provide an environment for direct interaction to move document changes on to the next level as quickly as possible. Privacy settings can be used to control the level of each user's input in this process. The next step in this simple-to-use workplace environment is a move away from issuing documents via email to dynamic Wiki-based document creation amongst teams as well as internal work blogs instead of business memos.

DID YOU KNOW...?

Fujitsu was the first to integrate Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 software across an entire document imaging scanner line. The enterprise content management (ECM) software by KnowledgeLake allowed any desktop connected to a Fujitsu scanner to tightly integrate with SharePoint, unlocking the value of existing infrastructure investments and creating a more efficient work environment.

How do you change a staff mindset that cannot go beyond viewing SharePoint as a glorified, web-based network drive?

You are not alone – achieving staff buy-in is a very common problem and, unfortunately, there is no single answer. However, from a psychological perspective, once a couple of workers discover how it works – or perhaps discover that it works! – others will quickly follow. The key is to get your staff to the edge of this waterfall, which usually involves a number of initiatives to succeed.

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You can sit down with those staff members who play around with other technologies a lot – the so-called 'players' – and ask them directly what is needed to encourage them to play with SharePoint. Or you can switch off every shared application that runs against the SharePoint *modus operandi* and force people to engage. On a basic level, it's carrot or stick, but the stick should be the last resort.

The key is to make your staff see the potential of collaborating with SharePoint without spelling it out. Often, just getting a few people into the SharePoint environment with, for example, a trick email link is all it takes. Once a few users are there, the blogging, announcement and document-sharing tools will be in front of them to play with. It's amazing how often this sort of tactic can set the waterfall going – once those few users start using SharePoint, it quickly spreads.

How good is SharePoint with document records management?

SharePoint offers a number of options in this area and in various different guises. The most basic option is a part of the basic SharePoint offering: a facility of records management with Record Center. Depending on your level of legal or regulatory compliance, this could fit the bill. However, if there is a detailed level of compliance, SharePoint can easily integrate with a third-party records management facility, such as Meridio, Open Text or Documentum.

Archiving rules can be automated and stored in whichever records management centre that has been chosen and there is right-click functionality for simple document management directly from SharePoint: you can view a document's properties, edit it, search within it, delete it and send to a team or location. SharePoint can be as integrated or as hands-off as necessary in this respect but it can provide a fast workflow for managing even the most complex documents.

Are there any bad MOSS implementations and what lessons were learned?

Probably the best example of a so-called "bad" implementation was simply a case of an organisation not recognising the scale of possibilities available to them with SharePoint. This customer implemented SharePoint to enable

simple collaboration amongst teams. However, very quickly the document management capabilities of SharePoint were discovered and the organisation began to use them as well.

The problem was that the implementation hadn't been designed for document management, which put service levels at risk. There were simply too many documents for the size of infrastructure put in place. Obviously, this involved rescaling the implementation and growing the document management capabilities as outlined in a previous answer. So, ultimately, there was a happy ending to this story. This example highlights the need to think strategically. Our advice here is simple: be careful what you ask for, because you might get more than you realise!

DID YOU KNOW...?

Fujitsu developed and implemented the web portal www.comercio.es for the department of 'Comercio' belonging to the 'Ministerio de Industria Turismo y Comercio' in Spain. This was the first Government-sector web portal in Spain to obtain the qualification and 'WAI-AAA' accessibility certificate, and also won the 'TAW' award for accessibility.

Answers taken from the panel discussion at the last Fujitsu Breakfast Briefing, Tools of the trade – a practical examination of implementing collaborative technologies, 22 January 2008.

Panel members:

Viral Tarpara – Microsoft IT Pro Evangelist

Simon Lennox – long-term Fujitsu secondee, Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland

John Buston – Fujitsu consultant specialising in SharePoint

Scott Rogers – Fujitsu consultant specialising in collaboration technologies.

FURTHER QUESTIONS?

Do you have other questions you would like to ask about collaborative business? Have the answers provided here made you think more about your own situation?

Get the right guidance to move your organisation forward in the collaborative world by contacting Fujitsu Services at mspractice@fujitsu.com or visit our website: <http://www.fujitsu.com/uk/services/microsoft/index.html> for more information.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you require any further information, please contact us via email

mspractice@uk.fujitsu.com or ring **+44 (0) 870 242 7998**.

Alternatively visit <http://www.fujitsu.com/uk/services/microsoft/index.html>