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The Concept of Social Business: Oxymoron or Sign of a Changing Work Culture?

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Abstract

The article discusses the source and pertinence of the term "Social Business". We present the findings from a study of projects that are in the early stages of adoption of Social Software in organisations. Using a qualitative research approach we examine real-world cases of implementations of integrated Enterprise Collaboration Systems. 16 existing cases (desk research) and three new cases (field research) are analysed and the findings are compared and aggregated. We apply the 8C Model as an analytical lens to guide the coding of the case data. The study's results reveal the relations between the different concepts (features, components, collaboration scenarios) that can be identified in the cases. The findings show that the most popular usage scenarios of the software are not very "social" but support people in their daily joint work with a focus on getting the job done. The study also reveals possible beneficial factors for the adoption of Social Software such as improved personal information management, mobile devices and unified communication, and better workspace and presence awareness.

Keywords: Social Business, Enterprise 2.0, CSCW, groupware, social software, collaborative work

1   Introduction, Motivation and Research Question

The topic of the 26th Bled Conference is eInnovation: Impacts on Individuals, Organizations and Society. One of the "innovations" of recent years was the introduction of the concept "social" in the workplace in the form of "Social Business" supported by "Social Software". The combination of the terms "social" and "business" might, on first hearing, seem strange. The Kernerman's Dictionary defines the term "social" foremost as "pertaining to, devoted to, or characterized by friendly companionship or relations" (Kernerman 2013). Webster's Dictionary explains the adjective "social" as "marked by or passed in pleasant companionship with friends or associates" (Webster 2013). But can business be "friendly or pleasant

companionship"? Both definitions are more likely to be used in the context of leisure time rather than the workplace. So why did IBM come up with the term "Social Business" (IBM 2011)? What are the origins of this oxymoron? What happens when companies introduce "Social Software"? Is it welcomed by employees? Are they building up *friendly relations* or feeling that their work is now an *enjoyable activity*? What are the expectations of the decision makers when they introduce Social Software? What happens to the existing company culture?

These were questions that motivated us to study the phenomenon of Social Business. Since these questions cannot be answered by looking at theory we turned to practice and searched for existing companies that were willing to share their experiences with us (as case studies). Social Business is a relatively new phenomenon and our search showed that there are very few cases of integrated, large-scale implementations of Social Software (beyond the experimental introduction of a test bed functionality like, for example, microblogging or Wikis) and in which companies were actually satisfied with the use of their newly introduced systems. We wanted to study the emergence of Social-Media-like software from an early stage to be able to later analyse a possible transformation in company culture or to be able to depict reasons for success or failure. Eventually, we identified three companies that agreed to give us an insight into their projects. We used these as in-depth case studies. The guiding overall research question for our study was: *What are companies doing with their Social Software Systems in the early stage of adoption?*

2   Emergence of Social Business and Social Software

IBM defines the term "Social Business" in the following way: "A business that embraces networks of people to create business value. Social businesses embrace technology to enhance relationships between employees, customers, and partners. They augment business processes and applications with social interactions and insight. They provide integrated activities that use business data and social data. Social businesses more fully integrate the collective knowledge of people-centric networks to accelerate decision making, strengthen business processes, and increase innovation that matters." (IBM 2011)

The definition indicates that the concept is rather geared at the collective potential of people in their joint work ("collective knowledge of people") than the intuitive understanding taken from the dictionary definitions discussed above. The origin of the word can probably be traced back to the concept of *Social* Media. Many Social Media platforms are indeed *social* and in conformity with the dictionary definition of "friendly companionship". In Social Media, people gather voluntarily in their free time to chat, exchange ideas, to play together and, most importantly, share information (photos, films, files). Social Media platforms thus provide software functionality that supports interaction and interchange. The general software category supporting these features (chat, blogs, wikis, pinboard, bookmarks, file exchange, microblogging, social profiles, ...) is called *Social Software*. Social software *features* (the functionality provided on the user level) can be categorised into the four inner areas of the 8C Model for Enterprise Information Management (Williams 2011). This is displayed in Figure 1.
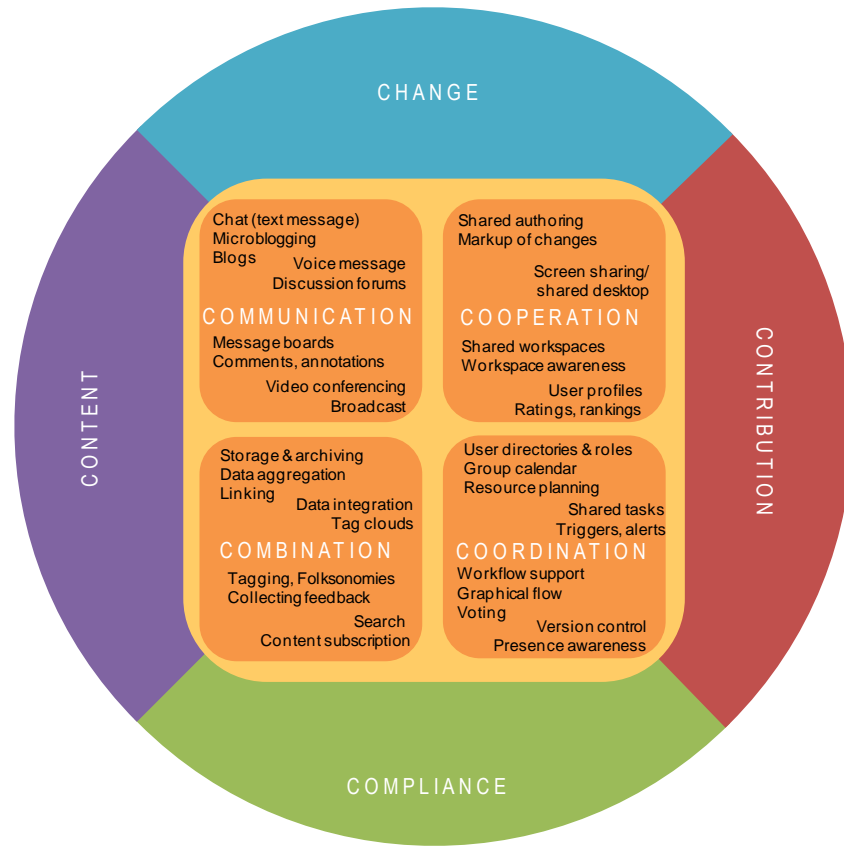
Figure 1: Typical features of Social Software categorised in the 8C Model

Figure 2 shows the connection between Social Media Platforms and Enterprise Collaboration Systems. Inspired by the success of Social Media and the recognition of the collective potential that networks of people bear, the same software features were developed into Enterprise Collaboration Systems which now enable companies to tap into the collective potential of their staff.

The resulting effect has been labelled *Social Business* (by IBM) or more generally *Enterprise 2.0*, a term that was popularised by McAfee in 2006 (Koch 2008). While the concept of Social Business describes the use of Social Media in a company the latter (and older term) Enterprise 2.0 alludes to a very similar thing, namely the use of Web 2.0 technology *in companies*. The definitions are almost identical, as McAfee says: "Enterprise 2.0 is the use of emergent social software platforms within companies, or between companies and their partners or customers." (McAfee 2006)

In this paper, we use the term "Enterprise Collaboration Systems" for software platforms that incorporate functional ideas from Social Media and thus support staff members in their communication, cooperation, coordination and content exchange (the inner areas of the 8C Model (Williams & Schubert 2011)). In our view, Enterprise Collaboration Systems are an emergent or more modern form of groupware enriched by the possibilities of the latest developments in technology (e.g. Web 2.0). Figure 2 gives an overview of the terms and shows that Social Media and Enterprise Collaboration Systems are both based on Social Software and are thus similar in functionality but are very different in other aspects.
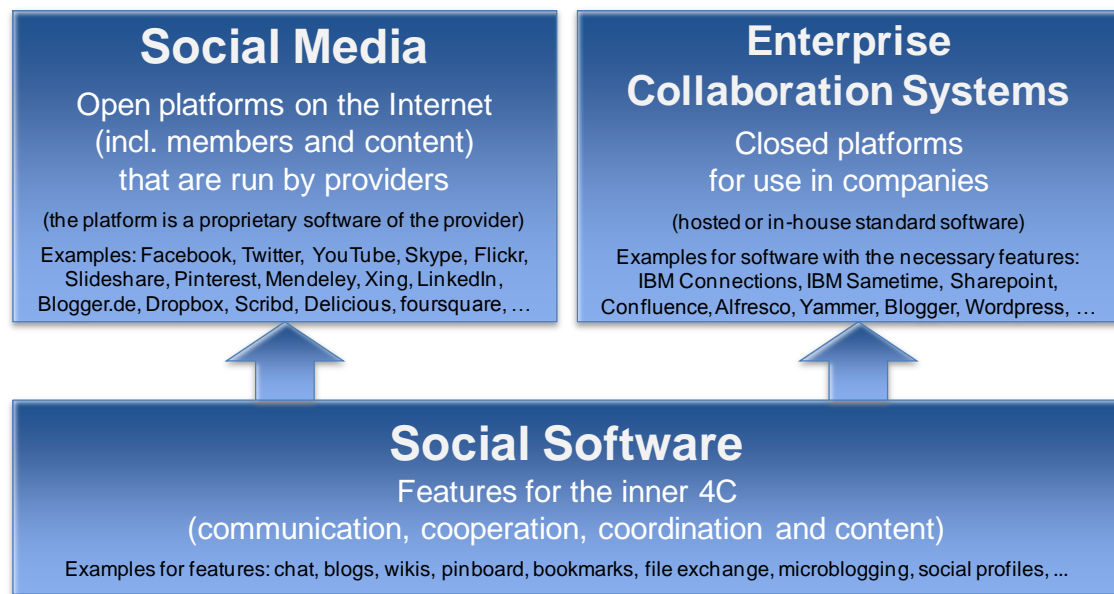
Figure 2: Social Media and Enterprise Collaboration Systems share the same features

Our study showed that Social Media and Enterprise Collaboration Platforms (ECPs) differ most notably in two respects, i.e. "access" and "ownership". Whilst Social Media are open platforms that can potentially be accessed by any Internet user, ECPs are restricted to authorised users and are run behind company firewalls or as a dedicated hosted solution. Ownership of social profiles and content often resides with the provider of the platform, which does not usually suit companies who need to retain ownership of the social profiles of their staff members and the generated content. ECPs need to be part of the company's knowledge management and can, over time, develop into a valuable information resource. They are also subject to existing regulations regarding business and information compliance.

3 Social Business in the Literature

We started our literature search with the search terms: "social business", enterprise 2.0", "social software" combined with "collaborative work", "introduction", "implementation", "use cases" and searched for academic and practitioner literature in our University's electronic library. We continued with a snowball techniques and added articles from the reference list of articles that appeared very relevant to our topic.

The literature reveals that the term "Social Business" is used with two completely different meanings. The first use refers to its more intuitive meaning of social behaviour of management to achieve social objectives through business. In 2008, Yunus published a book entitled "Creating a World without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism" in which he discusses a management style for multinationals that also addresses and solves social problems (Yunus 2008). "A key characteristic of social businesses is that they are designed to generate an economic surplus which will be reinvested to ameliorate the attainment of social objectives (e.g. poverty reduction)." (Zanfei 2012, p. 57) Yunus' suggests

that "Entrepreneurs will set up social businesses not to achieve limited personal gain but to pursue specific social goals." (Yunus 2008, p. 21)

The second meaning (and the one that we address in this article) refers to the use of Social Software in companies. Peter Schütt, a manager at the German branch of IBM, published a book with the title "The Road to Social Business" (original title: "Der Weg zum Social Business") in which he talks about the change in society, politics, personal life and the use of information systems that the emergence of Social Media has brought about. In the preface of his book, the author uses the term "Mitmach-Unternehmen". The verb "mitmachen" can be translated as "participate". As a consequence the title of the book should maybe rather be "Participatory Business". This would eliminate the association of society, companionship, and welfare – aspects that do not seem to fit in the work environment. His idea is that today's employees do not limit themselves to doing what they are told but are engaged (of their own accord).

Schütt's use of the term Social Business, however, is in line with other authors. Deloitte conducted an extensive survey and provided the respondents with the following definition of Social Business: "In our survey, we defined social business as activities that use social media, social software and social networks to enable more efficient, effective and mutually useful connections between people, information and assets. These connections can drive business decisions, actions and outcomes across the enterprise." (Kiron et al. 2012, p. 52)

The adoption of Web 2.0 technology in companies is not a new phenomenon. Early papers in this area discuss the topic of "social networking" (e.g. DiMicco et al. 2008). Social networking is based on the newly introduced possibility for employees to edit their own "social profiles", i.e. showing a photo, contact information and their area of interest and expertise.

The emergence of Web 2.0 tools in companies has been observed and written about for years. In 2008, Bughin reported from a study of more than 2800 executives that collaborative technologies (Enterprise 2.0) were rapidly adopted in the survey group and that the responses showed that the technology could form a source of competitive advantage. He describes isolated technologies such as "P2P, collective intelligence tools, social networks, blogs, web services, wikis, RSS feeds, podcasts and mash-ups". (Bughin 2008) There is a lot of similar literature on singular features of Social Software such as Blogs (e.g. Jackson et al. 2007; IP & Wagner 2008), Wikis (e.g. Happel & Treitz 2008), Social Networking (Richter & Riemer 2009) and Social Bookmarking.

In recent years, the early experimental tools have been further developed into *larger-scale integrated* Social Software Systems that support many different collaboration features and that integrate to some degree with the existing IT infrastructure of a company. Examples of such integrated systems (which we call Enterprise Collaboration Systems) are IBM Connections, Microsoft Sharepoint and Atlassian Confluence. These integrated systems are in the focus of our study.

During our keyword search we identified the best matches in the area of practitioner literature and trade publications. Short articles with eye-catching headlines such as "The New Era of Social Business" (Fenwick 2012), "Social Business Tool Revolution" (Gossard 2012) or "The

Road to Social Business Transformation" (Keitt & Schadler 2013) report on the promises of Social Software. The articles portray stories and anecdotal evidence and are about everything, from addressing and grooming customers in Social Media to the improvement of internal communication in Twitter or other hosted platforms. None of these stories address the introduction of on-premise, integrated, collaboration solutions which are the focus of this paper.

Many of the articles on Social Software discuss a mix of *internal* (employees and partners) and *external* (customer-oriented) issues and approaches. Our own study is about the use of Social Software *in organisations* i.e. the interaction *between staff members* and the support of *group work*. There is another branch of the discussion around Social Business that focuses on establishing *a channel to the customer* (using Social Media). This topic is *not* part of our study.

4   Research Steps and Survey

As mentioned above, the phenomenon of Social Business is an emergent topic and can only be studied by looking at current practice in companies. As of now, there are only a few companies worldwide that have introduced Enterprise Collaboration Platforms (ECPs) on a large scale. With the help of a leading software provider we were able to find three organisations that were willing to discuss their experiences with our research team. The organisations operate in different industries (manufacturing of components, IT service provider in the banking sector, research group) and vary in staff numbers (1800, 2400, 12). The three in-depth cases can be seen as revelatory cases following Yin (2003). They were crafted following recommended principles for case study design and documentation of results (e.g. Yin 2003; Miles & Huberman 1994; Schubert & Wölfle 2007). We sought to implement a triangulation between staff roles in each of the cases. We selected people in different roles in each company and transcribed more than eight hours of recorded interview time. The three roles were: Management (decision to implement), IT expert (responsible for installation and operation of the software), project owner (responsible for the introduction at the workplace). The cases comprise 160 pages of written text that was analysed with our research question in mind.

Figure 3 illustrates our four-step-process. The *first phase* was a preparatory phase in which the literature was reviewed and analysed to find out what had previously been published in the area of Social Business. In this step, we also searched for existing cases in similar areas that could be used for a pre-study before the start of our own field research.

With the help of the two open-access databases eXperience (www.experience-online.eu) and E2.0 Cases (www.e20cases.org) we found 16 existing cases (*desk research*) that describe the use of Social Software and analysed them to get a basic idea of the current practice in companies. The cases had all been written in a common structure following the eXperience methodology (Schubert & Wölfle 2007). The *common structure* facilitated our cross-case analysis. The case documents were encoded and analysed using an interpretive coding approach. The qualitative data analysis tool ATLAS.ti was used to manage the case texts and codes. An overview of the cases and the background of the companies are provided in

(Williams & Schubert 2011). The findings and the coding process are described in detail in (Schubert & Williams 2012).

Step 1: Preparation phase   **Step 2: Desk research**

```
Research      Literature           Case                Independent
question      analysis             selection (16)      coding
                                                       researcher 1      Discussion &
                                                       Independent       agreement
                                                       coding            on findings 1
                                                       researcher 2
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Step 3: Field research   **Step 4: Consolidation phase**

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Case              Transcription                    Comparison of
selection (3)     & text           Findings 2      findings 1 & 2    Conclusions
& interviews (9)  analysis
```
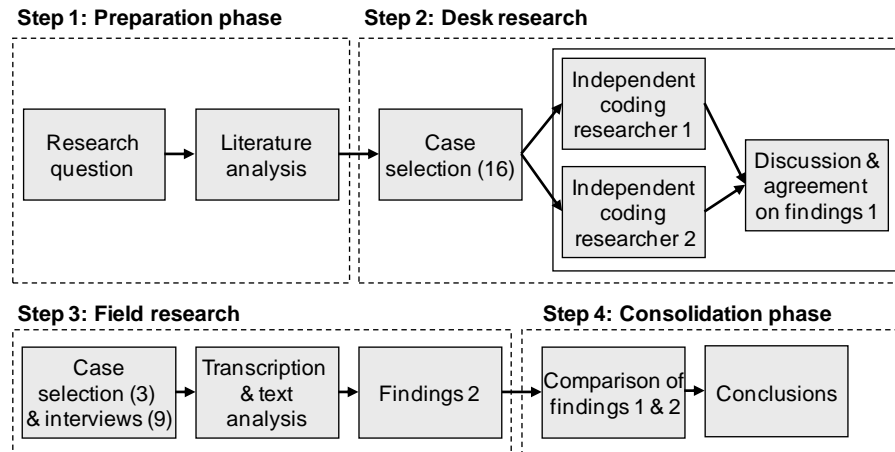
Figure 3: Research steps

In the *third phase* (which is the focus of this paper) we searched for companies that had recently introduced an Enterprise Collaboration Platform and were willing to speak about their experiences, thus allowing us to collect primary data (*field research*). Three companies agreed and we conducted nine interviews with people in three different roles. The different roles allowed us to triangulate the results. The survey period went from December 2012 to February 2013. The interviews provided very detailed information. Again, we used ATLAS.ti for our comprehensive and in-depth content analysis applying techniques described by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Saldaña (2009).

In the *last phase* we compared the findings from our desk research with the analysis of our primary data and generated our findings.

5 Findings

Guided by our research question we analysed our (primary and secondary) cases for the current use of the software in the daily work of the respondents. We coded the responses looking for typical usage scenarios which we call "collaboration scenarios". Collaboration scenarios are steps in a business process in which employees have to fulfil collaborative activities to advance the process, e.g. exchange or share information or directly communicate with one another. The Social Software supports synchronous as well as asynchronous activities.

Desk research: Scenarios mentioned in the case studies

We found 18 different collaboration scenarios in the 16 existing cases (c.f. Table 1). The Social Software that was used in the cases is: Windows SharePoint Services 3.0, Invision Powerboard, Yammer, Atlassian Confluence, IBM Connections, IBM Lotus Quickr, Wordpress Blog, MediaWiki, Liferay and Atlassian Confluence.

Category: Collaboration Scenarios	
Codes	Codes (continued)
Information exchange with external parties	Real-time joint work
Information channel (external)	Meetings
Team communication (asynchronous)	Knowledge database
Team communication (synchronous)	Knowledge management
Conversations	Expert search
News publishing	Expert chat
Personal relationship management	Expert network
Problem solving	Support with problems
Project management	Information exchange (internally)

Table 1: Collaboration scenarios identified in the existing cases

Field research: Scenarios mentioned in the interviews

Thirteen collaboration scenarios were mentioned in the *interviews*. In the in-depth cases we found six new scenarios that had not been mentioned explicitly in the existing cases. Seven of the previously identified scenarios could also be found here. All three companies that were interviewed are users of IBM Connections and Lotus Quickr.

Category: Collaboration Scenarios	
New Codes	Existing Codes
Task planning (team)	Team communication (asynchronous)
Information posts	News publishing
File sharing	Project management
Calendar management	Meetings
Idea management	Knowledge database
Information storing and search	Knowledge management
	Information exchange (internally)

Table 2: Collaboration scenarios identified in the new cases
(six new codes, seven existing codes)

The eight scenarios that were mentioned most frequently over the whole case data were the following:

1. Knowledge database
2. Information exchange (internally)
3. Project management
4. Knowledge management
5. Task planning (team)
6. Expert search
7. Team communication (asynchronous)
8. Meetings

The scenarios listed in the two tables are not at the same abstraction level. Task planning is, for example, a sub-scenario of project management. In some of the secondary cases, however,

only abstract concepts such as "project management" or "knowledge management" could be extracted (coded) and it was not possible to find out, which specific sub-scenarios were supported by the Social Software. This problem was overcome in the field research, where the interviewer could ask for specific activities on a more detailed level. As a result the findings from the field research provided us with a richer and more detailed and nuanced picture of the current use of social software systems in companies.

It was difficult to interpret and classify the results from the interviews. The graphic contains an excerpt of tools and features encountered in the case studies. The first round of (open thematic) coding showed that the respondents had presented us with a mix of concepts on different levels ranging from complete collaboration scenarios to software components, software types, and sometimes even to specific features of a software product. We applied axial coding (Strauss & Corbin 1990) to derive the relationships between the different concepts. Our analysis led to the following groups (classification, coding scheme):

1. *Collaboration scenarios*: the business activity that the software supports
2. *Components*: a bundle of features that is used to support one or more collaboration scenarios
3. *Software functions (features)*: the functionality that the software provides on the most granular level.

Figure 4 shows the relationship between the concepts in a schematic diagram. From the interviews we learned that the ideal process starts with a painpoint analysis where different stakeholder groups discuss the expected improvements from the new Social Software. The painpoints need to be translated into use cases (which we call "collaboration scenarios").

Within these scenarios, different software components are used. The components are groupings of granular features. In Figure 1 we grouped the features mentioned in the case studies into the four inner areas of the 8C Framework (Williams 2011) to add some structure and facilitate discussion about the requirements. The feature level serves as the link between the user perspective and the actual standard software product (software vendor perspective). In order to find the "right" software for the defined requirements (result from painpoint analysis) a functional match with existing software products is necessary. Figure 4 lists the elements that we extracted from our cases (grounded theory).
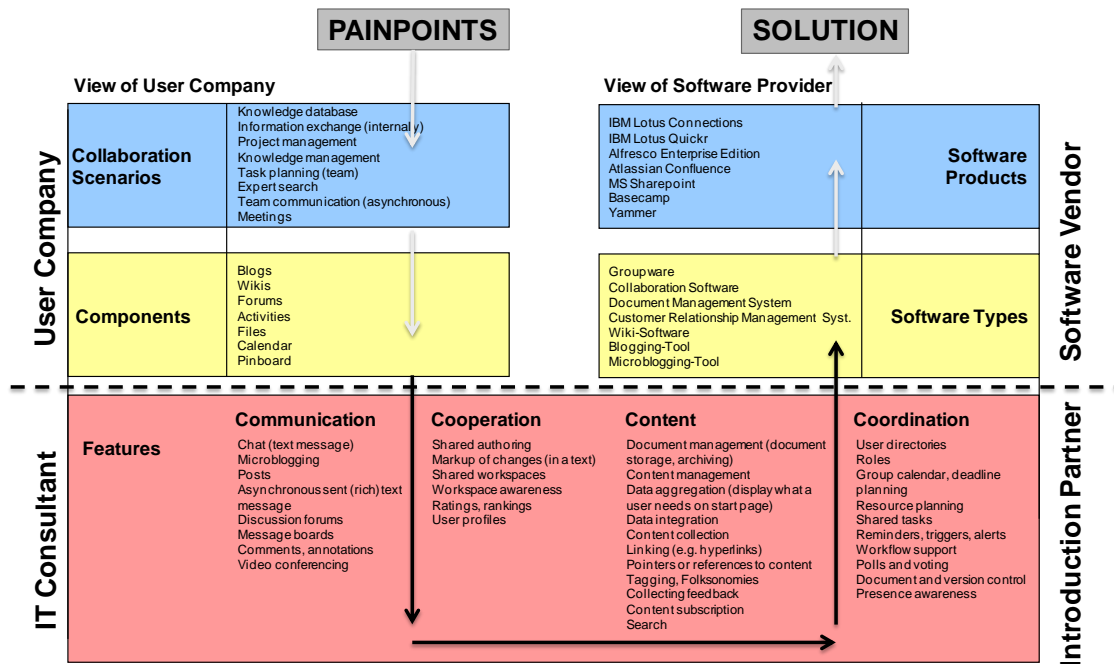
PAINPOINTS

SOLUTION

View of User Company

View of Software Provider

User Company

| Collaboration Scenarios | Knowledge database
Information exchange (internally)
Project management
Knowledge management
Task planning (team)
Expert search
Team communication (asynchronous)
Meetings | IBM Lotus Connections
IBM Lotus Quickr
Alfresco Enterprise Edition
Atlassian Confluence
MS Sharepoint
Basecamp
Yammer | **Software Products** |
| Components | Blogs
Wikis
Forums
Activities
Files
Calendar
Pinboard | Groupware
Collaboration Software
Document Management System
Customer Relationship Management Syst.
Wiki-Software
Blogging-Tool
Microblogging-Tool | **Software Types** |

Software Vendor

IT Consultant

Features

Communication
Chat (text message)
Microblogging
Posts
Asynchronous sent (rich) text message
Discussion forums
Message boards
Comments, annotations
Video conferencing

Cooperation
Shared authoring
Markup of changes (in a text)
Shared workspaces
Workspace awareness
Ratings, rankings
User profiles

Content
Document management (document storage, archiving)
Content management
Data aggregation (display what a user needs on start page)
Data integration
Content collection
Linking (e.g. hyperlinks)
Pointers or references to content
Tagging, Folksonomies
Collecting feedback
Content subscription
Search

Coordination
User directories
Roles
Group calendar, deadline planning
Resource planning
Shared tasks
Reminders, triggers, alerts
Workflow support
Polls and voting
Document and version control
Presence awareness

Introduction Partner

Figure 4: Grounded theory: from painpoints to software solution

6 Discussion of Findings

Returning to our original research questions about the use of Social Software in the early stage of adoption, what did we learn from our analysis?

Finding 1: Meeting support: structured information and integration into existing infrastructure

It was interesting to see that the respondents were almost unanimous in the description of the components that they thought were most useful. All of them had come to like the "Activity" component in IBM Connections. The Activity Component allows users to write, edit and post text and add specific tasks (*as a structured list*) to the information item. The tasks can be assigned to registered team members. It is ideally suited for 1) the preparation of meetings (agenda planning), 2) the writing and publishing of minutes and 3) task planning and control. If configured properly the tasks show up as personal tasks in the person's groupware environment. This was pointed out as the advantages of an *integrated solution*.

The interesting aspect from a research point of view is, that activity management is a very *structured way* of collecting information. The tasks are numbered, appear in a certain order (which can be changed) and can be checked (crossed out) when they are fulfilled. So it does not only allow information distribution but also control of the work progress.

Finding 2: Information accessible in thematic communities: replacing the much hated e-mail

The study revealed that people are starting to hate their e-mail. They mentioned that they felt overburdened by the flood of information that is frequently simply not targeted at the right addressee (mass e-mails). Respondents from all three case companies nominated the "Pinboard" and "Blog" component in thematic communities as a favourite way to reduce the amount of e-mails. Two advantages were mentioned: it is easier to *search* a post that I have read or written in the past and the information is sorted into *thematic areas* and I can decide which topic I want to follow. They also mentioned the improved *workspace awareness* (the compiled list of new or edited posts).

Finding 3: Project management support: the joint team workspace

Project management was the high level scenario that was mentioned in all interviews. Respondents appreciated the combination of different features in a "workgroup environment". Instead of looking for information that is spread in file directories and e-mails they can now access a "project community" where they share files, information posts (e.g. in Blogs), joint posts (wikis) and task lists.

The findings show that most of the functionality that is adopted in the early phase is very "hands on" and "down-to-earth". The respondents are searching for support in everyday situations with a strong focus on simple information management. None of the features in the top-three list of collaboration scenarios are typical features that we know from various Social Media (such as expert directories or photo or video file sharing). It is rather a combination of singular Web 2.0 features such as Blogs, Wikis and file sharing.

Bottom line shows that the most popular scenarios support the *personal information management (PIM)* rather than showing "social" features. The respondents felt that the Social Software facilitated the finding and the distribution of information and made it easier for them to "get the job done". The big promise of "social software makes your company more competitive" could still be true. But probably not because the employees are suddenly keen on helping each other (altruistically) but rather because the use of Social Software leads to a valuable information base that is easily accessible to whoever needs it whenever it is needed.

Overall, the use of Social Software in the early adoption phase seems to lead to:

- More centrally stored information (instead of ending up in personal mail boxes)

- More writing up of ideas and solutions because it is easier to retrieve the information

One of the respondents mentioned that it is a bad idea to label the introduction of such software as "introducing Facebook to the company" (as it was done in his company). This sets the wrong expectations. In the company context the association of the word "social" is not always welcomed so it is important to stress the benefits that Social Software brings along to get the job done.

7   Conclusions: Why Now and What Next?

People are creatures of habit. It is our conclusion that a working "Social Business" is a promising "cultural disposition" for companies. Our findings show that it can lead to a

workforce that is better informed and thus better at maintaining and developing the company's business. The term "social", however, is misleading as employees are not really behaving "socially" but rather "collaboratively" or are simply "more open to sharing information". The study has also shown that there is still a difference in the acceptance of a certain kind of information sharing in one's private life and in the workplace. Thus we argue that phenomena, which are observable for Social Media, such as Facebook or Twitter, cannot be transferred one-to-one to the workplace without causing misunderstanding.

Why is the change towards "social" happening now and not earlier (since we have had groupware such as Lotus Notes in companies for the last 20 years)? There are a few possible responses to this question that emerged from our study:

1. *Private goes Business*: Many people have integrated Social Media in their private lives and expect to have similar tools at their availability in the workplace, too.
2. *Personal Information Management*: At the end of the day Social Software supports people's personal information management and facilitates the completion of personal tasks. This is a motivational factor for adoption.
3. *Mobile Devices and Unified Communication*: There is an increasing demand for a synchronization of contact information and access to documents through mobile devices. Most Social Software supports access from mobile devices almost natively.
4. *Better (Workspace and Presence) Awareness*: We are becoming used to notifications and status information. Social Software makes it easier to see what has been changed and what is new.

Respondents also mentioned an increased proficiency in the use of Social Media. Employees have learned to use Social Media over recent years. They have tried out what works and refined their ways of use. One respondent said: "some time ago I revisited my history on Facebook. I looked at what I had written three years ago and saw how my posting patterns had changed. In the beginning I posted a lot of status awareness ("I am now at the station in Frankfurt") and I have stopped doing that. Today I only post what I see as "relevant" information." Now, the same people that have learned how to communicate in their private lives feel confident to use these media in a business context. Or as Orlikowski says: "Companies need to get started because this is here and it's here to stay, especially for the Millennial generation. This is what they are used to." (cited in Kiron et al. 2012, p. 6)

It looks like "Collaboration" will be a component in other Business Software such as ERP Systems, CRM software or Business Process Management suites (Erol et al. 2010). First signs of this trend are already visible (e.g. in Salesforce, various Notes-based CRM systems or process management suites like IBM Blueworks Live). Each company has to define their suitable "lead system", i.e. the system in which the aggregation of all relevant content for an individual user takes place. Large companies are using SAP Portal, smaller ones Intranet solutions. We argue that a future form of the activity stream with an embedded experience attached to each item could play the role of a highly customized content aggregator.

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