Enterprise 2.0 – What is it? Does it matter?

By Dan Keldsen

Enterprise 2.0 is a topic that has been building in awareness since the Spring of 2006, when Harvard Professor Andrew McAfee first coined the term in an MIT Sloan Management Review article entitled “Enterprise 2.0: The Dawn of Emergent Collaboration,” as a parallel (but distinct) term from Web 2.0 (popularized by Tim O'Reilly in 2004). Web 2.0 is seen by most to be focused on consumer and public-facing websites, although that distinction was not actually explicitly made in the original definition. Nonetheless, Enterprise 2.0 is clearly much more about enterprise adoption of “2.0 mindsets” than the “pure” consumer-facing side of the coin.

Here's an early glimpse into the state of Enterprise 2.0 as seen through a survey of the AIIM community (please note that the final results may vary slightly from those presented here). We’ve also reached out beyond that community to peer deeper into organizations around the world (assisted by an advisory panel assembled for this topic, including Prof. Andrew McAfee, Stowe Boyd, Patti Anklam, David Weinberger, and Prof. Eric Tsui).

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The top three responses to the question. Which of the following is closest to your organization’s perspective of Enterprise 2.0?, were: The topic never comes up (27 percent), A new approach to collaboration (23 percent), and Just Web 2.0 (10 percent) for the Enterprise. The fourth choice was “Just a marketing buzzword” (9 percent), which is also to be expected in the early stages of any new (or evolving) market definition. What do these responses mean? Clearly there is work to be done in building awareness around Enterprise 2.0, providing further definition and examples of what it is, and, more importantly, what it can do for organizations on both the business and technical fronts.

That the topic “never comes up” was the highest response is also not terribly surprising. It is interesting to note that collaboration, a topic that had fallen out of favor after being oversold as “groupware” in the late 1980s and 1990s, it is not far behind. Indeed, it is seen by many as the compelling use case for Enterprise 2.0.

Secondarily, we examined how individuals are defining Enterprise 2.0, rather than their organizational perspective of the term, given that organizations tend to lag adoption (and excitement) of individual members of the organization.

In response to the question, which of the following definitions of Enterprise 2.0 most closely aligns with YOUR definition?, the top three responses show an interesting level of understanding from an individual viewpoint: The application of Web 2.0 technologies in the enterprise (21 percent); and a three-way tie for The use of emergent social software platforms within companies, or between companies and their partners or customers (12 percent); The next generation of enterprise content management (12 percent); and, finally, Technology that enables people to collaborate and/or form online communities (12 percent).

Given the strength and awareness of Web 2.0 as a buzzword, if not in full definition, it is understandable that that response was the clearest choice. Interestingly, Prof. McAfee’s definition was tied in 2nd place with more explicit technology definitions, around enterprise content management (ECM) and collaboration, both of which have been around and well defined for ten years or more.

Stay tuned for the full Market IQ on Enterprise 2.0, and accompanying webinar, slated for late March 2008.

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The AIIM Market Intelligence Quarterly (Market IQ) explores a timely enterprise content management (ECM) topic with distinction and objectivity, providing education on both the associated business issues and technical solution components. Download the first report, Content Security: At the Fulcrum of Innovation and Risk, at www.aiim.org/industrywatch.