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Enterprise 2.0 Payoffs: Sales, Innovation, Knowledge Sharing

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Volltext: Note: AIIM reports by Enterprise 2.0 champion Andrew McAfee show specific gains from social networking inside the corporation. Slideshow: 10 Cool Social Media Monitoring Tools (click image for larger view and for slideshow) Open innovation, knowledge sharing through online Q&As, and improving collaboration between sales and marketing are the three standout scenarios for social business success covered in a new report from the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM), the global community of information professionals. The papers on "When Social Meets Business Real Work Gets Done" were written by Andrew McAfee and based on a survey by the AIIM Task Force on Social Business and Innovation. McAfee coined the term Enterprise 2.0 in a 2006 article for MIT's Sloan Management Review and is a regular keynote speaker at UBM's Enterprise 2.0 conferences. [ Why not learn about innovation from a master? See 3M Applies Social Business To Product Development ] While acknowledging the obstacles to enterprise social media success, the AIIM papers make the case that organizations taking a "wait-and-see" approach to the emergence of social business ought to pick up the pace. Key findings included:

-- More than 60% of firms who did invest in collaborative frameworks achieved big gains in knowledge sharing and communication accuracy between marketing and sales.
-- Open innovation delivers beneficial changes to both internal processes and external products, and is meeting the expectations of its sponsors. Open innovation helped realize major changes to the internal processes of 48% of respondents and to the external offerings of 34% of respondents.
-- A 60% satisfaction rate was reported for organizations with a rewards-based enterprise-wide Q&A. Respondents said high-quality answers often come from unexpected sources, indicating that social tools are cultivating advanced knowledge sharing.

"All three areas addressed by the Task Force demonstrate that when people engage properly with each other and with technology, trust, self-organization, and good business results emerge," McAfee said in the press release. "The three use cases are true examples of social business because they depend on people with strong, weak and potential ties to organize their own workflows, roles and credentials."

McAfee devotes one entire paper to the notion that simply providing a social activity stream or other forum where employees can post questions and get answers--either from an official source, or from peers--helps keep an organization focused and coherent.

For example, one of the case studies he discusses is replicating the "hallway culture" of General Mills, which traditionally relied on casual encounters in the hallways of its headquarters for informal knowledge sharing. That approach broke down once the organization went global, with more than 32,000 employees working in virtual teams, and General Mills dubbed its E.20 initiative "Connect-the General Mills Global Hallway."

In the General Mills example, the person who asks the question can mark the answer that proved most useful, and the next version of the Q&A application will provide mechanisms for "liking" and rating answers. McAfee also reports "surprisingly widespread" adoption of open innovation, where a broad group of employees (or even customers and partners) contribute product or product improvement ideas in a social forum. The survey found 26% of companies are currently participating in some form of open innovation. Of those, 90%
reported that anyone within the company could contribute—but only 15% said outsiders (even pre-screened outsiders) were welcome to join the process.

Social business integration of sales and marketing was the least mature of the three use cases in the survey, with only 18% of respondents reporting progress in that area. However, of those who were making the effort, more than 60% reported big gains in knowledge sharing, timely communication, and ability to work together. Follow David F. Carr on Twitter @davidfcarr. The BrainYard is @thebyard

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