



# The Cultural Challenge to Integration

By: Geoff Livingston  
Senior Vice President, CRT/tanaka



There are still great challenges to business adoption of social media. Regardless of the cause – control, forcing one-way communication models into conversational media, lack of participation, time or fear – companies and organizations find themselves stubbing their metaphorical toes. Their cultures prevent success.

There's no greater example of this than the enormous challenges the Obama administration faces moving the government into the Web 2.0 era. No one questions whether or not the president and his team understand social media. Yet the barrier lies in a prohibitive federal culture that enforces privacy and security regulation, and protects agencies from getting lambasted publicly.

As Allison Fine says, organizational silos prevent online communities from being empowered. Many companies and organizations attempt social media with a trial balloon or a beach-head approach. While these can be successful approaches, and represent a great way to introduce the power of social media, short-term solutions do not build an organization that can truly engage. Further campaigns are short lived, while conversations online tend to be ongoing.

If an organization needs to become social-media friendly – from PR firms and nonprofits to enterprises and government agencies – then a serious gut check needs to occur. Will our culture allow us to embrace these new tools? And more importantly, can we change the way we interact to allow more of our community into our business?

### **LEADERSHIP MUST EMPOWER**

Management must make a conscious decision to engage in social media, specifically to bring more voices to the table for real conversations. This does not mean crowdsourcing finances and trade secrets. It does acknowledge that real conversations involve more stakeholders than the employees inside the walls of the department/division/organization/enterprise.

In the modern information age, people expect a genuine relationship with organizations using these social media tools. That means the old ways of communicating – delivering messages through various media forms – won't work. Publishing a Twitter feed, a blog, a Facebook group or a "viral" video is not the answer. Instead, change the way relational communications are approached throughout the organization. Organizations will adapt their cultures to allow for two-way conversational media.

**If organizations are afraid of what social media will create, here are a few thoughts:**

- **Competitors will read conversations, and in most cases their efforts to emulate efforts will fail. In reality, a leading company's core offering is in talent management, the resulting very special people working there and organization-specific processes.**
- **Customers and partners will want to suggest that products/services/programs be run differently. A couple of their ideas will actually be improvements, as companies like Dell and Starbucks have discovered.**
- **The integrity of the company and internal relationships will not be drained, and the company will not lose power. Instead, the organization will only strengthen relationships and add more human capital and equity to the equation (Allison Fine).**

There are many case studies and books out now about the power of social media and the results it can achieve. It's hard to deny its power. Now, it's really a question of whether the C-suite is willing to embrace the painful change to become a social-media friendly enterprise. The C-suite needs to take responsibility for moving the cultural bar toward openness.

Yet, a decision means nothing without the ensuing action. From a CxO perspective, how does one move an organization into the social, collaborative Web?



## EVOLVING FROM SILOS TO HIVES

Social media needs to map toward the current culture in an evolutionary fashion as opposed to demanding sudden and drastic change. It won't be accepted by an organization if the change represents a sudden uprooting. Migration offers the best path to change.

This change could be classified as part of an overall corporate management shift caused by the information revolution. That revolution has antiquated industrial corporate structures, forcing extended networks of decentralized workforces, suppliers and distribution networks. So it only makes logical (and linear) sense that communications would follow suit. One could say the communications movement toward social media has been indirectly caused by the information age, just as human resources have moved toward talent management principles.

Communications at its core is the exchange of thoughts, opinions or information by oral, written or visual means. It is more than just marketing, and in reality by mapping the communications flow within an organization you can see its organizational architecture, workflow and cultural values.

Consider a beehive architecture. According to Wikipedia, the basic nest architecture for all honey bees is similar: "Honey is stored in the upper part of the comb; beneath it are rows of pollen-storage cells, worker-brood cells, and drone-brood cells, in that order. The peanut-shaped queen cells are normally built at the lower edge of the comb."

Hives are adjacent to each other, and while their members each have roles, from products (honey) and defenders to mates and rulers, these hives allow for fluid interaction. This is a much different mindset than the traditional corporate architecture of silos. A hive architecture allows for fluid information transfer and interaction between roles, as well as more open access to the outside.

Applied, social media can serve as an elixir, a means to ease the process of moving toward an extended corporate hive with empowered edges. A new structure for enterprise social media means empowering internal and external stakeholders with the ability to communicate (work) more fluidly across an extended architecture and share information.

Social media is not meant to gut the organization or its purpose. Nor is it meant to build individual stars in an enterprise. Personal brands don't create impact unless they are aligned within the context of larger enterprise initiatives. Instead, social media should support achieving a better result across teams of people; for instance, more productivity, better customer relationships, financial rewards and revamped, better policies.

## EXAMINING SILOED PROCESSES

To successfully migrate toward hive architectures, CxOs should examine department, division and/or enterprise missions and explore natural directions for improvement. This leads to a measurable social media result, something achievable: time management, improved processes, outbound marketing communications, better customer relations, product marketing/development, return on investment (ROI) or other organizational measures.

While marketing communications is the most talked about enterprise use of these tools, there are many. Because it is the function that impacts the bottom line with new customers, potential increased revenues and loyalty, marketing communications has often been the first focus of enterprise innovation and adoption in social media.

Even upon identifying a desired outcome, allocating the necessary time and resources, and authorizing a project, many social media projects fail. And that in large part occurs because of the siloed culture that deploys them.

Whether it's controlling the conversation, publishing public statements (and associated processes), legal issues or performance measurements, many processes stop people from using social media tools within the enterprise. One national consultancy tells all of its employees to use social media, but then asks workers why their billable time is down.

Audit HR and workflow processes to enable social media participation versus punishing people. Let people use the tools to talk to each other. Lower the firewall enough to let external stakeholders participate.

Old industrial processes seek to close silos in an effort to compete and protect the organization. Those old defense mechanisms don't necessarily work anymore in the information age. Each process should be vetted in comparison to the potential gain: Does the risk this seeks to avoid really outweigh what could be achieved? Adjust accordingly.

**Using the marketing communications model, here are some examples:**

- **Is there a process to vet online customer feedback? Or does the customer service department not interact with communications? And why?**
- **Internal review processes that involve many stakeholders across the organization and require weeks to approve a press release or Web page will not allow for live conversations about real issues.**
- **Similarly, planning campaigns assume that the organization can call the shots. The new online communications environment is so fluid that communicators can have a playbook, but individuals and processes should enable rapid adjustment to evolving conversations.**
- **Impressions and views are no longer viable measurements. Interactions that lead toward a goal are. How are people rewarded for communicating? Impressions or results?**
- **In that vein, if – hypothetically speaking – 30 percent of stakeholder time is spent online, have performance and job review measurements been adjusted to reflect 30 percent online work? Or are promotions solely doled out for the number of media hits, trade show leads or Webinar registrants?**
- **Does legal prevent communications from occurring? What's the barometer? Is the protection worth it in the new environment?**

It's all about empowering the front line and associated stakeholders; more people power vs. less control. Yet don't relinquish quality checks. The reality is that while more brain power is good, there are still dangers to crowdsourcing and idea markets.

In essence, beehives still have queens. And organizations, while evolving to more open, information-friendly architectures, will naturally change the way they communicate – but they still need management. Great decision making, while informed by more and different sources, still runs companies. Vetting information sources intelligently becomes a critical component to enabling leaders to make strong decisions.

## THE FIRST PROJECT

Our experiences working with organizations to get social media approved show one thing: low risk is better. While most executives understand that social media has become a must-have in the larger media environment, many organizations still view it as experimental marketing. In large part, that's because most of them fail in their initial self-started efforts.

### Tips to ensuring the right pilot project:

- **Begin with some form of listening or monitoring. It's important to know what the community actually wants from the organization.**
- **Align the project with an area inside the company that can use improvement, such as customer service or better search engine visibility.**
- **Simple and relatively low cost is good. When there is fear involved, an easy, relatively affordable project is an easy thing to sign off on.**
- **Short timeframes help, too. Make it a question of months or even weeks.**
- **Have a measurable goal. The project scope should identify exactly what to measure. Attaining something worthwhile is essential, whether it's micro-donations, market intelligence, feedback on a new product, click-throughs to a store, registrants for a value-added Webinar or some other measurable result. It's important to declare victory.**
- **Feel confident that said goals are attainable. It may be worth bouncing off someone else who has more experience.**

So that being said, here are some tips to getting approval. First off, we recommend using a pilot project to get the ball rolling. While social media really represents ongoing conversations, reticence is often conquered by a win, and the best way to provide a win is via a pilot project.

Once a success is attained, use cost models versus ROI to parlay further adoption of social media. Most widespread social media programs start with a blog, a project or a Twitter stream, and are expanded when initial successes are realized.

