

ComputerWeekly – The connected enterprise

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Communication and collaboration tools

| “Standard” tools | Real-time tools | “Social” tools |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Email | Telephone/VoIP | Wikis |
| File shares | Web conferencing | Networking sites |
| Portals | Video conferencing | Blogs/Microblogs |
| Scanned documents | Instant messaging | ... |
| ... | ... | |



“Unified Communications”

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Figure 1

Organisations today no longer have the luxury to be able to reach decisions the way they did in the “good old days” (well, maybe 5 years ago). Hierarchical decision making is too slow, too dependent on the knowledge and capabilities of immediate reports in the employment chain and is too prone to errors. The explosion of communication and collaboration tools (see figure 1) has provided many new means of communicating and collaborating – but has also introduced many issues that organisations are struggling with.

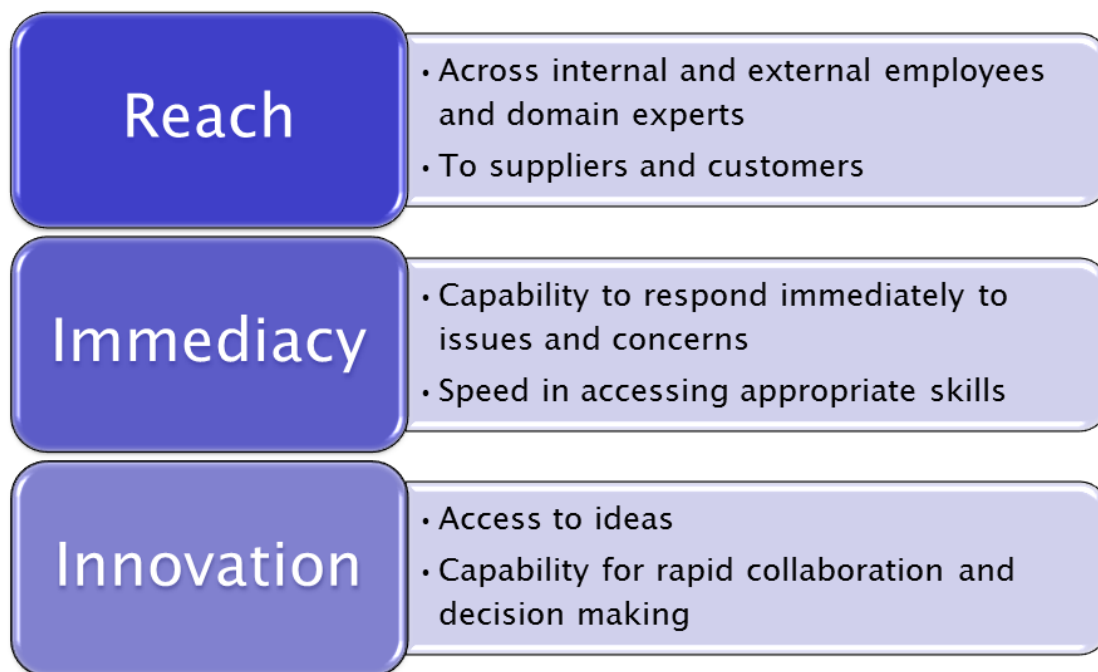
Early attempts at unifying the various tools into a cohesive system were either biased in a specific direction (e.g. all information ended up as some form of entry in a user’s email inbox – not a great deal of use to someone who was a phone junky), or were too cumbersome to use to embrace new technologies as they appeared.

An uncontrolled approach to communication and collaboration meant that valuable information slipped between the different tools, and decision making was then based on “best efforts” – that is, only on the information the decision maker actually had access to.

However, today’s communication and collaboration systems allow organisations to create a suitable platform to better respond to the market’s needs; one where the user can choose their preferred means of working without forcing others to use the exact same tools. The likes of Microsoft, IBM, Google, Skype, Twitter and Facebook are all providing new and different approaches to communication and collaboration – yet any mix has to be built and integrated in a manner that is secure and controlled.

Using Quocirca’s Total Value Proposition (TVP) approach, this short article addresses the value, risk and cost impacts of creating a connected enterprise.

Value quocirca
Business and IT Analysis



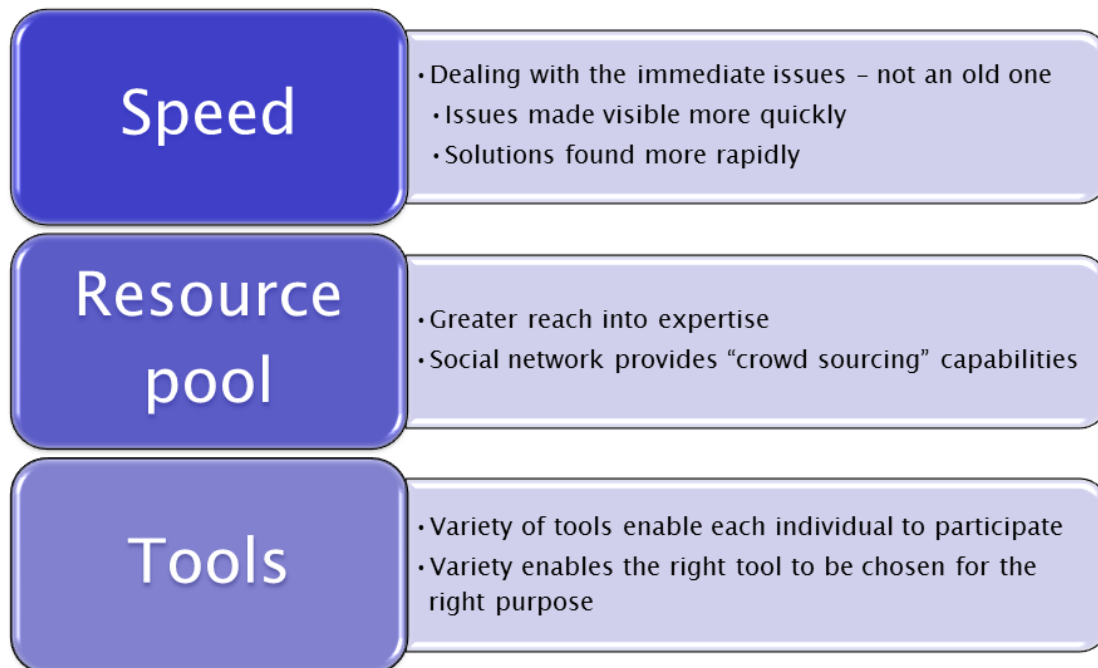
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Figure 2

Figure 2 looks at the additional value a connected enterprise can help create through good use of such tools. Using enterprise class, secure communication and collaboration tools enables an organisation to look outside of its direct employee base, without the potential problems of free-for-all use of e.g. Facebook and Twitter. Externals, such as consultants and contractors can be rapidly enabled to work as peers within the organisation’s environment, and suppliers and customers can also be involved by enabling them to provide valuable insights into issues and to provide their ideas as to how best to optimise processes and to introduce new innovations.

The immediacy of real-time and near-time communication and collaboration tools also enables issues to be dealt with far more rapidly, with externals again being able to be pulled in rapidly to deal with anything outside of the direct capabilities of the organisation itself.

Risk (positive)



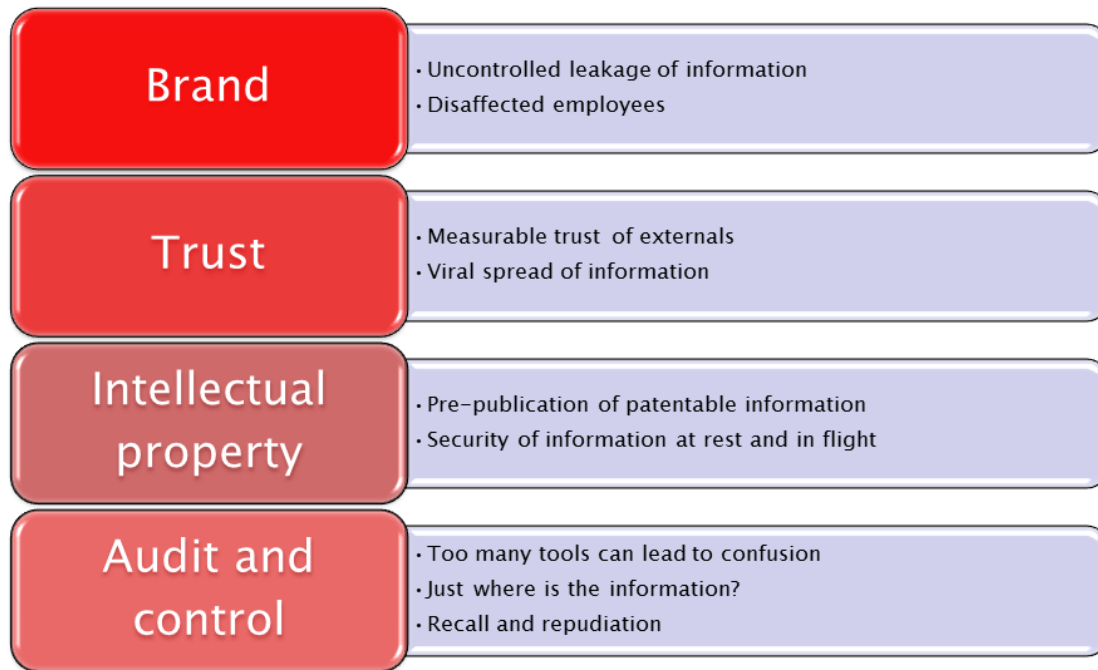
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Figure 3

A suitable communication and collaboration strategy can also lower risk – the capability to get to resources rapidly no matter where they are situated means that many issues can be dealt with before they become problems. Customers and suppliers can be kept informed, and certain issues can be “published” into a social network to see if anyone – even those unknown to the organisation – can help in solving the problem.

There is also a massive variety of tools available, almost guaranteeing that there will be a tool out there that meets the needs of each individual or group an organisation needs to deal with.

Risk (negative)

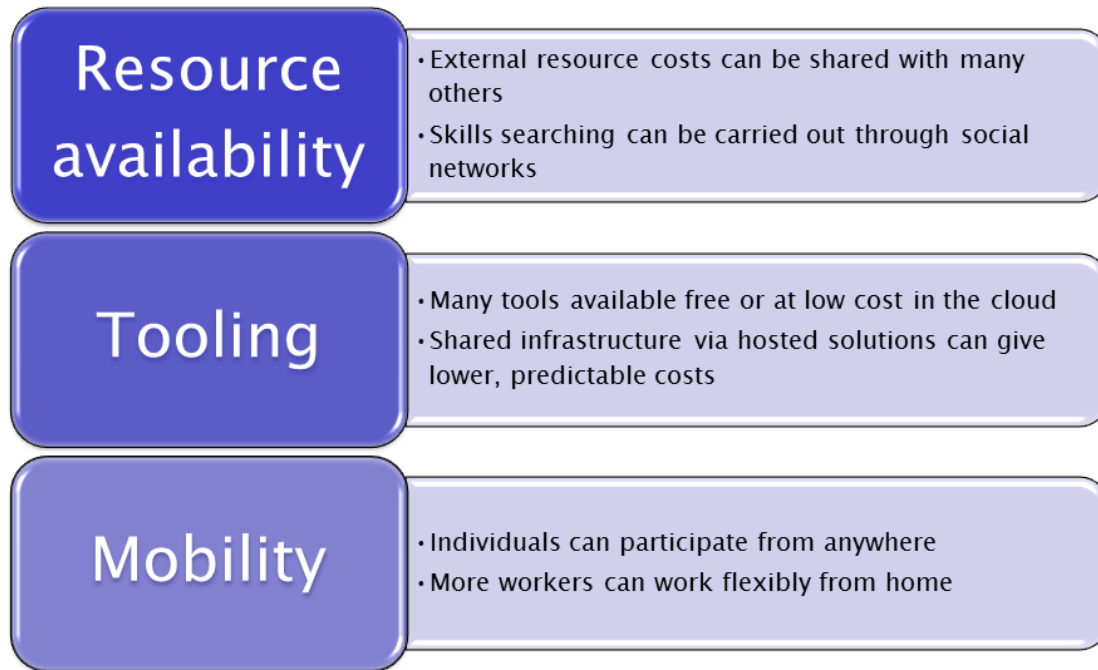


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Figure 4

But, communication and collaboration also increases risk. Opening up to those outside of the direct control of the organisation means that trust has to assumed or earned, otherwise the organisation can increase the risk of internal employees and externals accidentally or deliberately leaking information that could harm the organisation's brand – or worse, directly harm its financial viability through making public intellectual property that should have been kept secure.

The need for audit and governance of information may also be an issue, unless the chosen tools are implemented as a cohesive set of systems where information from each tool is available for the other tools to see and make use of.



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A good communication and collaboration strategy can also save money. The capability to access external resources means that these do not have to be employed on a permanent basis, and their costs can be shared across a broader base of organisations. The use of on demand external services can provide at worst predictable costs and at best the economies of scale required for lower costs – and many tools are available under open source licencing that can help to lower initial costs.

The universal accessibility of tools can also mean that participants can be anywhere – at home, on the road, in hotels, meaning that greater flexibility can be built in to the employee base.

The key to enabling a connected enterprise is in building a system that can be trusted such that individuals can be enabled to ask questions, provide input and help in decision making. For this, a unified communications approach is required, consisting of a mix of real-time, near-time and asynchronous tools that enable people to work how they want while fully participating with others who want to work in a different manner.

Through a connected enterprise, organisations can rapidly become more competitive in the market through better responsiveness and decision making.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at

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