To begin a book about Lotus® Connections, a suite of applications that are generically called “social software,” it seems only appropriate to start by looking at what we mean by the term and what this type of application provides to organizations. While examining the business aspects of social networking, we will describe some of the fundamental capabilities that need to be available within any software or service and explain how this results in value to the organization and to the individual.

This chapter focuses on the following questions:

- What is social networking?
- Why is it important to organizations?
- Who is involved?
- What are the cultural implications of using social software?
- What are barriers to its adoption?

The following chapters focus on how we enable social networking, including the capabilities of the specific tools. We also look at how we deploy social networking within an organization.

There has been a sharp increase in interest in the term “social networking” in the past few years because it has often been used when referring to popular websites such as Facebook, MySpace, Orkut, and LinkedIn. Many of these online services started with targeted audiences and now have expanded to a more general audience. Some of these sites are very popular with younger people, and as the “Gen Y” population entered the workforce, there was an expectation that similar capabilities would be found within their organizations. Another example of the term “social networking” is in reference to networking events that people attend to meet other people who are interested in a specific topic. These events are often sponsored by professional associations to help
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develop connections between people in an effort to promote business opportunities. Still another use of the term is when users refer to “my network,” a set of stable online relationships that have developed over time.

Because the term is used in so many ways, it has become difficult to know exactly what we are referring to when we talk about social networks. Is it a technology, an event, a group, or a behavior? So let us begin with a brief definition of terms.

What Is Social Networking?

“Networking” is an activity or process that has always been with us. Simply put, it is the act of reaching out and connecting to others. In this way, we have always been networking—sharing information between individuals that provides enough value to justify maintaining the relationship. Some of these behaviors are purely utilitarian (meaning there is some gain to be had), whereas other behaviors are more focused on the socializing aspects of the relationship itself.

“Traditional” Networking

Although networking actions have always been a part of human behavior, the term was first used years ago by sociologists as they described the “web” of relationships in societies. This extended the metaphor of the “fabric” of society that many people were comfortable with in the preindustrial days. It illustrated the understanding that people are fundamentally connected and interdependent as part of their identity.

This behavior might come more easily to some than others, but it can be seen and learned by virtually anyone. In a business setting, these activities include sharing or searching for information, knowledge, and expertise, as well as the more purposeful behavior of collaboration, which generally assumes that there is a mutual goal involved. This includes coauthoring, working together, and mutual support. We will explore this in more detail in the following text since any social networking software (such as Lotus Connections) is successful only to the extent that it enables the desirable behaviors that contribute to some value to the organization or the employee.

Social networking and collaboration are two related, but distinct, concepts. It is often understood that social networking contributes to collaboration but is a more fundamental set of behaviors. Wikipedia defines collaboration this way: “Collaboration means...a process where two or more people or organizations work together toward an intersection of common goals...by sharing knowledge, learning, and building consensus.”

As seen from the definition, collaboration includes additional behaviors that build on the basic connections that are the result of networking, but also includes working together for a common goal. Networking by itself does not necessarily require this but does provide a social context for more productive collaboration.
Social Networks
A social network is the web of relationships that connect people together. This is an outcome of the networking behaviors mentioned previously. The term “social” is used to distinguish it from other types of networks such as computer or phone networks. This type of relationship could include friendships (purely social), the flow of information or goods between people, business connections, and mentoring, to name just a few. Hierarchical structures in an organization are also a form of a network, but generally a distinction is made between the formal structures and the informal networks. In fact, informal networks are often used to provide the necessary linkages between the formal organizational structures that might have become silos over time. These networks can be the glue that holds the disparate parts of the organization together through personal relationships.

Most people will find themselves involved in these overlapping networks at some time or another, participating in these networks for various reasons. One set of relationships might be defined by current job roles, another might be based on trusted relationships for advice and counsel, other networks might be a loose connection based on a common interest, and finally a network might be devoted to purely socializing with friends within the workplace. Supporting and maintaining these networks, therefore, has to enable the underlying purpose of the network, as well as strike a balance between the inclusiveness of being in a network and the exclusiveness of being an outsider.

Networks can be very dynamic or stable. Individuals are continually joining or leaving networks based on changing interests. On the other hand, many networks are represented in communities that outlast the organizational structures. They are developed within, and between, the typical organizational structures that are meant to support the normal flow of work. Departments and project teams are formal groupings of people to get the work done, whereas “communities of practice” can be an informal, voluntary network that coalesces around topics of interest. Many social networking behaviors are common to these two different approaches, formal and informal.

Social Networking Software
There are many terms (some more or less synonymous) that refer to the technology that supports building of social networks. It is the product or service that enables individuals to connect and share. They can help a person build a network, leverage an existing network, or do both. These products and services are typically online (usually provided through the Internet or an organization’s intranet) and usually provide a central location to connect people. Most of these services are driven by Web 2.0 concepts. These concepts include the following:

- All users are potentially both producers and consumers of content.
- Multiway communications instead of one-way.
- Connections between people are managed by the individuals through invitations and sharing of their own personal connections.
- Public (more openness to sharing what used to be considered private information, including a bias for conversations in the “public square”).
Social Networking Concepts

- Self-selected communities (people coalesce around topics of interest and derive their own purpose for being a community).
- Voluntary (people choose what information and how much to share).
- Less control (governance is by transparency—everyone is watching).

Public social networking services often have a niche or an area of focus. Examples include Facebook (started with friendships in academia), LinkedIn (business connections), Friendster, Orkut (social friendships), Flickr (sharing of photos), and YouTube (sharing of videos). These websites are often called social networks, but more specifically they are examples of an online social networking service or application.

The capabilities that are included within the service are meant to enable specific networking behaviors for their target audience. For example, a website such as Facebook is meant to help people keep track of friends, share pictures and allow others to comment on them, allow friends to be aware of each other by making their network viewable by friends, search for acquaintances by demographic information that they are willing to share (for example, school names), send messages, and customize their experience by adding plug-in applications. On the other hand, it is not designed to include large repositories of files (although other sites do provide this service, such as Google Docs) or to enable collaborators to create materials by coauthoring a document. Therefore, bringing Facebook inside the corporate firewall is not the entire answer to the question of how to support social networking since it is mainly focused on the socializing aspect of networking.

Since there are so many kinds of social networking applications available in the public domain with many common capabilities among them, we will be focusing on the specific application of social network software within the organization. As we continue to discuss behaviors and capabilities, we will identify some specific requirements that social software should have to support the typical social networking behaviors within a company.

**Social Network Analysis (SNA)**

SNA is a diagnostic method to uncover the relationships within a social network to better understand the connections. It includes a set of methods and tools to provide a visual image of the social networks and acts like an “organizational X-ray” into the informal workings of a group of people. The primary focus is on the relationships between people rather than the attributes of the individuals (such as a skills profile or other demographics). In the past, a primary focus was on developing systems to capture the skills, expertise, and capabilities of an individual person. These profiles are still very important but provide only part of the picture of an organization’s capabilities.

Figure 1.1 is a simple diagram of a social network that is used to illustrate the linkage between people. The small circles represent a person, and the lines between the circles represent some type of relationship between the individuals. The layout of the nodes could represent departmental teams of people who work closely together, or any other common attribute, such as age, tenure, gender, or location.
What Is Social Networking?

These diagrams are used to understand the flow of information through a network, the position or roles that individuals play within a network, and how well connected the overall network is. The diagram in Figure 1.1 could be representing the linkage of whom a person will go to for advice. It shows with arrowheads that sometimes the relationship is directional, meaning it is not reciprocated: One person may go to a second person for advice, but the reverse is not true. Network behavior can include both symmetric behavior and asymmetric behavior, as shown in Figure 1.1. If this information was available to the organization, it would be fairly easy to identify who the subject matter experts might be in a network.

Another use of this analysis technique is to uncover the parts of the network that are densely connected and those parts of the network that are less connected. For example, the team on the right side in the figure appears to be tightly connected within the team, as well as having fewer connections between this team and every other team.

This visualization of a network is useful in quickly grasping the overall characteristics of a network, as well as in illustrating the position or “roles” that individuals end up assuming as a result of their behaviors. In addition, social network analysis includes many metrics that can be used to uncover the relative position of individuals (their “centrality” to the network) and also overall measures of the connectedness or cliquishness of the network.

The use of SNA is discussed further in Chapter 4, “Deployment Planning,” since it is a technique that is very useful to support the deployment and adoption of social software within an organization. It can be used to identify the key people within the informal network that can
play a critical role as advocates during the rollout and adoption of these new tools within an organization.

Why Is Internal Social Networking Important to Organizations?

As organizations consider how and when to get involved with social software applications, the immediate question that is raised is “What problems are we trying to solve?” What is the benefit to the organization and the employees that these new capabilities are meant to provide that is worth the disruption? This question could generate some puzzled looks. It is like saying, “Why collaborate?” Since it is so fundamental to how businesses do their work, why do we even need to discuss this? To justify the time and expense of implementing new software, training people on the use of the software, and possibly even changing the underlying culture, we need to be specific about how a capability that has been taken for granted contributes to specific business outcomes. Experience has shown that a clear understanding of the business drivers and the expected value is critical to the successful adoption of social software. As we cover specific business issues in the following sections, required capabilities that address these issues will be listed in sidebars.

The Business Environment

The driving forces that are making this change imperative are coming from both outside and within the organization. The external business environment is becoming more complex with mergers, acquisitions, new competitors entering the marketplace, partnerships that can contain both suppliers and competitors, and a global customer base with changing demographics. Customers are becoming more knowledgeable about the capabilities of social software and the value of having a more direct conversation with companies they do business with. The most tech-savvy end users are already using the Web 2.0 applications on the Internet to discuss their perceptions of a company’s products with each other, so a company ignores this conversation at its own peril. There are some general external trends that have been visible in the past few years that companies are responding to:

- Products/services are shifting toward more emphasis on services (often to complement or differentiate products), which requires dynamic collaboration at the customer interface.
- End users are becoming comfortable with the use of technology in their interface with corporations (for example, websites, voice-response systems) and the use of technology in their private lives (for example, instant messaging, photo-sharing sites).
- End-user loyalty is eroding, so new value needs to be provided to existing consumers and new consumers need to be reached; younger end users generally prefer the new media rather than the traditional interfaces.
- Suppliers are becoming more closely integrated, which requires the capability to support efficient personal connections between companies. This extends the trend started many years ago with electronic data interchange (EDI), which was computer-to-computer, to now include electronic conversations, person-to-person.
Why Is Internal Social Networking Important to Organizations?

Technology is becoming more ubiquitous based on declining costs for computing capability; there’s an increasing use of mobile devices, the cost of storage is decreasing, and the cost of communication bandwidth is decreasing, while speed is increasing and security is increasing to support trust across a virtual connection.

All of these changes are happening at a faster pace, which requires innovation to provide an adaptable organization with robust capabilities.

To address this changing external ecosystem, organizations are responding with more complexity within their organizational “walls.” Internal trends that are contributing to the adoption of social software include the following:

- Organizational structures are changing, becoming more matrixed. More temporary teams are being used to increase flexibility.
- Employees are becoming more knowledgeable and comfortable with technology in their nonwork life.
- New hires have grown up as “digital natives” and expect technology to support their daily interactions with co-workers. They are attracted to companies that offer the opportunity to use these tools in daily work patterns.
- Virtual workforces are becoming more accepted and allow global collaboration. Virtual workplaces will become the norm for many companies, global resources are being used that extend the need for virtual work teams, and work is becoming more specialized, which increases the need to collaborate across those specialties.
- Governance requires different measures than the external environment but is moving to more transparency and openness.
- Demographic changes in most countries are resulting in a need to shift from the older worker (the “digital immigrant”) to the younger worker (the “digital native”).

**CAPABILITIES REQUIRED: GENERATE BUSINESS VALUE QUICKLY**

Business value should be identified to encourage adoption to ensure that benefits are realized very quickly:

- Minimize disruption to existing capabilities.
- Use social software from existing software applications as much as possible.
- Support how work happens naturally based on individual preferences.
- Have multiple entry points to the applications (Web, mobile, email app, IM).

Integrating with existing capabilities will minimize the amount of disruption to the employees and improve benefits realization.
As mentioned previously, to add to the complexity, the organizational walls are becoming more porous with suppliers and customers wanting to be more involved and have more access to the resources within the organizations. The internal environment is blending with the external environment, and the systems and tools need to be compatible. In the past, we might have had very efficient electronic communications within the corporation, but communicating outside still depended on hard copy and the use of “snail-mail,” which is no longer acceptable. This has all resulted in the need to have more transparency of the capabilities of an organization and get access to them with little trouble.

The ability of an organization to more effectively use its assets (both intellectual capital and social capital) is spurring the need to identify and connect with expertise. This includes access to artifacts that can be stored in a repository, as well as the knowledge and wisdom that still resides only in someone’s head.

**Value to the Organization**

Generally, businesses are looking for value in either cost savings driven by efficiencies or top-line measures such as revenue, market share, and innovation. The behaviors of sharing and collaboration are so fundamental that they can be linked to almost any business goal. This makes it difficult to show a direct linkage between specific networking behaviors and business outcomes.

One critical success factor for adoption of social software is to first identify the business needs and develop a set of metrics that can be tracked during the adoption. Most social software applications will provide usage metrics that can provide insight into the amount of activity in specific functions. This data can be used to monitor the rate of adoption by the users. But the assumption that more use is equal to more value is not necessarily true. Therefore, the types of measurements shown in Figure 1.2 also have to be captured and tracked in some manner. These business measurements are often difficult to capture, so simpler metrics (for example, keystrokes, number of blogs, number of active users) are often used as a proxy for tracking of benefits.

So let us review how social networking can support improved results in these areas. In Figure 1.2, we can see possible benefits from using social software. These are all business benefits that can be related to business strategies and goals. Social software alone certainly will not deliver these benefits but will enable the underlying behaviors we have already mentioned.

A useful way to capture the business value is to identify specific use-cases that are important to the company and see how the application of the technology can address any of those metrics previously listed. Some of these use-cases might be more administrative wherein efficiencies can be achieved by the new technologies.

Another approach is to identify groups of people by job role who may benefit from more dynamic communications than in the past. Certainly, there will be groups of people that are controlled by defined tasks and procedures and might have less need for these capabilities. Many repetitive tasks have been streamlined and automated in the past by hard-coded applications that are very efficient. Many of these are typically not easy to change, so flexibility is lost. On the other hand, some roles within an organization will be more dependent on the ad-hoc, dynamic
Why Is Internal Social Networking Important to Organizations?

- Faster response to customer facing issues.
- Improved effectiveness of intra- and inter-company communications and collaboration.
- Greater hit rate / faster time to value on innovations.
- Faster access to critical information and experts.
- Faster response to customer facing issues.
- Real-time collaboration on tasks.
- Faster ways to find experts and information.
- Reduced recruiting costs for expertise already available in the company.
- Reduced rework on overlapping projects.
- Common collaboration platform and tools saves infrastructure costs; enables metrics by task and by person for better decisions.
- Greater leverage of key experts across an organization.
- Improved retention of younger employees.
- Faster development of high-performing resources.
- Easier to build "reputation capital".

Figure 1.2 Value categories

connections that are supported by the new capabilities. These groups, such as sales, research, development, customer support, and services, are very dependent on quickly identifying resources and bringing them together to create value for the end users.

Value to the Individual

As we turn to the value of social networking to the individual, which is especially important when we discuss the deployment approaches and barriers in Chapter 4, we will focus primarily on the professional benefits to the individual rather than the more personal benefits. It is still important to remember that often the ability to share more personal information with colleagues can contribute to developing trust within the group. Allowing a person to share whatever they feel comfortable with (within levels of professional etiquette) should be a basic capability of social software.

A person who is using social software is generally interested in seeking information or expertise, or they are interested in being sought. The former, based on having a need that can be met by someone else, drives the search for information and people. Social networks help us stay informed about what is going on in the organization. It also helps us to clarify and understand what we are learning. We rely on certain parts of our network to validate our own thinking and to test our opinions and decisions.

We also depend on our network to understand the explicit knowledge that has been captured into knowledge repositories. As we are searching, we would like to be able to find content that is found in files or databases, as well as people who are connected to those files. This means
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that if we find interesting content, we should be able to link to the author(s) of that content to be able to discuss it further. This allows us to understand the context of the material, the additional kinds of knowledge or wisdom that are often not captured while a document is being created.

Another aspect of seeking is that we would like to be able to search using keywords that are significant to us rather than based on categories set up by a small group of experts (see sidebar). This means that content can be found based on our mental concepts and categories rather than (or in addition to) a predefined taxonomy. This is called a folksonomy. Wikipedia provides a definition: “Folksonomy (also known as collaborative tagging, social classification, social indexing, and social tagging) is the practice and method of collaboratively creating and managing tags to annotate and categorize content. Folksonomy describes the bottom-up classification systems that emerge from social tagging. In contrast to traditional subject indexing, metadata is generated not only by experts but also by creators and consumers of the content. Usually, freely chosen keywords are used instead of a controlled vocabulary. Folksonomy (from folk + taxonomy) is a user-generated taxonomy.”

In addition to using the network to find people and content, the reverse is true. Individuals want to be sought by others. This leads to an additional use of social software, which is to develop the reputation of individuals. The most obvious need for developing a reputation is to develop a persona that is visible to others. You can do this by providing information about yourself such as skills, expertise, interests, and experience. Consolidating this information into a searchable repository makes it easier for others to find expertise. As a side effect of using these tools, you are leaving behind a representation of the topics in which you’re interested, as well as the content that you’ve contributed. Other people who are observing your contributions will develop their opinion on how knowledgeable you are on a subject. Additionally, others can build an idea of how approachable and/or willing you would be to help them.

CAPABILITY REQUIRED: FIND EXPERTISE AND SHARE EXPERTISE

Most social software capabilities begin with creating profiles of individuals that combine personal expertise, as well as social capital (including their network):

• Tag people with user-defined keywords.
• Search for people based on keywords with an enterprise view.
• Increase awareness of other people who are interested in specific topics.
• Find out information about people, professional and personal.
• See who other people are connected to, and view their network.
• Share personal expertise through expressing ideas and opinions, and get feedback.
• Join with others who are interested in a specific topic to contribute to the interest area.
• Be able to track a person’s actions, such as tagging of content and blogging.
Another very important benefit of social networking to the individual is for career development and the identification of job opportunities. This is a very common use of social networking in the external environment but is also of high importance internally. One approach is the proactive use of a social network when you are searching for a job. A second approach is having people aware of your interests and acting as advocates for you as they hear of opportunities. An interesting aspect of this use of social networking is that it is often the weak network ties that provide the most benefit in searching for a new job. Quite often the strongest ties in a network that come from frequent communications cannot provide any more information about the job opportunities than a person already has.

Organizational Culture: Enabler or Barrier to Adoption?

Every piece of software has assumptions built into it from the software designers. Some of those assumptions are very explicit and consciously included in the design. These assumptions include the level of knowledge and familiarity with technology of the users, the level of autonomy and control to allow them, and so on.

The degree to which the underlying assumptions of the software developers are in alignment with the organizational culture will determine the amount of difficulty an organization will face when trying to adopt social software. This is because the organizational changes that are necessary to fully achieve the benefits are often far more difficult to make than a suite of software is to install. This is true of any software but even more so of social software since it is so dependent on the end users voluntarily contributing their content and sharing in a more open way.

We will pause for a moment to define what we mean by organizational culture since this is so important to our understanding of the adoption of social software.

Organizational cultures are understood to have multiple layers, from visible behaviors and artifacts to the nonvisible values, norms, and underlying assumptions about how work gets done.

**CAPABILITY REQUIRED: DEFINING PERSONAL CATEGORIES FOR CONTENT CLASSIFICATION**

Tagging of content based on personal categories in addition to standard categories provides the following value to the individual and to the organization:

- Tagging categories are user-defined, creating a folksonomy.
- Tagging of many different kinds of content; web pages, files in repositories, blog postings, person profiles.
- Sharing of tags, making personal tags visible to others.
- Viewing how others are tagging content.
- Subscribing to what others are tagging to learn from their tagging behavior.
Dr. Edgar Schein, an MIT management professor, has studied organizational culture for many years. He defines culture as “the pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” (emphasis added)

Dr. Schein believes that culture change does not occur until an organization deals with the deeply held assumptions that have been built up slowly over time and are usually so unconscious as to be invisible to the people living in the culture. Since these are shared assumptions, it is often difficult to get an organization to imagine a different way of perceiving and thinking.

Cultures are inherently conservative, meaning that they try to maintain the status quo. That doesn’t mean that they are necessarily averse to change since some cultures are very dynamic and what they are trying to preserve is the equilibrium that has been developed between change and stability. However, there is a certain amount of inertia to a culture that resists anything that will disrupt this equilibrium. Fundamental culture change can easily take 5 to 10 years within an organization.

Experience has shown that organizations that are good at change management are very adaptive and able to easily assimilate new processes and technologies. As organizations implement new technology such as social software, it is very helpful to understand those aspects of the existing culture that are supportive of the new direction, as well as those aspects that might be a hindrance to successful adoption.

IBM® has been using a model of organizational culture based on these concepts that helps organizations understand the areas that need to be addressed to support collaboration (see Figure 1.3). Very briefly, the model includes four layers. These include two layers that are visible, behaviors and enablers (which are those objects and tools that are meant to support behaviors), and two layers that are internal to a person, values that drive behaviors and those shared basic assumptions highlighted by Dr. Schein.

The model starts at the bottom with the most internal layer of basic assumptions. This is the most difficult layer to change since over many years these assumptions have come to be accepted as “givens” and are not to be questioned. Also, many of these assumptions are mutually supportive, so questioning one assumption can lead to defensiveness. Most people who have spent time in the culture don’t even recognize that they hold these assumptions and that there might be other ways of looking at a situation. Quite often, new employees are the best source for pointing out these assumptions since they are looking at the culture with fresh eyes. This is why new hires are often puzzled by what they see in an organization. Many “millennials” (generally referring to those born between the early 1980s and 2000) bring assumptions to the workplace that are more aligned with the assumptions underlying social software since they have been using many of these tools while at school or in their personal lives.

The next layer of the model is still internal but more conscious. The layer of values is where we are choosing one outcome over another or one way of achieving an outcome versus another. As we think about values in the workplace, it is important to understand that values are always relative to something else. To say that you value something such as an action or an outcome is to
Organizational Culture: Enabler or Barrier to Adoption? 13

Figure 1.3  An organizational culture model

say that you prefer that action or outcome over another. The measure of a value is what a person is willing to give up to achieve it, what the “price” is of that value.

For this reason, we often must compare and choose between two things of value. For example, if a person or an organization says that they value openness and transparency, then they are choosing that over privacy. Privacy does not then become of no value but simply of less value than openness in this situation. As we explore the changing values in the workplace, it would be a serious mistake to think that we are throwing away values that we once had; rather, there is a shift in the emphasis and relative importance of some of these values.

A second consideration when talking about values is to understand the distinction between an “espoused” value and a “lived” value. To espouse a value is to claim that it is valuable, which may be different from the behavior of choosing and living that value. For example, a company can say that they value customer feedback but then do nothing with it. The actual lived values are the hidden part of the culture that is important. This is the consistently chosen, lived-out behaviors that demonstrate that a company really does value something (like customer feedback). This discussion of values becomes important as we begin to lay out an adoption plan for an organization since we need to balance between an espoused value that might represent a future goal and the lived values that represent the current reality.

The third layer of the model is the visible behaviors in the workplace. These behaviors are being supported by the underlying assumptions and values. Sometimes different underlying values can result in a specific behavior, so we can only presume to know what is going on inside a person. What might appear to someone as bullying behavior might be construed as only blunt and assertive behavior by others. Some of the behaviors that have been linked to social software in the external environment (such as “flame wars”) would not be tolerated within an organization that expects more professional behavior.
Since it is difficult to deal with the internal values and assumptions that a person might have, it is very important to define the kinds of behaviors that are acceptable and not acceptable. This defines the boundaries and norms for participants to act within. Usually this is done with a policy statement on business behavior (nonharassment, restrictions on language or topics, and so on) that can be extended to the use of the electronic tools. An example of this can be found in IBM’s Social Computing Guidelines (www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html) that they have provided to the public. This set of guidelines builds on their internal Business Conduct Guidelines. The topic of governance focuses on behaviors that either must or must not occur. These guidelines define the boundaries of acceptable behavior and any consequences that will take place when these boundaries are violated. Behaviors also include etiquette, those behaviors that are recommended to make life easier as we participate in the social environment.

The fourth layer of the model consists of enablers. An enabler is anything in the environment that has been created to support or shape the behaviors. These include artifacts such as the guidelines mentioned previously, policies, performance management and incentive systems, vision and strategy statements, the architecture of the workplace (is it open and collaborative, or is everyone sequestered behind closed doors?), and even the tools and technologies.

These enablers sometimes conflict with each other, such as a vision statement promoting collaboration but an incentive system that is focused only on individual performance. Alignment of the enablers is very important for setting a clear direction for the organization. And the alignment between the layers makes for a strong culture. What is heard from many organizations is that the people truly value collaboration and working together but the measurement systems do not support that, and so, over time, the assumption has developed that collaboration is not how you get ahead in the organization.

We will now look at some of the underlying assumptions and values that are inherent in the use of social software. These support the social networking behaviors that contribute to the collaborative culture that was illustrated previously. To the degree that an organization is already living these values and assumptions, the organizational culture will be an enabler to the adoption of the software, and the achievement of the business benefits will be relatively painless. To the degree that fundamental cultural change needs to happen, the implementation and adoption will be slow and cautious. We will consider the visible-behaviors and enablers layers of the culture when we discuss adoption practices in Chapter 4.

Assumptions
As mentioned earlier, assumptions are those beliefs that are so “taken for granted” that they become unconscious. It becomes very difficult to even imagine an alternative view of reality. We will first examine a few of these assumptions and then consider how they can affect the adoption and use of social software. Dr. Schein has identified a number of very fundamental categories of assumptions that affect our worldview, including two that are important to our discussion:

- The nature of human nature
- The nature of knowledge and truth
One of the underlying assumptions of social software is that humans by nature are fundamentally social, meaning that they get satisfaction just from being related to other people at work. This is different from earlier assumptions that work could be broken up into smaller and smaller pieces until you reach the point where a person is working essentially independently. This was meant to enable very efficient operations in which persons were concerned about the tasks that they had placed in front of them.

This assumption about human nature was captured by Douglas McGregor in 1960 and referred to as “theory X” and “theory Y.” McGregor defined theory X this way: “The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can. Because of this human characteristic of dislike of work most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort toward the achievement of organizational objectives.”

He contrasts this view of human nature that requires oversight and strict governance with his alternative view of human nature that he called theory Y: “The expenditure of physical and mental effort in work is as natural as play or rest. [Humans] will exercise self direction and self control in the service of objectives to which [they are] committed.”

It is hard to imagine organizations still holding to strictly theory X assumptions, but it often shows itself when discussing governance of something as new and frightening (to some people) as social software. Social software is inherently very open, but within an organization there can be a tendency to restrict its use. A theory X assumption would result in requiring moderation or approvals before posting of content, allowing only approved tags or pictures, and a group of select people who will audit the flow of the conversation. Theory Y, on the other hand, assumes that self-control is the norm within the organization and a professional person would not do anything that would damage their reputation. It is not that no one is watching, but that everyone is watching.

Another set of fundamental assumptions is related to “truth”—who gets to define it or control the dissemination of it. This is very important to an organization that is trying to unify or standardize their approach or direction. The reliance on experts to create, or to review and approve, content before it is made accessible to the rest of the organization is an example of “truth” being held by a few people. The alternative is the assumption that the whole group rather than just a few people can come to a judgment about the value of content.

A related assumption is about the difference between information consumers and producers. It has often been assumed in the past that producers of information are different from the consumers. Subject matter experts, therefore, were expected to create the entire product and other people would be consuming it. In the new environments, people become both consumers and producers. Everyone potentially contributes to creating materials and everyone consumes it.

**Values**

Let us now look at some of these values that are shifting in the new environment and how the behaviors of social networking are being affected by them. The first set of values was mentioned previously: openness versus privacy. The new environment places a higher value on openness and
transparency than in the past. More content will be available in earlier stages of preparation rather than being published only in finished form. This makes the process of creating the content more visible and thus open to feedback from more people during the development. Also, people themselves will become more visible. Sharing of personal information is becoming more common. Using “awareness” mechanisms built into many instant messaging systems, you can tell whether a person is available, in a meeting, or gone. This constant visibility has been part of these systems for several years, and experience has shown that there is a need for a new etiquette to go along with this capability. In the midst of this openness, we still need to respect others’ need for privacy.

Another value is the ability to have an open conversation in which anyone can voice their opinion and participate. The “wisdom of the crowd” is a powerful tool if used appropriately in an organization. James Surowiecki, in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds,* identifies the types of situations in which this is appropriate and also the critical success factors that help ensure that it doesn’t degenerate into the “madness of the crowds.” While this open conversation is increasing in value, it is also important to know when to listen to the wisdom of the subject matter experts. In an open environment, however, subject matter experts are not just those designated by the organization (sometimes based on seniority), but anyone whom other people listen to in the public conversations such as blogs and forums. Many tools allow the consumers to rate the value of the contributions, which will contribute to the reputation of the participants. The group gives priority to some contributors by attending to some voices and ignoring others.

Easily, the most fundamental value that is required for social networking to be successful is trust. Each network link represented by a line between two nodes shown in Figure 1.1 is based on a level of trust between the two individuals. That trust is based on two aspects: trust in the competence of the other person (the person knows what he or she is talking about) and also trust in the benevolence or motives of the other person (that person will not intentionally harm you). If there is any lack in either of these two areas, trust is diminished. This is certainly not an “all or nothing” proposition, but one of the skills that is developed in networking is to make a judgment, often unconsciously, on the level of trust that is warranted in the relationship.

Trust can be adversely affected when incentive programs (a potential enabler) are driven by competitive measurements (for example, ranking people against each other) that are built on a view of human nature (an underlying assumption) that humans are fundamentally competitive. This can result in behaviors in which people will hide information to achieve an advantage (resulting in a higher ranking) over other people in the network. This is an example in which a personal value can be overridden by an organizational enabler that is based on an assumption about human nature and motivation. This results in an apparent deviation between the espoused values and the lived values. Organizations often say that they value collaboration and trust, but then give incentives to people to work individually and keep an eye on their colleagues (competitors for rewards).

Other sets of values that need to be balanced within an environment that is productively using social software are the following:

- Risk versus accountability
- Individualistic versus group (for example, rewards and ownership of intellectual capital)
Why Now?

We close this chapter about the concepts and business value of social networking by asking the question: Why now? We covered some of the internal and external environment issues that are driving the interest in social networking and social software. In the past few years, there’s been a huge increase in the interest of these tools to be used within an organization.

Part of the reason is that all of these environmental factors are coming together at one point, which is driving the need for additional capabilities, as well as technology now enabling new capabilities. Organizational demographics are showing that a very high percentage of people could potentially be retiring in the next five years. The loss of that knowledge is of primary importance to many organizations; at the same time attracting and retaining new employees is becoming more difficult because of the opportunities available to them. Many new hires are bringing expectations with them into the workplace that can be supported only by some of these new capabilities.

The nature of work itself is becoming more complicated. Work is increasingly collaborative and virtual, and therefore the need to connect with more people is greater than in the past. At the same time, technology has made great increases in basic technology, speed of the computers and networks, and the capabilities of applications. These new tools are allowing people to socialize in the virtual world and share more of their interests. The computing power of computers is also supporting the ability to quickly and cheaply visualize networks that would have been difficult or costly in the past. Changing perceptions about openness and transparency are also supporting a more collaborative work environment.

And, finally, market pressures are also contributing to the increasing interest in social software. Both customers and suppliers are simply taking the next step in the evolutionary journey that has been going on for quite some time. Social software in many respects is simply filling a pent-up demand that has been building over the past decade.

- Private versus public
- Time: synchronous versus asynchronous; immediate versus delay
- Control versus freedom
- Dependent versus independent versus interdependent
- Sequential versus iterative development
- Influence by authority and competence (Subject Matter Expert, or SME) versus role in the network
- Ambiguity versus certainty

A simple way to check whether a department or community is ready for collaboration or social networking is to answer some questions related to the organizational culture model described previously. Identifying misalignment between the different layers of the culture model can suggest areas to work on for culture change efforts.
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE INVENTORY

Using a simple survey can help an organization uncover areas where the organizational culture will act as an enabler or a barrier.

Enablers

- Are formal measures in place to support collaboration to meet business needs?
- How much incentive do the participants have to collaborate with others appropriately to meet client business needs (as opposed to individualistic metrics)?
- Does a skills or expertise taxonomy exist in addition to a folksonomy (personal tagging) to facilitate identifying and assembling the diverse skills needed for collaborative efforts?
- Are roles and responsibilities in the collaborative process clear?
- Is governance of the collaboration process and its work products biased toward openness and inclusiveness rather than restrictive?
- Are the tools available to support cross-business-unit collaboration as well as collaboration between customers and suppliers?
- How effective are the tools available to support collaboration to meet client business needs?

Behaviors

- Do individuals show respect during open, constructive communication among the participants?
- Do the participants accept responsibility for individual roles and commitments, as well as the quality of the collective solution?
- Are the participants decisive in reconciling perspectives/priorities and determining the appropriate course of action?
- Do participants regularly use their networks to locate expertise for support or participation on projects?
- Do individuals regularly spend time in cultivating their network by regular interactions?
- Do individuals regularly look outside their formal organizational structures to extend their network beyond typical boundaries?

Values

- Do the participants value others’ insight and seek to understand the others’ points of view?
- Do the participants value innovative solutions to complex problems that might exceed their individual knowledge?
• Do individuals value interdependence in addition to personal competence?
• Do individuals value their reputation and what others think of them?
• Do participants value diverse skills/perspectives that might differ from their own and add value to the group?
• Does the organization value social networking by allowing people the time to participate in networking behaviors?

Assumptions

• Do the participants trust the competency of the other participants in the network?
• Do the participants trust the level of commitment of the other participants in the network?
• Do the participants trust the motives of the other participants in the network?
• Do the participants believe that a better solution can be achieved through collaboration than can be achieved individually?
• Do participants believe that the benefits of collaboration outweigh the risks—individually, collectively, and for the client?
• Do participants believe that expertise is identifiable and available for the collaborative effort?
• Do individuals believe that “who they know” is a valuable asset in addition to “what they know”?
• Does management assume that people can self-govern?
• Does management assume that productive work is being done if people are participating in blogs and other social software?

Endnotes