

Manufacturers And Social Collaboration Tools - A Mechanism For Innovation

Sanjay Ravi, managing director of worldwide Discrete Manufacturing, Microsoft

If you've been in the manufacturing industry for any length of time, you may have experienced challenges that come along with siloed operating functions. Hopefully, you've also seen the value that can be found when we break down the barriers between silos. For example, imagine that someone in customer service had an idea for a new product. Now imagine that the silos between sales, marketing, customer service, supply chain, product development, and manufacturing were removed, thereby streamlining collaboration among all roles throughout the product development and production cycles. How much more quickly and efficiently could this idea be incorporated into the product and brought to market?

Enterprise social tools can play a significant role in accelerating the time to market. I'm sure that when some people hear the phrase "enterprise social" they think, "This is something my kids do. It has no relevance in my workplace." Or maybe they think social networking is more appropriate for the marketing team. But [a worldwide survey](#) [1] recently conducted by Ipsos found that using social tools has increased productivity for nearly half of those surveyed; while less than one in ten say these tools have been detrimental.

In fact, 79 percent of respondents from the manufacturing industry would like to use new technologies that make them more productive at work. Manufacturing respondents, more than any other industry segment, were more likely to download restricted social applications on their work computers or phones. And overall, a third of all respondents would actually spend their own money on a social tool if it made them more productive at work.

In addition to the benefit of bolstering productivity, four in ten respondents believe that social tools help foster better collaboration. [Textron](#) [2], an American family of companies that includes Bell Helicopter, Cessna Aircraft Company, and Greenlee, has been very successful at using social tools to increase collaboration. Textron has grown to approximately 33,000 employees in 25 countries. Over the course of the past year, Textron has transformed its approach to employee engagement, collaboration and communications through the use of multiple social tools, including [SharePoint](#) [3] 2010, [Lync](#) [4] 2010 and proprietary apps powered by Microsoft technologies.

The company built an employee portal to link business units together globally, called the Enterprise Resource Information Center, or ERIC. This portal delivers all Textron information, and also delivers localized content because it instantly recognizes each employee by name, by business unit, location and other attributes.

Textron also built a "What If" app on SharePoint -an ideas forum that automatically

links to an employee's MySite profile. Since What If launched, they've gotten over 2,000 ideas from employees and over 10,000 accompanying comments.

According to Adele Suddes, Vice President of Communications at Textron, "we've built a chain of collaboration where people no longer think it's weird for a helicopter guy from Bell to share an idea with a power tools guy from Greenlee."

[Xerox](#) [5] and [Tyco](#) [6] have found similar value from [Yammer](#) [7], which allows employees from around the globe to share information and ideas through an easy-to-use social platform. As we look ahead at the future of the manufacturing industry, we know that technology must facilitate collaboration across structured and unstructured business processes. Manufacturers must evolve their focus from supporting tools that maintain systems of record - i.e. ERP and other traditional line of business systems - to supporting systems of engagement that facilitate global collaboration and information sharing. By making this shift, manufacturers will be better positioned to improve their agility and market responsiveness. To meet the needs of solution providers and manufacturing customers, we have developed [architectural guidance](#) [8] to assist in the evolution from systems of record to systems of engagement. This guidance is intended to help organizations have a full understanding of industry best practices and, in turn, realize the best value from their technology investments.

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[1] [http://www.microsoft.com/en-](http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/news/Press/2013/May13/05-27SocialToolsPR.aspx)

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[2] <http://textron.com/>

[3] <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-sharepoint-collaboration-software-FX103479517.aspx>

[4] <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-lync-video-conferencing-and-instant-messaging-FX102004552.aspx>

[5] <https://www.yammer.com/customers/customer/xerox/?autoplay=1>

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