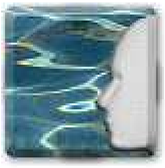
Selling collaborative business performance internally | The Xpragmatic View



The Xpragmatic View #127
October 4, 2009
by Marc Buyens (@mbuyens), Xpragma
marc.buyens@xpragma.com
url: http://www.xpragma.com/view127.php

In sales, most solutions are bought for other reasons than the salesperson thinks. Therefore, when these 'other reasons' don't exist, selling is an uphill battle.

Selling the solution

We admit, the title of this article is misleading. This article is not about selling collaborative business performance internally. The title has been borrowed from a recent post of Oliver Marks where he writes that he and Sameer Patel will be running a series of sessions during the upcoming Enterprise 2.0 conference in San Francisco titled "Selling the Case for Accelerating Business Performance with Enterprise Collaboration and 2.0 Technologies".

Now, personally, we think that there is no such thing as "selling" this stuff. So, since it is the intention of intelligent guys such as Patel and Hanks to present an approach for doing so, this article is about the reason we think it is not possible. Enterprise 2.0 is not sold. It is bought.

But, before doing so, first a small definition of scope.

What we are describing here assumes that we are talking about an existing, established company of some size and history and not about a small start-up. In the latter case, it might be an interesting experiment to see what wonderful things emerge from the completely free, unlimited and unrestricted interaction of a group of individuals. However, if you are a company with 10.000 employees, a bit of freewheeling through the corporate structure is the last thing you are asking for.

So, while considering the introduction of new approaches, and especially in the case of a perceived "disruptive technology" such as Enterprise 2.0, you want something that allows for the assessment of the potential gains, the associated implications and the risks.

The problem here is that traditional approaches such as a ROI analysis are ill-suited. We are talking about something "non traditional", so most of the variables are essentially unknown. Therefore, the outcome of a ROI analysis can be anything, function of your imagination.

So, you need something different. Something that does not require exact input, that is able to handle a high degree of "noise". Something that is more a thinking framework than a calculation. Something that will not give you an exact figure, but nevertheless, that can confirm that this is "the right direction".

How might a company proceed to develop such framework?

Buying the solution

Well, there are several ways for doing this. One possible approach is the 5-step method that we describe below. As you will see, the basic concept is extremely simple. Yet, correctly doing the exercise is extremely complex, certainly the first time. However, there is no need to directly go for the "complete" exercise. You can as well do this for part of your organisation, for a single department or a specific product, as long as the "links" with the rest of the organisation are correctly understood and taken into account. What are the steps?

1. Understand why you are successful

First, within the scope of your exercise (company, department, product...), describe why you are successful. Is it the rapid rollout of new innovative products, your low cost, the service you offer or your ability to detect and develop interesting niche markets?

Any company or group should be able to articulate this, but of course, reality...

2. Identify which capabilities support your success

We already talked about this in the previous view, The future of business. Capabilities are essentially a more detailed way of describing what makes you successful, in a way that it becomes more feasible to assess whether a given tool or approach will indeed increase you chances for being successful.

As an example: when great service is the thing that makes you successful, then capabilities such as: working error-free, rapidly finding the right information or expert, re-using already seen before solutions, good accessibility of your organisation and pro-active problem detection might be some of the things that support this. Do also include capabilities that you would like to have but that are currently lacking.

Once done, rank them, both by the level of importance (in supporting the success of your company) and by the level of quality (to what extent do you really have this capability). Keep it simple; don't make this a scientific exercise. Our ambition is to verify a direction, not to calculate a distance.

3. Identify the burdens

For the capabilities that are seen as being important, yet having a low quality score (or are missing), identify the reasons (if any) within your current organisation that cause this low quality. Is it a lack of skills, a lack of tools, financial (no budget), organisational or cultural?

Again, no need for a scientific exercise, but do not obscure the real reasons.

4. Remove the burdens

This step is not really needed since, knowing the existence of the burdens, you will be able to make the right assessment regarding the new tool or technology you want to implement.

Of course, especially in the context of something like Enterprise 2.0, the existence of certain burdens will be a huge warning sign while evaluating the potential value of the implementation.

5. Let the vendors in

You're done. You've collected all the information that you need. You've prioritised all the things that you would like to improve and now it is a simple matter of matching this with the capabilities that are offered by the new solution and identifying where this new approach will run against the obstacles you identified. A no-brainer analysis.

OK, we agree, it is more complex than that. However, you need "something" to support your decision process. You need to have this something in place ***before*** you start thinking about the introduction of any "unusual" solution and you have to develop it ***outside the scope*** of a specific evaluation. This is not something that is solution specific. This is a general framework that can support decision making for various types of solutions.

Unfortunately, most companies don't think that way. In general, their decision processes are much more rigid and making decisions based upon the assumption of "right direction" is not really on the agenda. Therefore, very few companies will have this type of view on their business. Neither will they have another, more intelligent, type of approach that achieves the same thing.

Since these decision frameworks are not in place, we think that "selling collaborative business performance internally" is not realistic. The context that is needed for the buy-in simply isn't there:

- We bring a story of new capabilities, but nobody can clearly articulate why and how these capabilities will influence the success of the company, so we end up in a traditional ROI discussion or worse.
- We bring the promise of new and more interesting interactions, but the burdens that will block these interactions are not taken into account.
- We bring the promise of new possibilities, but there is no thinking framework to assess the potential value of these new possibilities.
- In essence, we are parties that are talking to each other without a common language. So, we end up using poorly understood sign-language and our sales success largely becomes a function of the accidental collision of minds. The outcome for the company, always unknown.

Neither the tool vendors, nor the internal or external evangelists are in a position to bring this thinking framework to the table. The company itself must do the real work first. That's the right sequence. Not the other way around.

Enterprise 2.0 is a consequence, not a means.

About the author

Marc Buyens is analyst, management consultant and owner of Xpragma.
Marc started Xpragma in 1999 after a 20+ years career in the IT sector. Today, he provides advice, training and mentoring services focusing on the intersection of technological evolution, organisational change and business strategy: a messy world of unfulfilled promises.

http://www.facebook.com/marcb254
http://www.linkedin.com/in/marcbuyens
http://www.twitter.com/mbuyens

Xpragma bvba - Mechelsesteenweg 254 - 2820 Bonheiden - Belgium
Tel. +32-(0)15-340 845 - info@xpragma.com - www.xpragma.com
RSS feed: http://www.xpragma.com/english/rss/xpven.xml
RSS feed (full): http://www.xpragma.com/english/rss/xpv_full_en.xml