



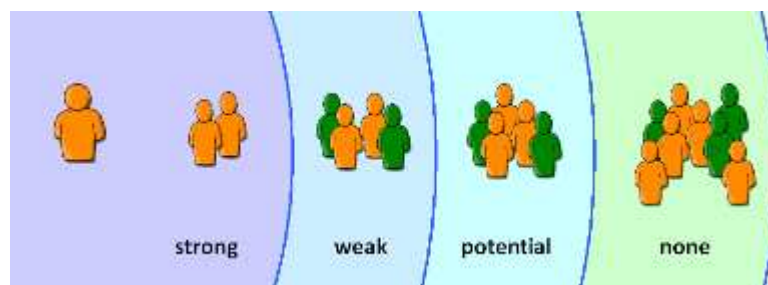
## Reaching for the edge



The Xpragmatic View #129  
 October 25, 2009  
 by [Marc Buyens \(@mbuyens\)](#), Xpragma  
[marc.buyens@xpragma.com](mailto:marc.buyens@xpragma.com)  
[url: http://www.xpragma.com/view129.php](http://www.xpragma.com/view129.php)

Real solutions and progress emerge when we are able to unify apparently conflicting views on the same reality. Do emergent social software platforms (ESSPs) provide a context for this to happen?

A couple of days ago, Andrew McAfee wrote a new post, [Colonizing the Outer Rings](#), where he showed a diagram that represented "*the relative amounts of different types of ties for a prototypical knowledge worker*". The picture below is a somewhat modified version of his diagram.



As the rings suggest, the strong ties group is rather small, whereas the greatest potential for new connections resides in the outer rings. Therefore, McAfee's conclusion was that emergent social software platforms (ESSPs) could create the greatest value by allowing individuals to interconnect with this otherwise unreachable group of unknown colleagues.

We agree. Not only do we find in these outer rings the greatest number of potential new ties, these new ties also have the potential of being of the greatest quality.

The reason for this is that, by definition, the type of interaction we will have via these new connections is largely unknown. Likely, these new contacts will have different, conflicting or even disconnected views on our mutual reality. As we have written before, real solutions and progress emerge when we are able to unify such apparently conflicting views.

Unfortunately, reaching into the far spaces of the corporate universe is not an obvious task. In reality, most ESSPs will have tendency to strengthen the already present strong ties but are weaker in solving other complexities of the corporation.

Indeed, above picture is only one perspective on this corporate reality. Another perspective would be to look at "how we expect these ties to be". Between close collaborators, we would expect observing strong ties. Yet, in reality, we will often find weak or even no ties.

Whatever the reasons for these connection "anomalies", ESSPs are unlikely to remove them. As said, they have tendency to strengthen the already present strong ties but by doing so, they risk

increasing the "anomalies" instead of removing them. ESSPs facilitate our quest for "[personal confirmation](#)" but do not always connect the unconnected.


Colonizing the outer rings is a great vision, but execution will be difficult. It is a leap of faith because the outcome is largely unknown. We reach for the far edges where value and progress emerge. But we might find dragons.

## 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.

 LinkedIn profile: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/marcbuyens>

 Follow on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/mbuyens>

---

© 1999-2009, Xpragma bvba. All Rights Reserved.

Xpragma bvba - Mechelsesteenweg 254 - 2820 Bonheiden - Belgium

Tel. +32-(0)15-340 845 - [info@xpragma.com](mailto:info@xpragma.com) - [www.xpragma.com](http://www.xpragma.com)

 RSS feed: <http://www.xpragma.com/english/rss/xpven.xml>