The rise of the chief collaboration officer

Already a fixture in leading global companies that have embedded open innovation into their processes, the Chief Collaboration Officer (CCO) is a vital resource that all forward-thinking companies must invest in locally, says Wyzetalk.

Gys Kappers, CEO of Wyzetalk

"As businesses become more social and begin to open up new communication and collaboration channels, age old business processes and functions are radically being reengineered," says Gys Kappers, CEO of Wyzetalk. "As a result, and in order to tap into the collective brainpower of organisational stakeholders to open innovation and drive growth, someone has to run with it and that person is the CCO."

Why do we need a CCO?

The need for a CCO and support staff is especially pronounced at the outset of Social Business Software (SBS) adoption. Without training, SBS tends to spread through the enterprise like wildfire, but often ends up being used for 'water cooler chats' rather than its ability to rewire the organisation for productive collaboration and communication.

"Establishing a CCO department goes beyond enthusiastic uptake," says Kappers. "It can ensure that targeted groups are formed to serve tactical (project-based) and strategic purposes, and that they are maintained and fully utilised - putting the gains of a fully-functioning SBS implementation to work."

Any innovation or revelation harvested from SBS conversations could lead to the business making process improvements, advancing a strategy or embarking on a new direction. These must be highlighted to the proper entity to internalise, adopt and action as well as measure it. "In other words, the influence of a CCO and support staff is most pronounced at the start but felt throughout the process, when social collaboration, communication and innovation have yet to be institutionalised. Without that guiding hand, it would be like trying to control the use of Facebook in the organisation," adds Kappers.

The CCO will also constantly ensure alignment of SBS activities with strategic objectives, thus fuelling renewed energy in

the business, encouraging a far more proactive approach to communication, and ensuring process transparency. In short, a CCO is charged with creating an open, connected business culture.

Who'd make a good CCO?

It is clear that a CCO is a catalyst for change but we've never had CCOs, and CCO courses aren't yet taught in institutions of higher learning. So how do you know if someone is qualified to do the job?

"Like any change management process, the job takes effort and drive to deliver the success that social business software is known for, and to instil a new way of doing things," says Kappers. "In my view, senior professionals with a competency in technology, communications or marketing, coupled with a strong operational sense of the business, should find themselves in the running for a leadership position in your fledgling CCO department."

However to transform the organisation into an innovation powerhouse, the position of CCO is a board-level post. They must be able to develop and drive the execution of an enterprise social strategy, train and guide the team supporting social collaboration, monitor and measure social activities to achieve business and programme objectives. All this while working effectively across the organisation and liaising directly with C-level executives, strategists, market development and insight, brand development, communications, IT and Web teams.

"One size does not fit all - but the promise of integrating the enterprise has unlimited potential," continues Kappers. "What is interesting is how few companies have actually embraced the idea and gone on to create a CCO role so it will be fascinating to see how the different roles play out over time and in different industries, as companies' strategies mature."

"There are great and diverse collaboration technologies out there today and collaboration itself has become increasingly important to businesses and as they find themselves increasingly surrounded with the 'social-ness' that the changing business environment demands, having a C-Suite executive that brings it all together to access the truly transformative possibilities of SBS and deliver results will become critical. Welcome to the team CCO," concludes Kappers.

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