

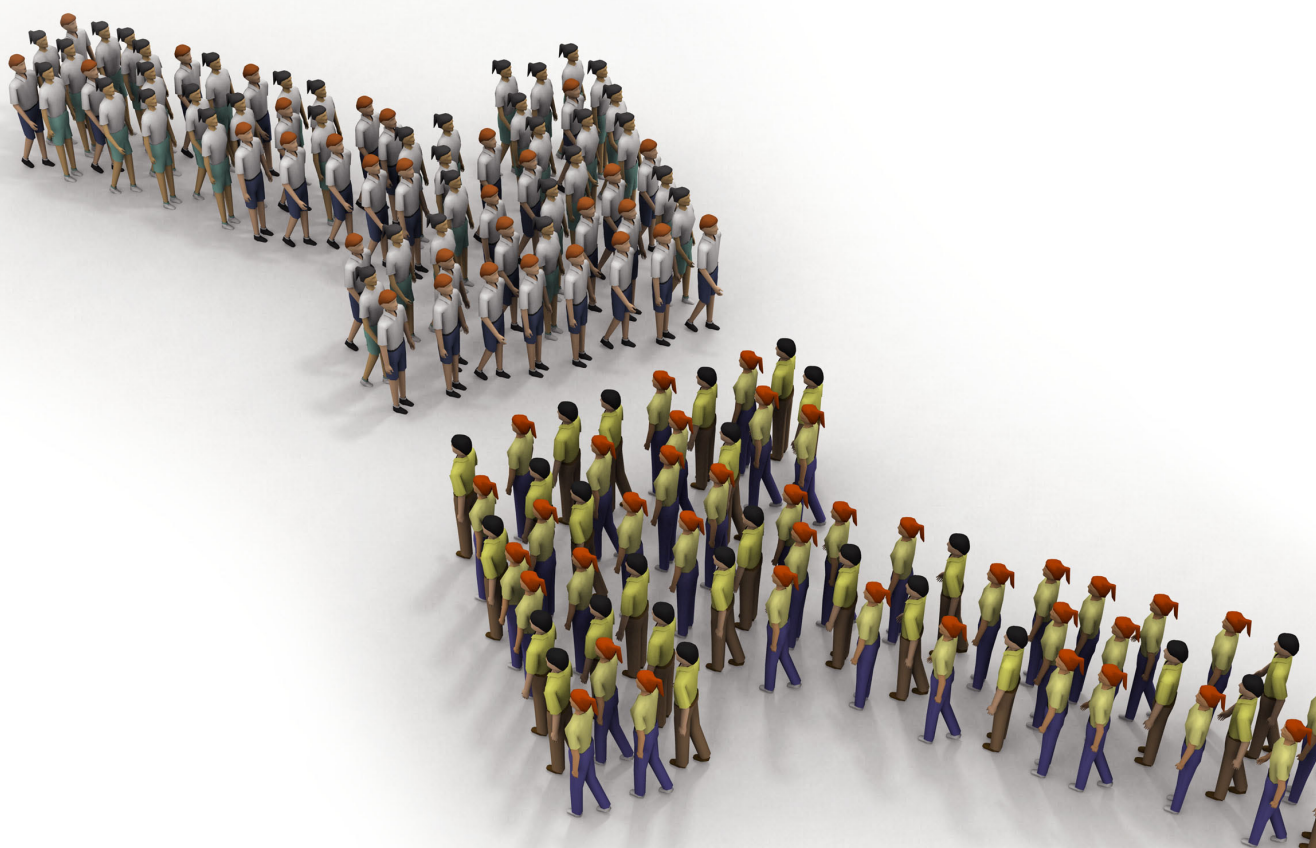


Making the Shift to the Next-Generation Enterprise
(a multipart series)

Future of Work Enabler: Community Interaction

Enabling high-impact enterprise communities is a key component of the future of work.

This report is an installment in our multipart series that explores the shifts necessary for future-proofing your company.



Executive Summary

Throughout the world, people of all cultures and ages have embraced social networking to a degree never imagined even a couple of years ago. According to SocialBakers, for example, the highest concentration of Facebook's one billion active users is in Bangkok, Thailand; Jakarta, Indonesia; and Sao Paulo, Brazil. Meanwhile, YouTube, with 800 million active users, is localized in 43 countries and 60 languages. And while the U.S. dominates on Twitter, Japanese is the second most-used language, and Arabic is the fastest growing, according to Semiocast in France.¹

Now, companies are trying to incorporate the tenets of social networking into the business world by developing inter- and intra-organizational social communities of interaction. To form these communities, they are using collaboration platforms and other social networking tools, as well as mobile, analytics and cloud technologies, or the SMAC Stack.™ Using familiar social techniques, such as status updates, "following," networks of "friends," personal profiles, trending topics, threaded conversations, video posting and "liking," businesses hope to experience the productivity gains that social networking-based enterprise community platforms promise.

And it's no wonder – today's globally dispersed teams often involve stakeholders outside the four walls of the organization. To collaborate at the speed and level that today's business world requires, these groups need new tools and techniques to effectively work together, whether to gather feedback, share what they're working on, leverage previous solutions, ask for advice or just let others know whether they're available to talk. Collaborative platforms can also be formed for specific communities, such as centers of excellence, research and development or protected domains in which to engage with partners, suppliers or customers.

However, business-oriented social communities have mostly not met expectations. After surfing the hype curve, many have fallen through the trough of disillusionment and failed to provide expected business impact. Platforms and tools that were expected to solve the critical business problems of collaboration in the context of work have merely become internal "hang-outs" that are unable to scale over time to meet business needs and provide only sporadic benefits, at best.



And yet it is possible to create an enterprise community of interaction that truly disrupts the business model in a good way, enabling dramatic changes in productivity and business efficiency. But organizations must first address several challenges, including these communities' need for predictability, self-propagation, scalability and integration with business processes. Communities of interaction that overlook these areas cannot deliver the transformative impact anticipated at the organization level.

Setting up enterprise communities of interaction will involve a range of choices, such as how to govern the social network and encourage its use. Companies will also need to change their own cultures to accept social media platforms as a genuine enabler rather than see them as a discretionary activity or even a drag on productivity. Doing so will provide fast access to expert information, encourage productive group dynamics and enable faster and smarter decision-making and turn-on-a-dime response to market changes. All this is possible through properly architected and managed enterprise communities, which support how businesses need to operate today.

Community interaction is one of the eight enablers companies need to consider when mapping their journey of reinvention for the new world of work, as described in our overview paper, "[Making the Shift to the Next-Generation Enterprise.](#)" In this installment, we will look at the many choices and considerations businesses must make when enabling enterprise communities.

Mapping the Enablers to the 3 R's



	 1 Community Interaction	 2 Innovation	 3 Worker Empowerment	 4 Virtual Collaboration	 5 Customer Empowerment	 6 Commercial Model Flexibility	 7 Value Chain Flexibility	 8 Flexible Service Delivery
RETHINK the Business Model		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
REINVENT Business Processes		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
REWIRE Operations	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Figure 1



Challenges and Considerations

First and foremost, organizations need to rise above the silver bullet mentality that they can solve all their collaboration needs simply by implementing a social collaborative platform. Communities of interaction need to be viewed as an effective way of improving process efficiency and stakeholder productivity. The fact is, four key challenges must be overcome before businesses can begin to reap the rewards of social enterprise communities:

1. **Achieving predictability and repeatability:** Social business communities are at an emerging stage, where their effectiveness is still largely dependent on individuals' desire to collaborate. There is no way to predict ahead of time whether the formation of any particular group will "take hold," let alone improve a business process. Without predictability, process owners cannot anticipate benefits or commit to business productivity improvements. For an enterprise community to reap optimal and predictable results, it needs to be thoughtfully architected in alignment with business processes.
2. **Encouraging self-propagation:** Outside the business world, social network interactions are spontaneous and take on a life of their own. A community started by avid fans of one sport or team, for instance, might easily branch off into other highly engaged groups that make more connections and create even more interactions, with participants returning after each sporting event. But in business-related communities, this type of self-propagation doesn't just happen. A discussion that centers on a customer solution to a problem, for instance, might trail off, and when another problem occurs, it may be tackled by an entirely new group. Businesses need someone to not only create but also manage and sustain groups within the enterprise community to ensure they operate and even expand over time.

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3. **Designing for scalability:** Most social communities are built on the simple principle that if we get people into one (virtual) room, they will collaborate. The focus is on breaking down barriers between people. Unfortunately, when the communities start to grow, the conversations can begin to take many forms and variants, and as this happens, they can begin to generate more noise than value. As the value diminishes, people are dissuaded from participating, begin to lose interest in the community and ultimately move on.
4. **Connecting with relevant processes:** A business community should be seamlessly connected to the business process. The moment a worker takes an action related to the business process, the community should automatically be engaged, each and every time. Involvement and participation cannot be discretionary.

Architecting Business Communities

To effectively respond to these four challenges, businesses need to properly architect their enterprise social communities, which involves both building the community and then managing and sustaining it. Let's take a look at the building phase and the two steps involved in completing this step.

- **Enable strategic focus and vision:** Communities of interaction need to be part and parcel of the business process architecture. To ensure this happens, companies need to secure support for social business communities at the top levels of the enterprise. Only with executive sponsorship can companies ensure that communities stay intact and are used by default by all employees engaged in the process.

According to an Altimeter Group survey, only half of all respondents said top executives were informed, engaged and aligned with their companies' social strategy. And yet, says Charlene Li, founder of Altimeter, one of the success factors of a social business is earning executive support and sponsorship, based on the business case. Garnering support from the top requires both education and weaving the social strategy into the fabric of the executives' work and priorities, Li says.²

- **Design the right type of community for the process landscape:** Different processes require different characteristics from a community; therefore, companies need to create the right communities to enable process productivity. For example, if a business process requires a high level of discussion, such as preparing a request for proposal (RFP), the best community would include participation from well-chosen experts. On the other hand, if the business process required a good deal of information broadcasting, such as training and policy management, it is better to architect a community of peers and incorporate gamification features (leader boards, contests, etc.) to encourage use.

All in all, business processes can be categorized into four types, and each type can be enhanced by using specific community features that encourage interaction (see Figure 2).

Four Types of Processes

Process Type	Description	Features that Encourage Interaction	Example
Processes that require a high degree of collaboration	These tend to be knowledge processes, such as research, knowledge gathering, etc. Communities that support these processes must be architected around the concept of engaging the right expert at the right time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert location: The community should include the right experts, which can be facilitated through a skill search model built into user profiles or an analytical solution to add the right experts at the right time. • Crowdsourcing: The community should enable users to ideate and implement as much crowd participation as possible within a minimal timeframe. 	Responding to business queries, customer solutioning processes
Processes that involve a high degree of information broadcasting	Processes that involve a good deal of information dissemination tend to require information consumption and feedback from large teams of people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gamification: Because consumers and contributors are different people in these types of communities, external motivation is needed to encourage participation. Gamification elements such as leader boards, contests, etc. can do just that. 	Training, policy discussion and broadcast to a large audience
Operational processes	These processes take care of the day-to-day functioning of the business unit. Such processes require input from experts to solve typical business problems, as well as compliance from a large business unit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert location (see above) • Gamification (see above) 	Resource management and delivery management processes
Processes that involve feedback collection from customers.	Such processes involve interaction with customers and the use of advanced analytics to monitor sentiment and obtain feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External social media integration: The community needs the ability to integrate external media for seamless communication with all participants. • Social analytics: These communities should utilize analytics to identify major communication trends and be able to respond to customers in the community. 	Customer query resolution and product support processes

Figure 2

Sustaining Participation in Enterprise Communities

Once the enterprise community is built, and executive sponsorship is secure, it must then be sustained with the right level of participation and the appropriate level of interaction with the relevant stakeholders. Perhaps the biggest fear for people who build a process-aligned community is the specter of becoming a “ghost community” – a platform designed with all the bells and whistles of a social networking site that is abandoned by participants who see no value in it, not unlike city neighborhoods whose residents and store owners flee after a factory closes down.

To avoid this fate and generate a consistent return on investment, community managers need to accomplish two goals:

- Encourage usage, measure progress and take course corrections.
- Extend usage and improve reach.

Community managers can meet these goals by using a robust framework that involves three stages of maturity: interact, communicate and transact.

Community managers should let the team and supervisors know that “water-cooler” conversations are not only acceptable but encouraged.

- **Interact:** In the first phase of community growth, the community manager must focus on peer-to-peer interaction, which builds participation and engagement. During this phase, individuals should be encouraged to discover their friends and engage in not only work-related business but also informal discussions around golf, travel, movies and other entertainment. Community managers should let the team and supervisors know that such “water-cooler” conversations are not only acceptable but encouraged. They can even seed these opportunities by creating informal groups and launching campaigns to increase awareness of them. Once a high level of engagement is established, the community becomes the default place for members to be virtually present.
- **Communicate:** Once engagement is established, the community manager needs to begin using the platform to broadcast all official communications. Since the community is already engaged, the reach would be very high. At the same time, when the community becomes the key way to consume important organizational updates, it adds credibility and solidifies to users that this is a strategic initiative and not just a cool place to hang out. When the platform is seen as the official communication channel, employees will start to use it for more work-related missives. Going further, users will also see the platform as a direct medium to interact with management, breaking down hierarchical walls. This is particularly true when C-level executives or business unit leaders initiate blogs, regularly update them with important messages and respond to employee comments.

This is also the stage in which community managers need to ensure that key managers use the platform or are visibly engaged. This will convey to employees that the platform has full organizational adoption, visibility and support.

- **Transact:** In the “interact” and “communicate” phases, informal interaction leads to engagement, which is channeled toward integrating communities into the workplace. Now it’s time for the “transact” phase, where community managers lead the community into business-focused action.

Quick Take

Behind the Scenes of a Successful Enterprise Community

Cognizant Academy is a good example of an organization that has transformed its way of working by becoming a social organization. The academy – our learning department within the company – has realized the many benefits of operating with well-functioning enterprise communities.

The first step in the academy's transformation was to create a community template, which included a mix of communities that would serve its 250-plus associates and students (see Figure 3). By doing so, the academy created a model for user engagement with the proper noise filters in place. Conversations were categorized under the relevant groups, ensuring the community would not be stifled by too many people having too many conversations.

Following our maturity model, the community was launched with clear messaging that informal and unofficial discussions would be appreciated and encouraged. During the first phase, the grassroots influencers were identified and encouraged to seed as many conversations as possible, increasing engagement on the platform. In the second phase, almost all management communication was converted into information flows through the platform, including event announcements, schedules and RSVP functionality. This brought “official credibility” to the interactions. Connections were formed, and business conversations increased quickly on the platform. As seen in Figure 4, the community included a healthy mix of business and informal conversations.

With this kind of engagement, Cognizant Academy has moved up the value chain, integrating the community-based model into its actual work systems. This has greatly increased the productivity of the specific groups (see Figure 5).

Today, Cognizant Academy is a highly social organization, in which community-based interaction is the primary model of interaction. The academy has seen significant improvement in process efficiency and productivity, due to its use of an enterprise community. Taking a structured approach helped the academy overcome the challenges and obstacles of moving toward a community-based model and accelerated its transformation to a social organization.

Cognizant Academy Community Work Model

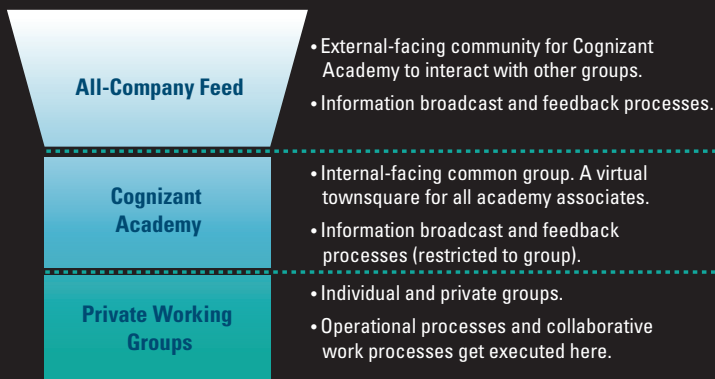


Figure 3

A Mix of Communications

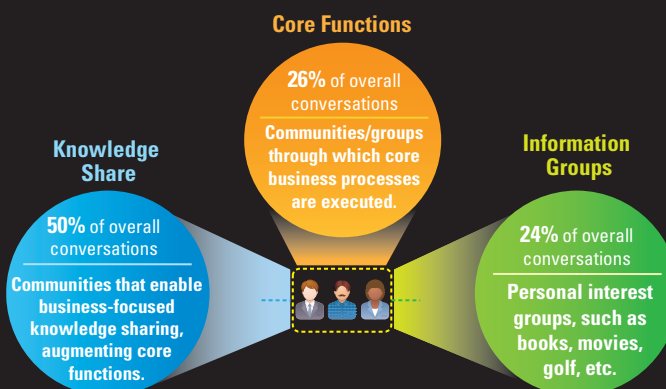


Figure 4

Enabling ‘Social Learning’ Group

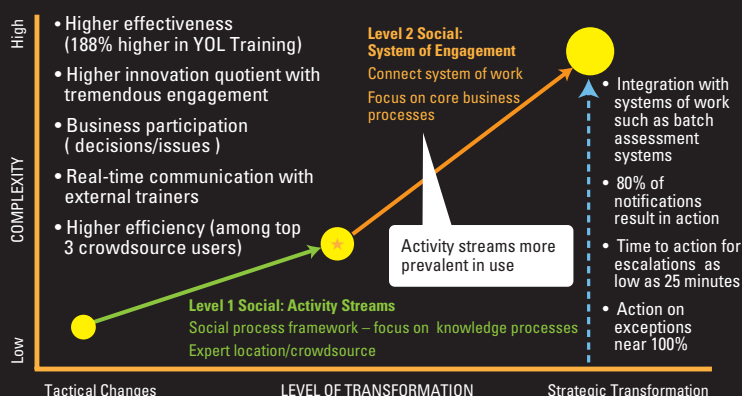


Figure 5

The transact step is the toughest phase of community growth. In this phase, the community manager focuses on enabling actual work to flow into the community by integrating work systems with the community platform. As such, the community transforms from a “conversation platform,” to a true work-collaboration platform.

Community managers can begin by enabling one-way transactions, such as integrating a vacation request system with the community platform. If a group has formed around completing a customer deliverable, for instance, automatic notifications would be sent when a member of the community was planning to be out on vacation. Moving to two-way communication, an integrated system could enable supervisors to sign off after receiving such a notification. An even more sophisticated system would enable community members to plan how to continue maximizing productivity even when the group member was away on vacation.

Traveling the Value Curve

By following this framework, community managers can ensure that the community is part-and-parcel of the business process. At that point, the community can be assessed by measuring its impact on the effectiveness and productivity of the business process it is designed to support. In this way, community managers can encourage usage of the community, measure progress, take course corrections, extend usage and improve reach (see Figure 6).

By moving through the stages of interact, communicate and transact, enterprise communities can become vehicles for increased organizational productivity and efficiency (see Figure 7, next page). On the other hand, if the community does not complete the three-step maturity process, it faces the prospect of becoming a ghost town, as initial interactions that were sustained through enthusiasm and novelty dissipate, and group members move to other platforms to collaborate.

Measuring Community Success

Stage	Metrics Used	Action for Growth
Interact At this stage, metrics are focused on participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach: Comparison of the number of people the community was intended to reach and the percentage that has logged into the community. • Frequency: The number of times a person logs into the community to contribute/consume. • Stickiness: How long a person stays on and contributes to the platform and whether there are drop-outs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate participation from leaders. • Convert blast e-mails into conversations within the community. • Introduce virtual town hall meetings through the community platform, with leader participation.
Communicate At this stage, metrics are focused on the usage of the platform for work-related activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of business conversations as a percentage of overall conversations. • Categorization of groups into informal groups, knowledge-related groups (augmenting business processes) and core groups (enabling business processes). • Contribution to process efficiency (has the customer solution process become faster, cheaper, better) or employee productivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the core systems of work that require ideation and discussion and that need to improve reach. • Identify the stakeholders who and groups that can add value to the work notification. • Build integration.
Transact At this stage, metrics are focused on business process efficiency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process effectiveness: Improvement in the business process that has been integrated into the community platform. • Overall process efficiency: Improvement in the quality of deliverable/cost/time to act for the business process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve integration to make social streams an inherent part of the work stream and not a bolt-on. • Redesign/rearchitect processes embedding in social streams in the relevant places, making it the default enabler/executor of the process work.

Figure 6

Quick Take

Best Practices for Enabling Enterprise Communities

Do's

- **Be clear** about the kinds of conversations that are allowed and not allowed on the platform. People with misperceptions can impede viral adoption.
- **Ensure continuous and visible management participation** – this cannot be an optional or one-time event. Use of the platform as the official channel is necessary for creating credibility around the community-based model of working.
- **Identify influencers early in the process** and create a separate community for them. These are the early adopters who can view the business conversations happening on the platform.
- **Involve the technology support team**, as they are crucial for completing the necessary system integrations.

Don'ts

- **Create a platform ownership team** separate from the business unit. A community is enabled by the right technology, so create an ownership team that includes business and IT.
- **Let the community grow** without governance and guidelines. Knowing the right milestones and course corrections is mandatory for business communities to succeed; otherwise, they will become “noisy-towns.”
- **Enforce usage restrictions** apart from the “acceptable use policies” at the organizational level. Allow users to try new things with the model and push boundaries.
- **Allow managers to learn the consequences of non-hierarchical communication** by themselves. Host sessions and coach them to encourage the expected behavior from the group.

Value Curve for Social Communities

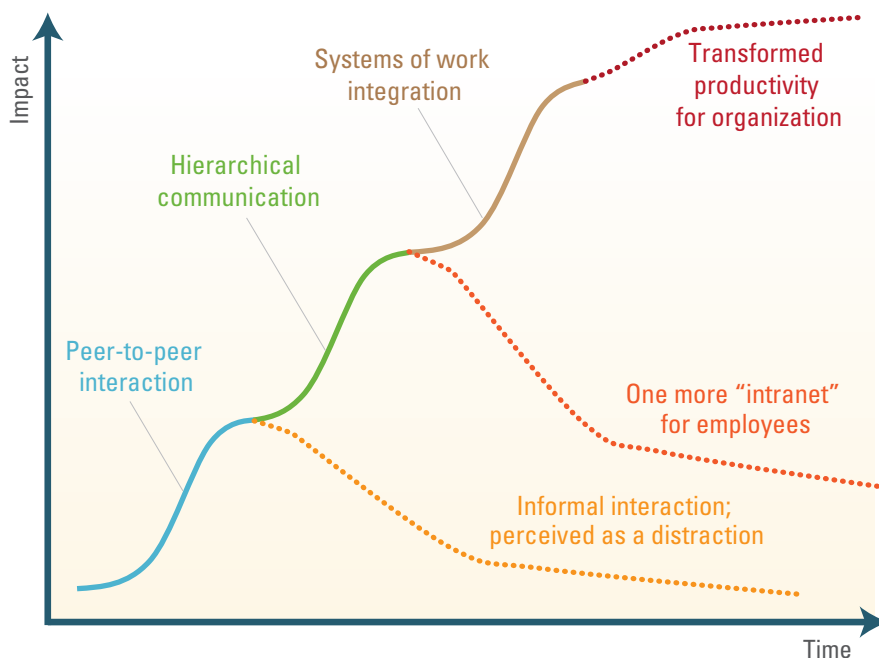


Figure 7

Architecting Communities to Transform Business Productivity

Given the global embrace, social networking is here to stay, and it has a lot to offer in terms of increasing enterprise productivity, business performance and organizational effectiveness. But in the business world, socially-enhanced collaboration does not just happen.

Business communities of interaction need to be architected and managed in order to become a critical facilitator of business productivity and efficiency. Through our experience creating such communities, we have designed a framework to derive an optimal environment that is integrated with business processes, aligned with organization policies and able to boost business productivity to transformative levels.

Footnotes

- ¹ "Twitter Reaches Half a Billion Accounts," Semiocast, July 30, 2012, http://semiocast.com/en/publications/2012_07_30_Twitter_reaches_half_a_billion_accounts_140m_in_the_US.
- ² Charlene Li and Brian Solis, "The Evolution of Social Business: Six Stages of Social Business Transformation," Altimeter Group, March 6, 2013, <http://www.altimetergroup.com/research/reports/evolution-social-business>.



About the Author

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