The 7 Pillars of IT-Enabled Team Productivity

The Microsoft SharePoint 2007 Analysis

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Executive Summary

Microsoft SharePoint is garnering much attention and mindshare in teams, groups and organizations. Microsoft claims that SharePoint can be leveraged to enhance collaboration and productivity within teams. Those claims do not stand up to a non-Microsoft and vendor-neutral critical analysis. When the latest version of SharePoint is put under the microscope for a careful examination, its use by teams for collaborative activities creates more pain than it solves.

This White Paper critically applies a vendor-neutral framework, The 7 Pillars of IT-Enabled Team Productivity, to Microsoft SharePoint. This framework is an organizational-centric framework for building a collaboration environment to support and enhance team practices. The framework holds that teams need collaboration technologies that address 7 key capabilities in order to enhance collaborative work:

1. Shared access to team data.
2. Location independent access to team data and members.
3. Real-time joint viewing capabilities.
4. Team-aware calendaring.
5. Social engagement tools.

On its own merits, SharePoint earns a passing grade in only the first area, “Shared Access to Team Data”. If an organization also has a deployment of Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007, then two additional areas—“Real-Time Joint Viewing and Editing” and “Social Engagement Tools” are elevated from a “fail” to a “pass”. Nonetheless, that still results in a failing grade in four of the seven areas.

SharePoint excels in supporting asynchronous team collaboration for creating and managing documents and digital artifacts when people are in the office. In its current design iteration, however, it is not a tool to generally increase the productivity of collaborative teams, and in many cases makes work life more difficult for team members.

This White Paper is written for CIOs, IT Business Analysts and IT Organizations who are charged with evaluating the efficacy of SharePoint for team collaboration. Business-focused departments that are demanding the availability of SharePoint for collaborative purposes will also greatly benefit from this paper.

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Introduction

Microsoft SharePoint is taking the world by storm. In the past year Microsoft claims to have earned over a billion dollars from SharePoint, once-competitors are lining up to integrate their offerings with SharePoint, and organizations are discovering that SharePoint already has a widespread grip within business units and divisions when IT decides that it is time to do something official about SharePoint.

Microsoft positions SharePoint as a general-purpose IT platform for businesses and organizations. Collaboration is one of the capabilities that SharePoint is apparently suitably adept at delivering—this White Paper critically examines Microsoft’s claims in this area. The latest iteration of SharePoint is examined through the lens of a vendor-neutral framework for explaining what teams need from collaboration technology in order to be productive in their work. The aim of the framework is to enable CIOs and IT organizations to select technology that contributes to team productivity, and to avoid or mitigate that which gets in the way and makes work more difficult.

The lens used in this White Paper is The 7 Pillars of IT-Enabled Team Productivity. It was developed during 2005 by Michael Sampson, the then Research Director at Shared Spaces Research and Consulting Limited. Since then the framework has been presented to an international audience, and has featured prominently in the internal collaboration strategy work at leading organizations. It provides a way of filtering the claims of vendors about their products through an organizationally-focused frame of reference. The complete 7 Pillars framework can be accessed for no charge at http://co.michaelsampson.net/7pillars.html (PDF, 54 pages, 2.1 MB).

The 7 Pillars framework is applied in this work to the latest collaboration offerings from Microsoft, that being Windows SharePoint Services v3 (hereafter “WSSv3”) and Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 (hereafter “MOSS 2007”). WSSv3 delivers the core collaboration functionality offered by Microsoft, and MOSS 2007 adds optional (but useful) collaboration features in addition to numerous other capabilities for business intelligence, content management, search and more. While the capabilities beyond collaboration are integral to the value proposition of SharePoint as a platform play in businesses and organizations, the unremitting focus in this work is on the use of SharePoint for collaboration.

Methodology

The methodology applied in this White Paper is to examine what SharePoint can and can not do. It is an objective, facts-based analysis of capability, not an emotional or subjective claims-based model. Once the facts are clearly understood, then the implications of those facts within the context of team collaboration and productivity are clearly stated. For example, when Microsoft represents that SharePoint can be used to support team collaboration, it fails to note the compete array of facts related to such usage; when all of those facts are understood, the ability of
SharePoint to support team collaboration is severely questioned. This work highlights these additional facts and explains their implications.

Understanding the facts of SharePoint’s capabilities within the 7 Pillars model results in SharePoint earning a failing grade in 6 of the 7 areas. That is, on its own merits, SharePoint in reality only deals with one of the 7 core capabilities required by teams. In giving a failing grade, the intention is to summarize all of the facts about SharePoint’s capabilities and the associated implications within the context of team collaboration. With a clear strategy for “integrated innovation”, it is entirely within Microsoft’s power to change the facts in the next edition. But until that is released in the 2010 timeframe, the world’s cadre of information workers have to deal with what SharePoint currently offers with respect to team collaboration.

A final point is in order. Microsoft has designed SharePoint to play a specific set of roles within an overall Microsoft architecture. There are many other servers, services and client software from Microsoft that can be and should be used in an overall enterprise collaboration strategy. So clearly, SharePoint does not offer real-time conferencing capabilities, as required by Pillar 3, but Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 does. If (a) Microsoft offers an adequate product to address the needs of a given Pillar, (b) it can be reasonably expected that organizations will offer that product as part of the overall enterprise collaboration strategy, and (c) the product integrates with SharePoint to give a near-seamless end-user experience, then a “Pass” is still given. If a product from a third-party vendor is required to make the Pillar work, then that is not be taken into consideration within the grading for each Pillar.

See Figure 1 for Summary grading of SharePoint.

**Figure 1. Summary 7 Pillars Analysis of SharePoint**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 1</td>
<td>Shared Access to Team Data</td>
<td>PASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 2</td>
<td>Location Independence</td>
<td>FAIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 3</td>
<td>Real-Time Joint Viewing</td>
<td>PASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 4</td>
<td>Team-Aware Calendaring</td>
<td>FAIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 5</td>
<td>Social Engagement</td>
<td>PASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 6</td>
<td>Team Task Management</td>
<td>FAIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillar 7</td>
<td>Collaboration Auto-Discovery</td>
<td>FAIL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions and Recommendations

The sole strength of SharePoint on is in Pillar 1, in meeting the needs of teams to have a single place for shared access to team data. On its own merits, it fails the other six areas, but two of these areas are elevated from a failing grade to a passing grade when Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 is added into the mix.

Taking into consideration the outcomes of the analysis in this paper, what are the implications of these findings for organizations looking to deploy SharePoint to support team collaboration activities?

1. SharePoint’s collaboration features leave much to be desired. SharePoint can not be said to be a mature collaboration platform, because it neglects many of the required capabilities. If you want more than shared access to team data, SharePoint is not the tool for your organization. In fact, it will make things more difficult for team members, rather than making them easier.

2. If you are considering moving to SharePoint from another collaboration platform, make that decision with reference to the actual improvements that you will get. You may find that the delta is too small to justify a move.

3. If location independent access to SharePoint is a key requirement for your teams, then Microsoft is unable to deliver a product that meets these requirements. You will need to purchase a third-party product to mitigate the weaknesses of SharePoint, and this will significantly add to your cost equation. Ensure that you take it into consideration in advance of proposing a new SharePoint deployment.

4. Microsoft has pretty well dealt with the asynchronous sharing and collaboration around documents and artifacts. It has done this in a broad-brushed way, but has to date failed to make SharePoint a place of productive work for information workers. Situations where shared access to team data is the driving requirement, such as in client extranets for document sharing, SharePoint is an appropriate tool.

5. There are clear opportunities for Microsoft to improve the collaboration-supporting capabilities of SharePoint. It has an opportunity to demonstrate true “integrated innovation” rather than use that phrase as mere rhetoric.

6. SharePoint delivers more than just collaboration capabilities. These may be the driving reason for shifting to SharePoint, but it is difficult to make a strong case for embracing SharePoint to support team collaboration as the lead driver.

7. The addition of OCS 2007 is strategic to the creation of a productive environment for team collaboration. If you embrace SharePoint, you should also embrace OCS 2007.