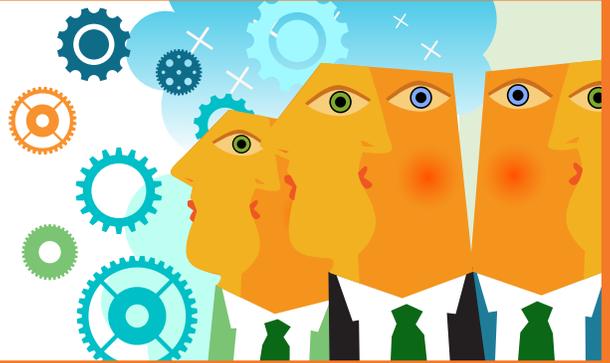# Point of View

Perfecting the Pivot Series: Collaborative Execution

The Collaboration Pivot

A pivot, in business terms, is a rapid, significant and successful change of strategy – sometimes the shift is in the form of a fluid course adjustment and sometimes it is a radical new direction. Pivoting is no longer a once in a while activity. Constant daily change requires constant recalibration of strategy and tactics. The best Architecture, Engineering and Construction (AEC) firms are always pivot-ready.

On February 27, 2014, Avanade hosted a webinar panel discussion for AEC leaders titled Perfecting the Pivot held in conjunction with Engineering News-Record, FMI Consulting, Microsoft and Creative Growth Group.[1] You can access the recorded webinar on-demand here. This document is the final piece in a series of four Executive Briefs emerging from that conversation and designed to help AEC firms perfect their ability to pivot especially through the use of technology.

Four trends are forcing A/E/C firms to shift strategies and tactics at a far greater pace than ever before. The four imperatives are:

1. Agile Adaptation: This is a firm management and cultural imperative demanding an environment of measurement, transparency, and rapid, fact-based decision-making.

2. Client Expansion: This is a revenue imperative based on the relentless pressure to grow existing client relationships and new client revenue in a marketplace defined by perceived scarcity.

3. Changing Workforce: This is a people imperative linked to the disruption occurring due to a radically changing, multi-generational workforce increasingly dominated by the Millennial Generation of workers who are extremely tech savvy.

4. Collaborative Execution: This is an execution imperative driven by a tsunami of collaboration technologies and by rising corporate interdependencies that are shifting how we work with colleagues and clients.

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This Avanade Executive Briefing addresses the final of the four Pivot Imperatives: Collaborative Execution.

The Collaboration Imperative

The world of sports is filled with pivot analogies. In basketball, a pivot is the swivel that a player makes around one planted foot. In cricket, a pivot is the body rotation of a spin bowler pitching the ball towards a batsman. In baseball, a pivot is the turn a fielder makes when throwing the ball in an opposite direction during a double play. In these cases, "pivot" is a verb - an action. In soccer, pivot is a noun. It refers to the player who occupies a collaborative, situational leadership role on his team. On the soccer pitch, the deepest midfielder – the one covering the space between his team and the opponent's defense, controlling possession and distributing the ball along the field to his teammates - is called a pivot. The pivot breaks up the pace of play and provides time for his fellow midfielders to get forward and attack. The pivot is a master collaborator.

"Improved communication and **collaboration** through **social technologies** could raise the **productivity** of **interaction** workers by **20 to 25 percent.**"

– McKinsey & Company

AEC firms have been havens for lone wolves: filled with subject-matter specialists who are superb at operating as individual experts. More recently, a mix of new talents and tools make collaborative execution an absolute imperative for success.

Collaborative Talents

Workforce generation style and skill gaps continue to grow. AEC teams today are especially diverse and geographically distributed. Collaborative initiatives help to close the gaps.

With a scarcity of top talent available in any given geographic market, AEC firms must recruit and manage the best architects, designers, engineers and project managers wherever they reside. Additionally, the pace of AEC mergers and acquisitions has increased in the wake of the economic recession causing more geographic distance among colleagues. As a result, the AEC workforce is an increasingly dispersed one – often, at least some members of any team are working offsite or are "virtual".

With more Millennial generation workers entering the AEC workforce at the same time that many Baby Boomers are slowing down and not enough Gen Xers in between, there is a looming leadership succession challenge in many firms. As a result, a successful AEC organization must create conditions that allow disparate generations to bring their distinct skills together more effectively and blend the leadership and relationship experience of the senior group with the technological know-how, energy and enthusiasm of the rising one.

Collaborative Tools

The proliferation of ultra-smart mobile devices linked to use -it-anywhere-anytime applications has created an AEC workspace that is always open for business. The opportunity for productivity gains through these collaborative tools is profound. The renowned consultancy, published its report, "The Social Economy: Unlocking Value And Productivity Through Social Technologies,"[2] in July 2012. In it, the authors write, "Improved communication and collaboration through social technologies could raise the productivity of interaction workers by 20 to 25 percent."

At the same time, the tsunami of technologies can be overwhelming and confusing. Having the right tools is one thing, employee adoption of those tools and shifting behavior from individual work to teamwork is another thing altogether.

Adding to the challenge: hardware, software, products and services overlap in the world of social business collaboration (many share similar features with each emphasizing one as primary) and therefore categorization and comparisons of your options are somewhat arbitrary. As good as any, here is one approach at categorizing the current set of tools – by the primary purpose or function around which the tools are built.

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1. Collaborative project productivity tools let professionals, suppliers and clients have visibility and interaction with regard to process, progress and problems for their key project. As with all technology categories these days, project productivity offerings run the gamut from limited-feature, "freemium" tools for small businesses to robust products for mid-size to larger AEC firms. On the lower-end, offerings like Zoho Project provide group calendaring, milestone tracking, task and to-do management among other basics. These tools tend to stand alone – not integrated – from an organization's other software tools. At the enterprise-grade level, are offerings that integrate naturally with – or are already built-into an AEC firm's management system. Avanade's project management tool, Critical Chain Project Management is a relatively new, innovative method for planning, scheduling, and managing performance in a non-linear project environment where resources are shared across multiple projects. BIM technology is also moving in the collaborative user direction, linking the design team and merging architectural, structural, mechanical, plumbing and other building-related models so that clashes can be avoided and change orders minimized.

2. Collaborative communication tools enable AEC workers to stay in constant touch and to conduct web-conferencing and online meetings on-demand, regardless of location. Tools in this category range from consumer-level apps like Skype that some use for business purposes to commercial-quality tools like Microsoft Lync, which is specifically built for enterprise use. The proliferation of handheld mobile devices brings all collaboration tools – virtually - to the construction site and across the globe so issues can be resolved immediately with on-the-spot discussions rather than tedious formal meetings. Going a step further, some companies have tried to foster collaboration despite physical separation through wormholes and avatars. The innovation and design firm, IDEO, has implemented virtual collision zones they call "wormholes." The firm focuses live webcam feeds on specific areas within their high-traffic workspaces and displays the feed on huge, flat screen monitors across their network of offices. Colleagues can see through the digital wormhole and have spontaneous interactions and conversations with colleagues around the world. Meanwhile, Microsoft recently filed a patent application describing a method for providing shared media experiences (like watching films) among an entire group.

Microsoft's avatar system is designed to digitally replicate the experience of going to a movie theater with a group of friends, providing a shared experience in a virtual world that may not be possible in the physical world due to geographical distance. It isn't hard to envision how this technology might be applied to virtual business meetings – such as design reviews - in the AEC space.

3. Collaborative content and file-sharing tools – From Pinterest and Instagram to Dropbox, Box.net there are myriad consumer tools available for sharing files and many have been adopted by small businesses. In the league of enterprise-grade applications, SharePoint reigns as king of the hill and growing. At the 2014 SharePoint Conference, SharePoint online saw 500% user growth over the prior 12 months according to Jared Spataro, Microsoft Senior Director of SharePoint Product Management.[3] SharePoint Online delivers the powerful features of SharePoint through a flexible, cloud-based implementation. Meanwhile, SkyDrive Pro is Microsoft's document sharing tool that integrates with SharePoint and Office 365 and allows AEC colleagues to easily store, sync and share documents and work with them together or separate, offline or online.

4. Collaborative firm management tools – Enterprise Resource Management systems such as Microsoft Dynamics AX continue to be vital tools for running efficient and effective AEC firms. Now they are also centers of interconnectivity among co-workers, information sources, and devices – interpreting big data instantly so that AEC executives can make faster, better business decisions. Perhaps more mundane but equally impactful to the average worker, collaboration-ready ERP systems let professionals working at remote AEC sites or on the road tap into their ERP systems to enter hours, project data, sales quotations, and orders to keep business information up to date, regardless of time zones or geographical barriers.

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Pivot-Ready Technology for Collaborative Execution

It used to be that technology followed and supported a firm's strategy, people and processes. Today instead, the power of new technology precedes and informs corporate strategy and drives people and process. This is especially true of technology that fosters collaborative execution.

You can either anticipate or react to the rate of technological change in the AEC marketplace. There is little in between. It is in your best interest to prepare to pivot well ahead of your need to do so by equipping your firm with the right supporting technologies and the best expert advisors to implement them. The right collaboration technologies, in particular, will allow you to most effectively and flexibly adjust to the rising trend of tight collaboration and co-creation amongst mosaic teams of colleagues, clients and cooperative suppliers.

We have intentionally crafted Avanade's pivot-ready service offerings and the Microsoft Dynamics AX and CRM systems that we implement to enable maximum agility for firms like yours. Our commitment to provoke your thinking on issues such as collaborative execution is an example of our dedication to AEC industry success. How pivot-ready are you? Contact Avanade's AEC technology experts for a Pivot-ready Assessment and we will help you find the solutions that let you need to collaborate more easily, adapt more quickly and win bigger and more frequently.
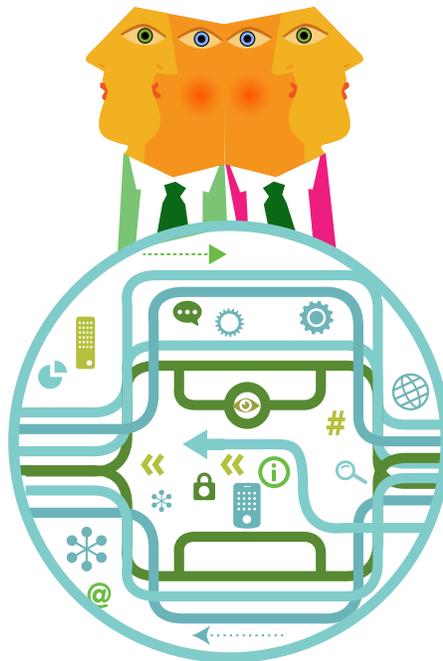
1 The webinar, "Perfecting the Pivot: How AEC Firms Can Gain Agility through Innovative Technology and What Happens When They Don't" occurred on Thursday, February 27, 2014.

2 McKinsey Global Institute Report, " The social economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies" was published in July, 2012 and authored by Michael Chui, James Manyika, Jacques Bughin, Richard Dobbs, Charles Roxburgh, Hugo Sarrazin, Geoffrey Sands and Magdalena Westergren.
The webinar, "Perfecting the Pivot: How AEC Firms Can Gain Agility through Innovative Technology and What Happens When They Don't" occurred on Thursday, February 27, 2014.

3 SharePoint highlights shared during the keynote presentation of The Microsoft SharePoint 2014 conference that took place March 3-6, 2014 in Las Vegas, NV.

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About Avanade
Avanade helps customers realize results in a digital world through business technology solutions and managed services that combine insight, innovation and expertise focused on Microsoft® technologies. Our people have helped thousands of organizations in all industries improve business agility, employee productivity and customer loyalty. Avanade combines the collective business, technical and industry expertise of its worldwide network of experts with the rigor of an industrialized delivery model to provide high quality solutions using proven and emerging technologies with flexible deployment models—on premises, cloud-based or outsourced. Avanade, which is majority owned by Accenture, was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation and has 20,000 professionals in more than 20 countries. Additional information can be found at www.avanade.com

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