



BUSINESS POTENTIALS OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS FOR COLLABORATION AND TEAMWORK**Slavoljub Milovanović***University of Niš, Faculty of Economics, Republic of Serbia*✉ slavoljub.milovanovic@eknfak.ni.ac.rsUDC
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Abstract: Information technologies and systems are not able to make decisions, negotiate, or determine the prices of goods in the market. Companies need tools that support collaboration, teamwork, search, exchange and sharing of information and knowledge, where the Internet and social media play a major role. As a result of collaboration and sharing of knowledge and information, managers can make decisions in all these areas. Internet and social media tools are the most important knowledge management technologies for collaboration, communication and knowledge sharing; therefore, the paper considers potentials of the tools in enterprise business.

Keywords: Internet, social media tools, collaboration, teamwork, social business.

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1. Introduction

Collaboration represents working with other employees in a company to achieve common and specific goals and focuses on the execution of a task or mission. It usually takes place within a company or between companies. Collaboration can be short-term (lasting a few days) or long-term (lasting several years). It depends on business activities and the relationship between stakeholders in collaboration.

Employees can be organized into formal teams for collaboration but there can also be informal teams in a company. Company management can assign a certain business goal to a team. Team members must cooperate in order to accomplish certain tasks and jointly implement a business strategy. For example, one of the team's strategic goals might be to "increase Internet sales by 10 percent." (Rohi, 2017).

Collaboration supported by information and communication technologies (ICT) is the subject of research in many works that study different aspects, such as: collaboration supported by ICT tools in small and medium-sized enterprises (Hardwig et al. 2018, Hardwig et al. 2020, Disconzi & Lorenzoni, 2017), the application of collaborative ICT tools in knowledge management (Davidekova & Hvorecky, 2024) and supply chains (Alsaad et al. 2018), the use of asynchronous ICT tools for interaction and collaboration in the context of learning and knowledge acquisition (Davidson-Shivers & Rand, 2022), the evolution of collaborative ICT tools to support internal communication (Trillmich & Wedel, 2019), the use of collaborative ICT tools for effective decision-making in the public sector (Akinsola, & Munepapa, 2021), management and organizational issues in the application of collaborative ICT tools, particularly social networks of enterprises (Bertin et al. 2020), social collaborative software for supporting virtual teams shown through a case study (Orta-Castañon et al. 2018), the role of collaborative digital tools in the transformation of the innovation process using the example of new product development (Marion & Fixson, 2021), performance measurement and benefits obtained from collaboration based on ICT tools (Graça & Camarinha-Matos, 2017), the use of web services and tools for online document editing and collaboration (Kosalge, 2017) and the use of workflow and other tools supporting collaboration among data scientists (Zhang et al. 2020).

The main goal of this work is to analyse and present the possibilities of Internet and social media tools in collaborative and teamwork, as well as in communication and coordination activities related to the transfer and sharing of knowledge, organizational learning and individual learning. Accordingly, the paper is divided into eight parts. After the introductory remarks and a review of previous research on this topic, the second part explains the reasons that have increased the importance of collaboration and teamwork in companies, while the third part emphasizes the collaborative role of the Internet and the possibility of using collective intelligence through crowdsourcing. In the fourth part, the possibilities of using the Internet for learning and remote work are discussed, while the fifth part is dedicated to business operations based on social media and collaboration supported by these media. The sixth part gives a brief overview of the most important Internet-based software tools that are often used for collaboration and social business, while the seventh part analyses the criteria for choosing those tools. The last part of the paper is devoted to concluding considerations related to the business possibilities of using the Internet and social media tools.

2. Importance of collaboration and teamwork in the enterprise

Collaboration is important for various reasons. Namely, there have been major changes in the nature of work, the organization and size of companies as well as

the culture of work and business. In addition, professional work based on collaboration is developing and there is an increasing emphasis on innovation. These reasons that have increased the importance of collaboration and teamwork in companies will be briefly explained.

Changing the nature of work. Production and administrative work have changed radically. Before computers, business and work processes were carried out independently of one another and under the coordination of supervisors. However, today the production of services or products is organized with more coordination, collaboration and interaction between employees involved in it.

Development of professional work. Professional work based on coordination and collaboration in service companies tends to become more interactive. Professionals have significant education and knowledge that they exchange with their colleagues in a working environment.

Change in company organization. In the industrial era, work was organized in a hierarchical manner. Today, informal working groups and teams are organized to complete various business tasks and projects. In completing these tasks and projects, employees create and use their own methods. Managers do not give detailed instructions and commands about how to accomplish business tasks but control and measure outcomes of tasks.

Change in company size. Business has changed in the sense that it is not conducted in one, but in several locations or branches and factories throughout the region, country and world. With a global presence, a company must coordinate design of products, manufacturing, sale, marketing and whole supply chain on a global bases. Global corporations must organise global teams whose members communicate and cooperate globally.

Business based on innovation. Innovations in business are often made by the talented and creative employees but communication, coordination and collaboration with other employees are necessary to implement the innovations. Innovation is the result of social interaction and collaboration between employees in a company. In fact, intensive collaboration and the use of collaborative information technologies improves the quality of innovation.

Changing organisational culture. The culture of work is changing in the sense that collaborative work in formal and informal teams and working groups gives better business results than employees working alone. Popular terms of collective wisdom and intelligence (crowdsourcing) create a cultural basis for collaborative work, coordination and cooperative effort (Gronwald, 2017, Hayes, 2018).

3. The collaborative role of the Internet and crowdsourcing

The communication possibilities of the Internet are very often extended by various applications that support collaboration or cooperation among users. In modern organizations, employees must work together to accomplish tasks. Cooperation refers to the efforts of two or more entities working together to achieve some business tasks. The term workgroup primarily refers to several employees working together to accomplish a business activity.

Finally, workflow is a term that refers to the movement of information through the segments and steps of the work process in an organization. Workflow management allows information and tasks to flow from one user to another, so that they fit within the rules of the organization. Workflow systems consist of software tools for processing and transferring information flowing within an organisation.

If members of a team work remotely from one another, they together form a virtual team. Members of the team meet digitally, via computer networks. Virtual or digital collaboration implies the use of information and communication technologies that support geographically distant members of an organization to plan, design, develop, manage, research and improve business processes. Employees in an organization often collaborate virtually with each other, while enterprises coordinate their business activities and collaborate digitally with suppliers and customers.

In order for members of a team to collaborate, they can use different types of teleconferencing. Teleconferencing implies the use of information and communication technologies that allows geographically dispersed users to organise and conduct meetings and conferences. The most commonly used type of teleconference is videoconferencing that allows users to simultaneously share information and data in various formats such as audio, video, images, graphics etc. Conference participants can communicate and collaborate by working together on documents and exchanging files.

Many software tools are developed for collaboration and communication. The most well-known are wikis, OneDrive for Business, Google Docs and IBM Lotus. Generally speaking, these tools enable digital collaboration, email communication, implementation of databases, word processing, document and file management and application development. These tools enable different levels of document control by tracking changes that occur in documents. These tools enable users to process and modify one document at the same time. (Iskandar et al. 2017)

One model of cooperation that is supported by the Internet is crowdsourcing. The model enables an enterprise or another type of organization to assign problem-solving tasks via the Internet to a wide group of people. This way of accomplishing tasks offers many potential benefits to the organization. First, a large group of people or masses can investigate a problem and solve it rapidly at low cost.

Second, an organization can encompass much more talented people for problem solving than those present within the organization. Third, by collecting information from the crowd, the organization gains direct insight into the desires of its customers. Finally, crowdsourcing gives access to global sources of ideas and knowledge in designing solutions to many problems.

In many cases, crowdsourcing has been successful but there are a few problems related to this way of collaboration via the Internet. The crowd may contribute too many ideas, many of which may be useless. Content created by non-experts could be inaccurate and irrelevant. The attached content may infringe copyright. Finally, the content created by the crowd may be of low quality because the quality depends on the structure of the crowd.

In the next section, other collaborative services of the Internet in distance learning and work will be explained.

4. The role of the Internet in distance learning and work

E-learning is learning that takes place with the support of Internet technologies. It can be held in the classroom when a teacher gives traditional lectures to students who work on the Internet during classes. However, it can be held in virtual classrooms when all learning takes place online rather than in direct and live communication with students in a traditional classroom. This is distance learning in which students and lecturers are not in traditional classroom but use the Internet for communication.

The Internet provides a multimedia space for self-learning. Internet-based systems make knowledge available to many users when they need it, no matter where they are. In this context, e-learning and distance learning systems can support learning in educational institutions and learning and training of employees in companies. (Liang, Liu, 2018)

Some companies need knowledge that is not in digital form, but remains in certain employees of a company who are experts in a specific domain. Modern enterprise digital knowledge, collaboration and social networking systems, have the ability to find experts and leverage their expertise in a specific business domain. These systems have online lists of experts in a company and their profiles detailing their business expertise, documents, experience and education, as well as repositories of content generated by these experts. In order to find the right expert in an organisation, employees can use search tools. To provide needed knowledge outside the organisation, employees can use social media and search engine tools that allow users to find web pages of interest and share them with other people.

In addition, companies should manage the learning and knowledge acquisition processes of employees and integrate these processes into their knowledge and

learning systems and other company information systems. These systems make tools available for managing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating different types of training and employee learning. A modern learning management system supports multiple learning methods, including videos, webinars, live in-class or online instruction, and group learning through online discussion groups and interactive chat conversations. A learning management system consolidates mixed modes of employee learning, provides selection and management of courses, creates and delivers course materials, and measures the outcomes of the learning process.

In addition to their systems supporting learning processes, companies can also use Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which are available to the public for educating their employees. This type of course is available through the Internet to a large number of potential learners. This is a new method of creation and distribution of online courses that enables participants in the learning process to collaborate, communicate and discuss learning themes and units. Some companies, such as Microsoft and AT&T, have created their own massive open online courses, while others use publicly available MOOCs. In the near future, these courses are expected to play a greater role in online learning and training in many companies. (Abusweilem, Abualoush, 2019)

Just as learning can take place at a distance, work can also be done at locations that are far from workplaces in organizations. It is, in fact, work outside the workplace, which is not performed on the premises of the organization for which the employee works and which, most often, is paid by performance. If such work is done in the worker's home, it is called homework. Given that the worker is connected to the organization via the Internet, it is referred to as telecommunication work or telecommuting. Such workers do not have a permanent office in their companies and prefer to work from their homes, conference rooms and other places. The growth of this type of work has been, in a way, driven by globalization, extremely long distances to workplaces, fuel prices that show an increasing trend, ubiquitous broadband Internet communications and powerful computer technologies.

5. Social business and collaboration in the company

Many companies today improve collaboration and knowledge exchange through social media tools. These companies use public social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, X, etc.) and implement internal social networks to improve communication and collaboration with their customers and suppliers. They also use their own social networks for internal coordination and collaboration among employees. Social media tools allow company employees to create profiles and groups for collaboration inside the company, which accelerates the exchange of information, improves innovation and knowledge management processes.

Employees, customers and suppliers of companies continuously discuss companies on social networks. If companies engage in these discussions, they can stay in contact with employees, customers and suppliers thereby improving their attachment to the company.

Social networks enable transparency of information and knowledge. Employees exchange ideas, knowledge and information with others directly, without the intermediation of managers or other actors. Employees can learn what customers are thinking about the company and its products, suppliers can learn what their partners in the supply chain are thinking. Creating a collaborative and social environment in the enterprise would encourage operational efficiency, exchange and sharing of knowledge, innovation and speed up management processes.

Feedback from consumers on social networks can help product designers find out how their products are actually accepted on the market and then accelerate product redesign. Employees can use social networks in order to acquire new information and knowledge that improves their efficiency in performing business activities and solving problems. Table 1 presents the business applications of social networks.

Table 1. Business applications of social networks

Social network applications	Description
Social connections	Personal and business profiles serve to connect people
Collective intelligence (crowdsourcing)	Using collective intelligence to find solutions to business problems
Shared virtual spaces	Coordination of projects and business activities; joint creation of documents and other content
Blogs and wiki tools	Publication and quick access to information; discussion of opinions and ideas
Social Commerce	Sharing information about shopping; purchasing via social networks
Data sharing	Uploading, sharing, commenting on photos, videos and other posts on social networks
Social marketing	Using social networks to communicate with consumers
Virtual communities	Discussing various topics in discussion groups, sharing knowledge

Source: (Zhang, Venkatesh, 2017)

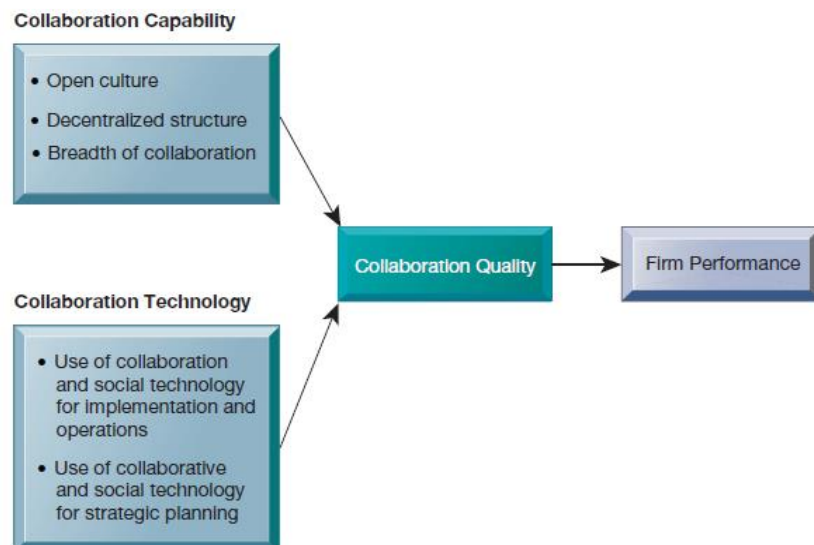
Investments in information technology for collaboration and social business lead to business improvements that manifest in sales, marketing, research and development functions. Table 2 presents the benefits of social network applications for business collaboration, while Figure 1 graphically shows how collaboration affects business results.

Table 2. Business benefits of social networks

Benefits	Description
Productivity	Employees who communicate and work together can acquire expertise and complete business activities faster than those who work autonomously without collaboration. In addition, there are fewer mistakes in teamwork..
Quality	Employees who collaborate can spot mistakes and take corrective action faster than those who work autonomously.
Innovation	Employees who collaborate can generate better ideas for innovations related to products and services than those working autonomously without collaboration.
Customer support	Employees who collaborate and use social technologies can resolve customer issues more efficiently than those working autonomously.
Financial outcomes (profitability and revenue growth)	Companies that implement social technologies in their business achieve higher revenue growth and better financial outcomes.

Source: (Turban et al. 2017)

Figure 1. Effects of collaboration on business results



Source: (Laudon, K. & Laudon, J., 2018)

6. Collaboration software tools in social business

Collaboration, exchange and sharing of information and knowledge in companies are supported by various information technologies that enable social business. Today there are several hundred tools developed specifically for these purposes. Companies can buy some tools on the market, but many tools can be downloaded on the Internet for free. Some of these tools will be briefly explained:

E-mail and messaging tools. These tools are the main means for communication and collaboration in interactive business. These software tools run on laptops, personal computers, smartphones and other devices and include file transfer and sharing and messaging features. Instant messaging tools usually enable multiple users to communicate and interact simultaneously. In the last several years, the use of e-mail has been declining, while instant messages and social networks are becoming more accepted channels of communication.

Wiki tools. These easy-to-use tools enable users to enter textual content and edit web pages on special wiki sites. The most famous wiki site is Wikipedia, the global joint project aimed at organizing encyclopedic-type content. Many volunteers worldwide contribute to Wikipedia, which does not accept advertisements and is not a profitable project. Wikis can be used in business to store and share knowledge and information. SAP is a software firm that develops wiki platforms for social business. (Santoro, 2018)

Virtual worlds. Virtual worlds are 3-D online platforms that simulate the real environment. Users in form of avatars populate these 3-D environments and play the role of virtual inhabitants. Avatars are graphical representations of users with the capability to speak, make gestures and communicate like real people. Companies use this technology for meetings, conferences and training of their employees. Business people using their avatars can meet, communicate and exchange information via audio and video chats in these virtual environments. The most popular virtual world platform is Second Life.

Platforms for social business and collaboration. There are software products that provide multipurpose collaboration and social business platforms for teams working together. The most common are teleconferencing and videoconferencing platforms based on the Internet and collaboration platforms based on cloud infrastructure. For example, Microsoft provides OneDrive for Business, which is a cloud-based collaboration system. There are also plenty of tools that enable implementation of corporate social networks and collaboration platforms such as IBM Connections, Salesforce Chatter, Google Network Services and Tools, Microsoft Viva Engage, Workplace. Table 3 shows the capabilities of social networking software in the enterprise.

Table 3. Capabilities of social networking software in the Enterprise

Social networking features	Description
Profiles	Profiles present information about users, their education and profession, expertise and skills.
Sharing of multimedia content	Users can create, post, share and manage multimedia content (text, audio, graphics and video).
News and notifications	Users are informed about status updates and posts from specific groups and other users of the social network.
Group and team work environments	Formation of groups that communicate, exchange information and collaborate. Members of the groups can work together on documents and projects. The possibility of creating private or public groups and archive conversation, to preserve the knowledge of the team.
Tagging and social tagging	Flagging specific pieces of content, similar to the Facebook “like” button. Tagging allows users to add keywords to identify content they like.
Privacy	Information privacy depends on the nature of the relationship between users. In social networking, it is necessary to determine who in the company is allowed to access what information.

Source: (Oseledchik, Ivleva, Ivlev, 2018)

Although enterprises develop their own internal social networks, they are not as popular as Facebook, Twitter (now X) or Instagram.

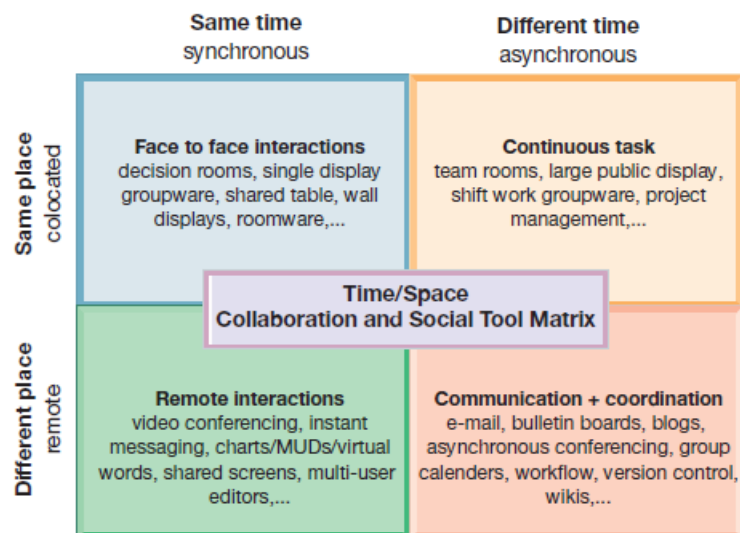
7. Evaluation and selection of tools for social business and collaboration

With a large number of tools and services for social business and collaboration, companies should have objective criteria for evaluation and selecting the right technology. For this purpose, a framework for selecting appropriate tools should be created. One useful framework is the collaboration time/space matrix in which collaborative and social tools can be placed (Figure 2).

The time/space matrix is focused on two factors affecting collaboration: time and space. If a manager wants to collaborate with colleagues in different time zones, and they cannot meet, time is obviously a limiting factor for collaboration. The location of participants in collaboration also prevents cooperation of employees in large decentralised companies. Gathering employees and organising meetings makes high costs due to the geographical remoteness of employees in

these decentralized firms (multi-location firms). In fact, there are high travel costs and valuable managers' time lost (Tripathi et al. 2020).

Figure 2. Collaborative and social tools in the time/space matrix



Source: (Loon, 2019)

Collaborative and social tools can be used to solve issues in communication affected by limiting factors related to time and space. Managers can use the time/space matrix to select the most efficient tools for collaboration and group work. Some Internet collaboration tools can be used in multiple time scenarios for synchronous and asynchronous communication and interaction. (Oseledchik et al. 2018)

Essentially, businesses should follow these six steps when deciding to **invest in** the right collaboration tools at an acceptable cost and risk:

1. First, find the answer to the question: what are the collaboration challenges that the enterprise faces considering time and space factors? This means that a specific company should locate itself within the time/space framework. The company must evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of collaboration tools within time/space context specific to the company.
2. Considering the time/space matrix, available software solutions should be found. It is necessary to create a list of IT products offered by the supplier.
3. Next, it is necessary to analyse each IT product, in terms of its price and benefits for the company. Training costs and the cost of hiring an IT department, if necessary, should be included in the estimates.
4. Next is the identification of risks and security associated with each IT product. This means that the company needs to find an answer to the following questions: Is it ready to transfer its data to the software vendor

that should deliver collaboration tool? Should the company assign control over its systems to other companies? What financial risks does the IT solution provider face? How much would it cost to change supplier in the case that the chosen supplier of IT products fails?

5. It is necessary to consult users to identify problems of application of chosen collaboration tools and provide training in their use.
6. At the end, the narrowest selection of software tools is made and providers are invited to present their IT products.

8. Conclusion

Collaboration and teamwork play an important role in business today and are undergoing transformation for several reasons. First, major changes have occurred in the nature of work, the organization and size of the companies, as well as the culture of work and business. In addition, professional work based on collaboration is developing with increasing emphasis on innovation. In addition to formal organizational structures, informal teams are formed with clearly defined business goals. If members of a group work remotely, they form a virtual team that organizes meetings electronically, via computer networks. Virtual or digital collaboration involves the application of information and communication technologies that support geographically distant members of an organization to plan, design, develop, manage, research, and improve business processes.

Just as business can be based on collaboration supported by digital technologies, so learning can take place electronically at a distance. In addition, work can be done in locations that are far from workplaces in organizations, which is a perennial practice of many companies, only the tools for collaboration are now improved and are based on web technologies and social media. Work performed outside the workplace, most often at home rather than on organizational premises, is called telecommuting.

Many enterprises today use social business applications to improve collaboration and knowledge sharing. These enterprises use public and private social networks to help consumers, suppliers and employees in communication and collaboration. These tools allow company employees to create personal and professional profiles and organise groups for communication and collaboration. The goal of collaboration and social tools is to improve interaction between employees within a company and between the company and its business partners. Companies using these tools can accelerate the exchange of knowledge, improve innovation and decision-making. The most significant applications of collaboration and social tools are: social networks, collective intelligence (crowdsourcing), shared virtual workplaces, blogs and wiki tools, social commerce, data sharing, social marketing and community creation.

The application of enterprise social networks enables: profile creation, content sharing, news and notifications, group work environments, tagging and social tagging, and privacy. The business benefits realized through collaboration and the use of social networking applications and tools are manifold: productivity of employees, quality improvement of products and services, business innovations, customer support and financial outcomes. The collaborative and social information technologies described above can help overcome time and space limitations. By using a framework that is shown through a temporal and spatial matrix, companies will be able to select adequate tools for collaboration.

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POSLOVNE MOGUĆNOSTI INTERNETA I ALATA DRUŠTVENIH MEDIJA ZA KOLABORACIJU I TIMSKI RAD

Apstrakt: Informacione tehnologije i sistemi ne mogu donositi odluke, zapošljavati ili otpuštati ljude, potpisivati ugovore, dogovarati se ili odrediti cenu robe na tržištu. Preduzećima su potrebni alati koji podržavaju kolaboraciju, timski rad, pretraživanje, razmenu i deljenje informacija i znanja, gde internet i društveni mediji igraju glavnu ulogu. Kao rezultat kolaboracije, deljenja znanja i informacija, menadžeri mogu donositi odluke u svim ovim oblastima. Internet i alati društvenih medija su najvažnije tehnologije za upravljanje znanjem koje se mogu koristiti za saradnju, komunikaciju i deljenje znanja, tako da se u radu razmatraju potencijali tih alata u poslovanju preduzeća.

Ključne reči: internet, alati društvenih medija, kolaboracija, timski rad, društveno poslovanje

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