

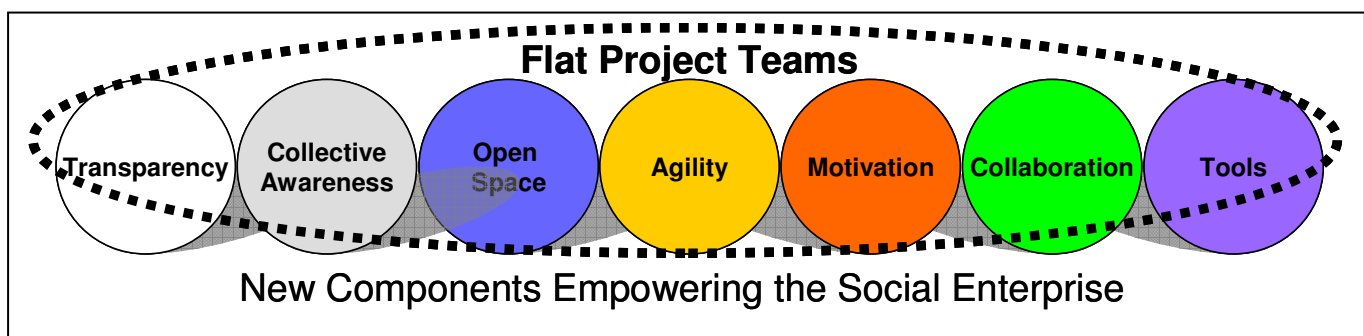
## Flat Project Teams – A First Step Towards the *Social Enterprise*

By Thomas Christel

Flat project teams are not a new concept, but rather one that has been around for years, but what is new is the ability to apply transparency, open space, collective awareness, agility, motivation, collaboration and supporting tools to the process. Building teams to accomplish strategic initiatives and doing it among the stove-pipes of a corporate hierarchy and power struggles is the task at hand. Let's first define a "flat project team." It is a team organized from across the entire hierarchy and includes a member or members from each department or function, offices or locations that wish to participate or is impacted by the project you wish to accomplish. As a flat project management team, I don't mean leaderless, there is a central person, a champion, who invites in the other participants, keeps the project in scope, on time and under budget. The other participating departments, functions, offices and locations leave their titles and egos at the door and what you have is a group of professionals with varying backgrounds and ideas to accomplish the task or project.

But as Thomas Friedman describes it in his highly successful book, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, the world has changed dramatically. Successful businesses are beginning to capitalize on collaboration between the resources that best provide the services they need, regardless of where they are in the world. With an increase in collaboration, new markets arise for tools to support that collaboration. Collaborative development will be a major factor in the project management for years to come.

So now let's look at the new terms as they apply to flat project teams.



**Transparency** – the ability that anyone can see or have access to all documents and information regarding the project at hand. The information is transparent to the team and anyone in the company. Allowing data, information and knowledge to flow in and out freely.

**Open Space** – all meetings are open, no closed doors, you choose to attend in person or online. It keeps the team fluid and reduces redundancy. Keeping everyone on the same page or having the ability to access the information shared and discussed. That is why it is important to post meeting notes and decisions in your blog or meetings file, for all to review and comment.

**Collective Awareness** – the group provides the direction, milestones, tasks and deliverables. It's a collaborative environment bringing an agreed upon strategy and direction. The group holds each other accountable and works as a team to support each other. At the end of the road the team earns the credit not an individual. The ideas, concepts and creativity are captured and may provide additional projects down the road.

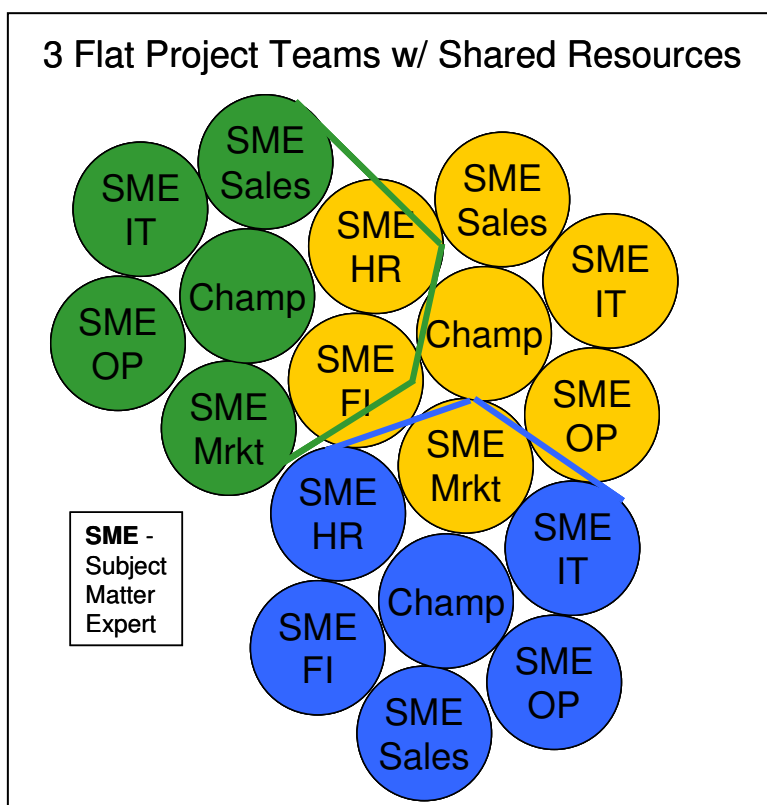
**Agility** – providing a group across the hierarchy the ability to move in and out of the structure freely, without restrictions or barriers. Information is accessible: process diagrams, organization charts, department tasks, business functions, and current technology used are all now available. It's like have an insider in every department, allowing information to flow freely.

**Motivation** – give professionals an opportunity to voice their thoughts, their ideas, their perceptions and their passions...and you generated motivation! Too often large hierarchical structure's stifle free thought and expression. But, within flat project teams its encourage and required. You begin to see a unique dynamic appear, people excited about the project, motivate and proud to be part of the team.

**Collaboration** – the ability to share ideas, documents, calendars, in a one-to-one or one-to-many relationship with an improved end product resulting. Collaboration can happen in many ways: face-to-face meetings, online conference calls, document sharing, formal and informal, resulting in proactive collaboration or reactive collaboration.

**Supporting Tools** - with the rise of the social networking revolution of facebook, myspace, youtube, flickr, tweeter, second life and others, it would only be a matter of time before these types of tools would hit the Enterprise. You see marketing, public relations, and customer service glom onto blogs, wikis, rss feeds and others tools for new communication channels, but what about an environment that provides all the Web 2.0 tools in one platform and allows you to customize it for your team, providing collaboration and communications to keep everyone on the same page and integrate all your project's tools and information. This has given rise to a new software category that Gartner calls: Team Collaboration and Social Software in a report posted in September 2007.

Also keep in mind, that you may not be the only "flat project team" within your company, so what happens when other arise and resources become tight or scare? You will need to share and work together. You may pull other professionals out of the Sales, Marketing, HR, IT or Operations departments. The concept can be applied and used for multiple teams. See diagram below as an example;



With all existing concepts and new ways of applying them you will meet with varying challenges and resistance in your enterprise. Here are a few challenges to be aware of...

1. **The Poison Pill** – this is normally a department head or someone with influence, who sees your project and approach as a threat to their power base. I know it sounds ridiculous and archaic, but it's real and you need to identify these players, try and befriend them, invite them in to participate. If they push you off, be prepared for a work-around. Sometimes, to accomplish your goals, you need their department's support and they know it, so be ready for a work-around if you need to.

**Side note:** a work around is the ability to accomplish the same task, but in a different approach, normally a little longer, a less direct process but with the same end result.

2. **Senior Management Support** – make sure you have a champion up in the executive suite, it could be your boss or your boss's boss, or maybe someone not linked to you like the CFO or CIO, but someone to speak on your behalf in those senior executive meetings. Someone to bring the word up the chain of command that is respected and supported. This is critical for all those meetings and off-line discussions you are not privy to.

3. **Why join your Team?** – everyone's plate is full with their own projects and people to manage, why would they join a Flat Project Team? A couple of reasons come to mind: you need their expertise on the team, your project touches or intersects with their department or function, they will be part of an innovative way to work and collaborate to change the old structure. You will need to gather buy-in and support. This takes time and you need to start at the top of each department head, ask for their support and to participate or assign someone from their department or team.

4. **Don't Have Time** – I am working a 10-12 hour day now, how will I find the time to participate on your flat project team, to accomplish your projects, when I can't get my own done? Good point, but maybe you can accomplish your projects along side with a different structure in mind. If possible, tie in other people's projects to yours, without scope creep or losing sight on your main goals and objectives. Tie them loosely, promising similar steps along the way for their time and support. For example, offer two or three online surveys versus just your one. In this way, you will provide additional support, resources and budget sharing costs or reducing steps to your project.

5. **Is this Strategic for the Company?** The answer to this question should be *YES* and you will need a strong explanation to ensure your project gets approved. My recommendation is to tie your project to your company's strategic goals or initiatives. Professionals who will participate want to be part of a bigger picture and its success. Consider this your mission statement and rally cry for your project.

6. **Dominate Personalities / Power Struggles within the Team** - Don't think they don't happen. Like the poison pill, this can wreak havoc to your efforts and to the flat project team, often dividing the team and killing the project. My recommendation is to take the individual aside for a private one-on-one meeting to try and understand their motivation and reasons for dissent. If you're in the right, your team will apply peer pressure to the trouble maker and they may conform to the will of the team or drop off the team.

7. **Don't Rock the Boat** – new ideas are often met with the “don't rock the boat mentality.” Normally, from long timers, who learned it's easier to be hidden and do nothing than to be noticed and held accountable. But today's professional wants the opportunity to prove themselves and what a great opportunity then to be part of a strategic initiative for the company.

8. **Flat doesn't mean unruly** – if this is a new concept you are introducing, you will need to provide guidelines and understand what participating in a “flat project team” means, sometimes you need to spell it out in what is expected of each participant. They will be expected to proactively participate, they were asked to join due to their particular area of expertise.

## So how to apply today's new technology to my "flat project team" to empower the social enterprise? 10 Steps to Success...

Here is a step by step approach using a new enterprise social platform for collaboration and communications in the market called; **we+ workspace**, from **Yooplus srl**. You can assess the platform for **FREE** for a period of time to ensure it meets your needs at [www.yooplus.com](http://www.yooplus.com). The best approach is to have your project or projects and team or teams in mind.

1. **Create a business case or Project Charter** - if you would like a template, go to the yooplus web-site ([www.yooplus.com](http://www.yooplus.com)), under we+, scenarios, Automation scenario (ID-guest, Pwd-guest), while in we+ workspace go to *FILES* and sort through – open *Project Charter Template*. Populate this template with your project, teams, information and data. Consider it a Work-In-Progress (WIP).
2. **Register for your FREE we+ workspace** – take the information from your Project Charter and populate the platform with your projects, sub-projects, managers, teammates and guests. You can add and delete to the list, but at least you have started the process. Now you can invite your team into the platform.
3. **Kick-Off Meeting** – review the Project Charter, we+ workspace as your collaboration and communication social platform, and open discussion on expertise, scope, milestones, tasks, timeline, and resources.
4. **we+ workspace components to apply to your project** -
  - a. **Single Page View** – from your home page you have access to that week's calendar, events, milestones, tasks and notes posted. Your messages are below on the left with your blog next to them. Your projects and professionals sits on the right and you can see who is online and last time they have been on.
  - b. **Blog** – your blog can be your voice into the company, you can have a "team blog" and individual project blogs. This can provide status, open issues and successes you are having at the various stages of your project. What this should not be used for is venting, bitching, or non-business issues. This is your team's or project's voice in the company. Be professional, be proud, be passionate!
  - c. **Wiki** – your wiki can also be a team or project related. This can have many uses to store key questions and answers, key challenges and solutions, future add on features or enhancements. I have seen it used for customer service and support with an extended FAQ, populated by the users. The more it is used the better it becomes.
  - d. **Tags** – your tag cloud is an important part of your workspace allowing you to tag similar files, documents and items. So you can quickly recover them at a moment's notice. You should remember to tag all relevant materials with a set of common tags your team develops.
  - e. **Shared Calendar** – allowing you to enter an event, milestone, task or note right into the calendar to be shared with your team, keeping everyone on the same page. You get the current week on your HOME page, and a 30 day monthly calendar under the calendar button.
  - f. **Shared Files** - you can post files under "yoospace" which are not shared with anyone or under the project they are assigned to. In this case, anyone with access to that project can have access to that file. You may want to encrypt the file and then only those with the encryption key can have access. Just another level of security for your confidential data, information and files.

- g. **“Yoor Space”** - a personal section for you to house your data, information and files. Keeping a record, drafts or back-up of your work prior to posting it in the collaborative environment.
  - h. **Customization** – you want to change the language, color, font or photo you can go under **settings**, under your icon or photo. This is where you can add additional information within your profile including your skype address and more.
  - i. **Security** – we have SSL security with multiple layers built within the platform pending each of your team’s authorization from Admin, Manager, Teammate and Guest.
  - j. **Encryption** – we have created encryption capability for you to add addition security to confidential files and you can provide access to your team with a code key.
  - k. **Access to my data** - you can close a project and download all your data, information and files related to project at any time.
5. **Weekly Status eMeetings** – I would suggest that you schedule and hold weekly status meetings. Keep the meetings the same time and day allowing participation by your team an others within the company...transparency is key. You will find additional ideas coming from the outside as well as your team’s participation. These can be done online with the skype conference call or other applications within the platform.
  6. **Trouble Shooting Sub-Team** - within the team, choose a smaller team to create a “trouble shooting group” with the ideas to help solve key challenges, unforeseen obstacles and lags in the schedule. They tend to be senior professionals or experts from multiple functions and have the capacity for creative problem solving. This sub-team is part of the whole, but can be called upon for additional work or support.
  7. **Project Launch** - When your project is completed, alpha and beta tested, focus group validated, you are ready to put your launch plan into practice. Make sure you have a launch plan that covers adoption, tracking, coaching and reporting. If you have a large audience to reach in a short period of time, I recommend you to do a “train the trainers” program and create a sub-team of Champions to help reinforce your launch plans and project usage.
  8. **User Training** - Training is NOT a one time event! Its ongoing and professionals need reinforcement and follow-up regarding new applications, technology or processes within the company. So when you plan your training program, look at all type; Instructor Lead Training (ILT), Online Tele-Conference Training (OTCT) and eLearning Training (eLT) as a possible blended learning experience. Create a learning path and work with HR to provide it as part of their employee development program.
  9. **Senior Management Reporting** – My recommendation is to create an online dashboard, that tracks your efforts from launch on. You would capture number trained, adoption rates, usage rates, improvements in productivity, efficiencies, and processes. All depending on your project and its deliverable. Make sure you re-state your original goals and strategic mission. It will have been some time since the start and your project charter.
  10. **Constant Improvement** – like all innovation projects they are living breathing entities and need constant care and enhancements. Your users tend to provide the first round of improvements as well as management and even your customer.

## What can you expect from Flat Project Team and a Collaborative Social Platform?

### Intangible Benefits:

1. Better communications with your team or teams and a VOICE in the company.
2. Everyone on the same page, no surprises or disappointments for managed expectations.
3. Shorten cycle times; for approvals, feedback and participation, engaged participation.
4. Better access and control and management of data, information and knowledge.
5. Transparency of information, files, communications and statuses.
6. Best and brightest ideas, creativity, problem solving, and a 360 degree view of the project.
7. Your “Company Knowledge” becomes explicit and available.
8. Develop “Social Relationships” within the Team and other departments, offices, companies.
9. Develop a sense of ownership bringing loyalty, commitment and collaboration back into the enterprise.

### Tangible Benefits:

1. Shorten the project life cycle delivering on time, due to the new process and platform.
2. New ideas and project extensions are a natural by-product of the process.
3. Informed, educated and transparent user/employee (reinforced belief in the company)
4. Demonstratable Return-On-Investment (ROI) from project cost to implemented benefits.
5. Ongoing visibility of the project, its progress, and success. (Dashboard Reporting)

### Wrap-Up

What you need to realize is the paradigm shift of the software industry from Microsoft dominance (licensed software model) to the new fluid/flat platforms and applications in a just-in-time fashion, what you need, when you need it and you only pay for that period of time. This has been driven by the Web 2.0 wave, as mention in the introduction, with the *Social Networking Revolution*. The new Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model has been adopted already by 25% of the market (states: IDC and Gartner) It has been around for years, first introduced by SalesForce.com when it was founded in 1999, now with over 38,000+ customers. What you should be looking for is an intuitive, multi-lingual social platform around team collaboration and communications. Allowing you and your team to access other business applications, mash-ups and even export widgets out of the social platform for your own custom applications within your website, portal, community or other web-based applications. For the sole purpose to empower the “*social enterprise*” resulting in transparency, open space, collective awareness, agility, motivation, collaboration and productivity. Sharing to get things done!

The we+ workspace is this type of social platform. ([www.yooplus.com](http://www.yooplus.com))