Management Update: Guidelines for Managing B2E Implementations

Gartner provides insights into the B2E (business-to-enterprise) model's value to enterprises, and provides guidelines for managing B2E implementations.

Business-to-employee (B2E) uses e-business approaches and Internet technologies to enable a comprehensive set of services for an enterprise's employees and managers. Gartner provides insights into the B2E model's value to enterprises, and provides guidelines for managing B2E implementations.

What Is B2E?

B2E is the delivery of a comprehensive set of enabling services to an enterprise's employees to support the management and optimization of their relationships and work. Some enterprises broaden the scope of B2E by establishing a service model and structure that can be extended outside the enterprise to provide similar employee services to business-partner firms and selected services to customers. Consequently, although B2E is used throughout many enterprises as a platform for business transformation, B2E services are now being extended to transform relationships with business partners and customers.

B2E supports the management and optimization of work processes and relationships. Moreover, B2E is about enterprises using e-business concepts and exploiting Web-based applications to provide their own internal services.

B2E will capture the attention of many enterprises. Once enterprises understand B2E concepts, many will want the capabilities. Consider these examples of working in the ideal B2E environment.

- Employees are provided a unified virtual workplace in which collaboration, self-service and connectivity enable them and their teams to work unconstrained.

- New employees on their first day can connect to the enterprise B2E portal, be presented personalized services and applications, can find relevant content and what they need to know, can find the people with whom they should collaborate, and can begin work.

- The CEO and other executives can communicate with every employee on a one-to-one basis, minimizing dilution and assuring that messages are current.
• Teams and communities can form, function, expand or disband as needed to accomplish ad
hoc or ongoing work assignments.

The Language of B2E

B2E employs common terminology that is often loosely defined and needs more precise definition. Some commonly used B2E terms are defined as follows:

• Application is a set of business processes and software programs designed for a specific business purpose. The business purpose may be very simple (such as building a spreadsheet) or very complex (such as managing the accounting process).

• Content is digitized data. Content includes documents, procedures, database records, e-mail messages, Web pages — or their components — and richer forms such as video, audio and images. From an enterprise perspective, content may be internal or external; and the format may be structured or unstructured.

• Process is a group of work steps that, when performed, complete a task. Processes may be structured with the required sequence of work steps predefined, or they may be unstructured with the required steps and sequence defined just in time to fit the task.

• Service is a grouping of applications, processes and content that fill a defined need for a user. The user may be an individual, a team or an organization.

• Tool is a technology product that a user may choose to apply to a work task. Tools are often used stand-alone, but they can be embedded in applications or processes.

B2E Services

Eight enabling services are defined in B2E (see Figure 5). Most enterprises have already built or are building those services in some form. However, few enterprises have integrated all services into a coherent workplace solution. The individual services are generally built independently, at different times and often by individual business units.

Figure 5

The Eight Enabling Services of B2E
1. **Self-service.** Enables employees to perform transactions or processes and to access forms, policies and other content within their authority.

2. **E-learning.** Provides training and development of specific skills or expertise for work, and builds workforce competencies and expertise for personal, workforce and organizational development.

3. **Communication.** Enables executives, the enterprise and employees to inform or interact with customers and business partners and each other through multiple channels.

4. **Employee "contractual" relationship management.** Enables the enterprise to support formal “contracts” with its stakeholders, specifically between the employer and its employees.

5. **Community services.** Enables employees, customers, business partners or alumni to work or interact with, and develop or maintain content with others who share activities or interests.

6. **Knowledge management.** Provides access to the enterprise’s knowledge assets (e.g., digitized information, experts and expertise) and to the enterprise’s knowledge sharing and collaboration processes. Knowledge management may include business intelligence, competitive intelligence and innovation support.

7. **Access to applications.** Provides a single point of entry to work applications, personal or team productivity and collaboration applications, and, ideally, the ability to integrate tasks, processes and data from multiple applications through a single workspace.

8. **Personalized and value-added services.** Provides the ability for users (employees, customers or business partners) to personalize their workplaces (establish preferences and profiles), enable a balance of work-life issues (such as the ability to connect to family, friends or communities of interest), provide the means to manage work-life issues (such as flextime or choice of work location) and convenience or “concierge” services that enable users to take advantage of opportunities that are afforded them through their affiliation with the enterprise.

Source: Gartner Research

B2E provides a path for integrating the provision of those services into a comprehensive, integrated package. However, before beginning the integration process, B2E requires governance and other mechanisms to bring the moving and disparate parts together.

**The Support Pillars of B2E**

Managing B2E implementation requires the enterprise to build three pillars of support:

- Governance (see Figure 6)
- B2E technical architecture
- Processes to move B2E enabling services and content to the Web

**Figure 6**

**Governance Models for B2E**
<table>
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<th>Model</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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| Enterprisewide governance    | • Initiated at the inception of the B2E initiative  
• Remains in place through development of strategy and until governance processes for B2E implementation are mature and proven (it may then shift control to B2E support governance) | • Required members: CIO, human resources, finance, marketing (owns responsibility for the “brand”) and corporate communications  
• Additional members: first implementers among services and business-unit owners, enterprisewide services owners, influential service or business-unit owners  
• CEO and executive committee provide guiding principles and “walk the talk” support  
• Centralized, enterprisewide governance model |
| Infrastructure governance    | • Completion of B2E strategy and start of B2E implementation  
• Remains through building B2E infrastructure and early implementers of services                                                   | • Specialized governance to guide design and development of technical infrastructure  
• Enterprise CIO designs the governance committee  
• Membership includes business units in an advisory capacity  
• CEO and executive committee provide funding for infrastructure  
• Centralized model but is enterprise CIO directed |
| Enterprise support governance | • When enterprise-wide governance processes are mature and proven                                                                       | • Required members: same functional areas as enterprise governance but may move down a level in the organization  
• Additional members: B2E service owners or business-unit owners.  
• Governance may blend centralized and decentralized within a guiding set of principles and methodologies |

Source: Gartner Research

B2E governance will guide the other two pillars. Governance should be established at the inception of a B2E initiative and should be consistent with the enterprise’s strategic direction.

Ideally, the CEO or a very influential executive will set B2E and its governance in motion by doing the following:

• Providing a clear message that B2E is important to the company

• Specifying aggressive goals for B2E that require enterprisewide collaboration and synergy to accomplish

• Providing seed money to build the enabling infrastructure and at least some early enterprisewide services
• Naming an executive to lead the enterprise governance committee

• Identifying the boundaries or constraints of the initiative

  – A simple boundary condition may be the timing of a key initiative.
  
  – A more complex constraint may be business direction.
  
  – Because infrastructure, moving work to the Web, or redesigning processes may vary for each approach, key business constraints are important.

Strong leadership and support will launch B2E with a high probability of success and will ensure that early work is conducted with a sense of urgency. Without strong leadership, B2E may never get off the ground, or it may proceed on a plodding schedule.

**B2E Critical Success Factors**

Once B2E is set in motion, each pillar is created when its component parts and infrastructure (across the enterprise) are unified to focus on a shared vision, but differentiated to exploit unique value in the content and delivery of services.

Unified governance means a shift in behavior from individual business units making decisions on spending for employee services or portal implementations toward those decisions being made within a unified framework. A unified framework means that spending, technical architecture and infrastructure decisions should be shared and consistent throughout; but services provision, content management and other features may be differentiated to improve economic value or utility.

B2E technical architecture is focused on unifying the functional components required to deliver the enabling services through a single architecture and through a single portal or single approach to managing multiple portals:

• From the enterprise’s viewpoint, the challenge is unifying the provision and delivery of services.

• From the user viewpoint, the challenge is unifying the access to services.

When work is moved to the Web, the B2E enabling services and content provide a highly personalized work environment for individuals and teams. The goals for this work environment are to unify the infrastructure but differentiate the content and enabling services to best serve the individuals and teams.

The four categories of work environment content and services are:

• Services to support an individual’s work-life activities and his or her work-linked personal activities

• Applications to enable people to complete their work most productively and collaboratively

• Content that fulfills the knowledge, learning and interest needs of individuals
An overall environment that instills satisfaction and stimulates creativity and innovation

Balancing unification with differentiation is the most critical success factor of B2E. However, most enterprises will have some issues in managing that balance.

- In entrepreneurial enterprises, unified action may appear constraining and contrary to local business needs, so individual business-unit managers may not be inclined to unify any actions.

- In enterprises that are hierarchically controlled, unified action will come more naturally, and any differentiation will require individuals to take more initiative and rely less on their comfort zone.

- In enterprises that think long-term, differentiation may be perceived as too many tactical decisions.

- In tactically focused enterprises, unified actions must be taken within a longer-term vision.

Thus, the first major challenge will be to design the B2E pillars to accomplish an appropriate balance.

**Bottom Line**

- No natural owner exists to champion the creation and adoption of a B2E environment.

- B2E unifies many services, each is owned and supported by a different area of the enterprise, and no single owner has the capacity or authority for overall funding, decision-making or managing the B2E environment.

- Executive-level support is required to drive B2E, and a governance model must be designed that transcends organizational boundaries.

- Remember that B2E has no end state.

- B2E will evolve and change with its users and enterprise direction.

- The initial implementation of the technical infrastructure and enabling services will be time consuming.

- Continuous change will be required — some services will be enhanced or replaced while other services are still under development.

- B2E is a moving, shifting target that will require flexible, adaptive methodologies and practices to accommodate high levels of innovation and continuous change.

Written by Thomas Berg, Research Products

Analytical source: Kathy Harris, Gartner Research

For related Inside Gartner articles, see:

• “Management Alert: A Road Map for Defining a Business-to-Employee Strategy,” 21 August 2002

• “Management Alert: Business to Employee — A Key Element in Enterprise Strategy,” 14 August 2002