Virtual War Rooms:

Resolving Enterprise Problems with Collaboration Tools

Introduction

How can organizations solve complex enterprise problems as quickly as possible?

Resolving urgent, multi-vendor, mission-critical types of problems requires collaboration. But coordinating the input and effort of employees—along with outside partners or suppliers—who work remotely, are traveling, or are based in other cities (or countries) is challenging.

While vendors offer a range of online collaboration tools (for functions like project management, voice/Web conferencing, and file sharing), most aren't designed for in-the-moment, team-based problem solving. Nor are they focused on the most critical type of problem management from a business value perspective: restoration of a service or operation as quickly as possible.

This white paper describes the current collaboration technology environment; scenarios requiring real-time collaborative problem resolution; and the characteristics required in an online tool to address efficient enterprise problem management.

It closes by describing how Kinetic Response, from Kinetic Data, can enable organizations to quickly assemble ad hoc teams of internal and external experts to rapidly and effectively resolve complex and critical enterprise problems.

Lost Productivity Is Truly Costly

Solving large problems (those that cross functional boundaries, impact different geographic regions or require multiple skillsets) within an organization requires collaboration. Except in the case of wholly localized problems, face-to-face meetings are impractical (and even then, increasingly mobile and remote workforces often preclude this option). Teleconferences are cumbersome and functionally limited, and even email quickly becomes unwieldy for issues that require more than a few interactions among a small number of people.

In a business or operational crisis situation, it's vital to be able to quickly identify the specific individuals (potentially including partners, vendors, or others from outside the organization) who need to be involved in resolving the problem; get everyone "on the same page" quickly; and collaboratively share information, assign actions, and monitor progress.

In reality, it can take days, weeks or months to fully investigate a problem—but for critical business services, every minute of downtime equates to lost productivity, which can be measured in real financial value. As just one example, Gartner reports that the average cost of network downtime is $5,600 per minute, with a range of $2,300 to $9,000 per minute depending on the industry.[1]

To address the challenges of group problem solving, technology vendors have introduced a range of online collaboration tools and applications. Each class of tools is ideal for working on issues of varying scope, complexity and duration. However, online collaboration tools generally aren't designed for this kind of "virtual war room" workflow.

The Ecosystem of Online Collaboration Tools

The importance and variety of collaboration tools have greatly expanded since the early days of email and instant messaging. As detailed by Forrester Research, the cloud collaboration ecosystem now includes tools for productivity, file sharing, project management, Web conferencing, video chat, and team calendars, among other functions.[2]

Categories of collaborative technologies include:

Type	Examples and Purpose
Email and instant messaging	These familiar tools remain useful for resolving simple issues with a short time horizon involving two or a few people.
File-sharing tools	Common examples include Dropbox, Google Drive, Box, and OneDrive. These cloud services are ideal for sharing content that's too large for email (such as video files), though collaboration capabilities are generally limited.
Social media (blogs, forums, wikis, social networks)	Social tools are highly effective for making ideas and discussions discoverable in both search and social, and engaging with a large network of online social connections. But they provide little to no control over participants and are public-facing (thus emphatically not a channel for sharing any type of confidential information).
Web conferencing/video conferencing	These platforms are effective for purposes like group discussions, product demonstrations and remote training. But they are designed primarily for ephemeral, one-to-many interaction; are not ideal for sharing documents; and generally offer limited real-time collaboration capabilities.
Collaborative productivity tools	These range from broad online office suites like Google Docs and Microsoft Office 365 to special-purpose tools like ProofHQ. Their primary purpose is collaborative document creation and editing, along with light project management.

Collaborating in Enterprise Crisis Situations

All of the tools above are useful in specific circumstances. However, none of them is ideal for short-term, urgent, documented collaboration to deal with enterprise emergencies or even crisis situations.

Yet Forrester also notes the imperative of collaboration for preventing and resolving enterprise problems: "Open information sharing...surfaces actual problems with a customer's experience. Organizations stumble when they don't consider how their actions affect a client interaction. These moves quickly tarnish clients' perceptions of a business—see the criticism of JetBlue Airways' preparedness for a January 2014 winter storm—unless firms can take quick action."[3]

Examples of enterprise emergencies requiring real-time collaboration to address include:

| Category	Examples
Customer issues	• A shipment of goods failed to arrive • The goods arrived but were late, defective, or damaged • Mission-critical equipment or software provided to the customer has stopped working or operating properly
Internal system failure	• Email system stops running • ERP system can't be accessed • Another core control or management system goes down
PR or social media crisis	• A key employee or executive sends out an offensive or intoxicated tweet • A shipment of hazardous materials derails • The company is accused of improper labor or environmental practices
Natural disasters	• A data center is damaged by an earthquake, flood or tornado • Shipments must be suspended from a distribtion center due to a hurricane • A power outage causes data loss or spoilage of perishable products

Supply chain disruptions	The flow of products, components or raw materials is disrupted by: • Weather • Train derailment • Pipline leak • Labor unrest • Factory shutdown • Other causes
Information security issue	• Data breach/theft • Computer virus • Data loss • Systems damaged • Other malicious penetration of corporate networks
Website issues	• Corporate website goes offline • Website is hacked/defaced • Ecommerce system fails, preventing company from accepting online orders • Other key Web-enabled functionality (e.g., online customer support system) goes down

Requirements for an Enterprise Problem Collaboration Tool

As noted above, most existing collaboration tools aren't designed to enable ad hoc teams to communicate and coordinate efforts to quickly resolve these types of complex and urgent problems. However, online collaboration technology is vital to resolving such issues. Key requirements of a collaborative enterprise problem solving tool include:

• Ability to instantly invite outside third-parties on an ad hoc basis as needed (e.g. outside consultants, vendors, business partners, etc.);
• Enabling new participants to quickly become familiar with the problem, and what's already been done to solve it, without interrupting the flow of information;
• Assurance of privacy and security (access is controlled by user level and invitation);
• Ability to share relevant documents and images;
• Provision of robust mobile functionality to support use in the field;
• Ability to assign tasks to individuals and manage problem-resolution activities; and
• Archiving of all issue information for later training, replication, root cause analysis or compliance purposes.
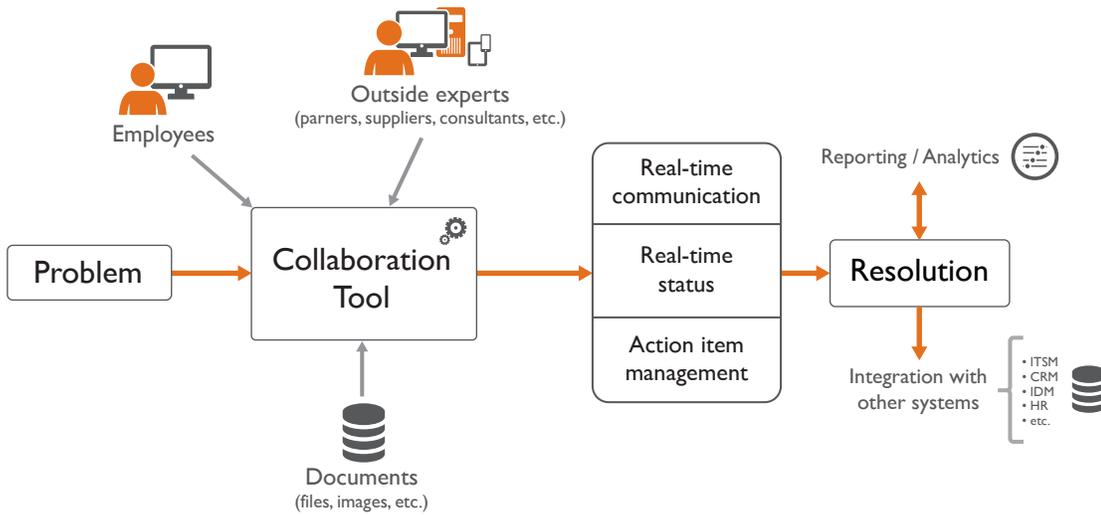
The value of such a tool is to solve big enterprise problems faster by involving the right people and managing critical action items.

Using Kinetic Response for Collaborative Problem Solving

Kinetic Response, from Kinetic Data, is a collaborative problem-resolution tool; it enables enterprises to cost-effectively set up "virtual war rooms" to resolve complex and urgent enterprise problems, without unnecessary overhead.
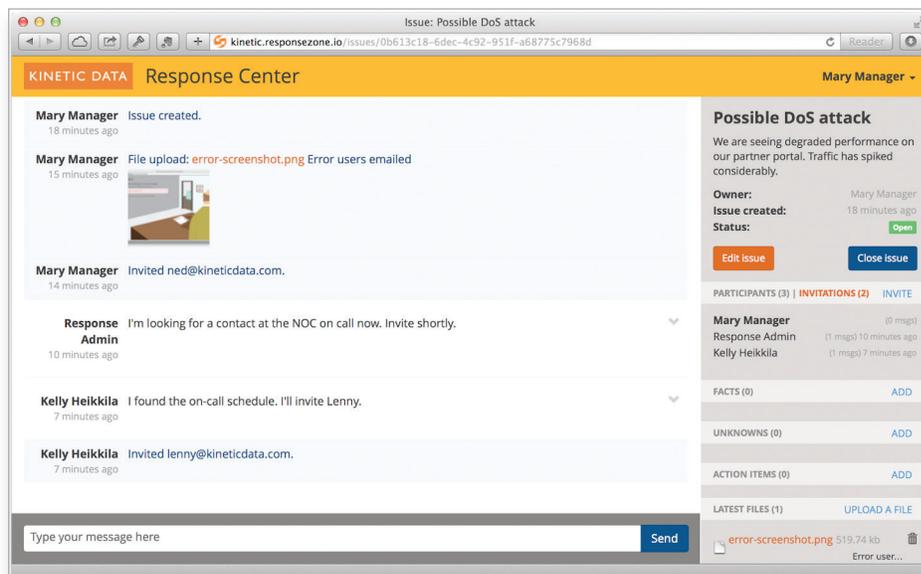
Figure 2: Resolving an Enterprise Problem Using Kinetic Response

In addition to meeting the requirements above, Kinetic Response provides real-time visibility into service delivery or other enterprise problems to those who are working on the issue; facilitates group discussions through secure corporate chat; and maintains a record of all communications, files, and actions related to problem resolution.

Resolving enterprise issues with Kinetic Response is a five-step process:

1. **Assemble the team.** Anyone inside or outside the organization can be invited to participate, with different permissions for internal and external users.
2. **Share the knowledge.** Chat, share images or other files related to the issue at hand, and clearly identify facts and "unknowns."
3. **Coordinate activities.** Assign tasks, track status and see what each participant is doing.
4. **Solve the problem.** Communicate and monitor activities to resolve the issue.
5. **Document the process.** Kinetic Response automatically archives every session for reference, training and compliance purposes.

Unlike the few virtual war room tools from enterprise vendors, Kinetic Response is:

• Simple to implement and use; participants can join and help resolve problems with no training on the software.
• Cost-effective; it doesn't require a large platform license.
• 100% web-based; no software is installed on user PCs or devices.
• Focused on problem collaboration; it's not designed for presentations, general meetings or one-to-one support.

Conclusion

Online collaboration technology holds great promise for enabling enterprises to solve big problems more quickly and efficiently by assembling ad hoc teams and giving them capabilities to identify and coordinate corrective actions.

However, most existing tools are designed for more limited, specialized tasks (like file sharing, document management, or presentations) or for general project management.

An ideal problem-collaboration tool would incorporate several specific capabilities, including secure access, task assignment and management, and archiving. Through these capabilities, organizations could accomplish the immediate goal of solving enterprise problems quickly, while also optimizing longer-term problem management processes and root cause analysis.

Kinetic Response is a tool that offers these functions and others, in an uncluttered, cost-effective manner, as a cloud-hosted or on-premises application.

About Kinetic Data

Kinetic Data has helped hundreds of Fortune 500 and government customers—including General Mills, Avon, Intel, 3M, and the U.S. Department of Transportation—implement business service management and enterprise request management (ERM) applications aligned with ITIL best practices. Kinetic Data was named "Innovator of the Year" by an independent group of enterprise software users, and the company has also been recognized with awards for its superior customer service and support. Kinetic Data serves customers from its headquarters in St. Paul, Minn., offices in Sydney, Australia, and through a network of reseller partners.

For more information, visit www.kineticdata.com.

[1] "The Cost of Downtime," Andrew Lerner, July 16, 2014. Gartner

[2] "How Collaboration Improves Customer Experience," TJ Keitt, May 16, 2014. Forrester Research

[3] Ibid.