

# The Future of the Navy: Social Business

By **LT Raymond Lazott** \*\*

While you may not be familiar with the term “social business,” chances are it plays a key role in your everyday life.

Generally defined, social business cultivates the creation of networks and products which connect people and promote collaboration, shared learning, and innovation. Social business networks like IBM Connections and Microsoft SharePoint have been successfully incorporated across both the private and public sectors and continue to thrive. Many of these networks have even grown beyond a single corporation to connect leaders and experts across diverse industries.



160916-N-IA-20-001 WASHINGTON, D.C. (Sept 16, 2016) LT Ray Lazott (right), FY17 SECNAV Innovation Advisor, meets with VADM Cullom (OPNAV N4). (U.S. Navv photo by LT Russ Kratoville)

Recognizing the transformative impact of social business, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus has directed the FY17 Naval Innovation Advisory Council (NIAC) to conduct in-depth research on social business and other innovation priorities as part of the cohort’s overall theme, “Design Thinking for a Learning Organization.”

In my role as a FY17 SECNAV Innovation Advisor, I am leading a project which seeks to make the case for the use of social business throughout the Department of the Navy (DON). Currently, there are few, if any, effective means of collaboration and networking inside the DON. Leaders travel around the world to promote their ideas and solicit feedback. What if Navy leadership could engage the Fleet directly from their offices? Furthermore, onboard Navy ships, routine administration is still routed by hand. References, presentations, and other works are often lost each time a Sailor or Marine transfers from their ship, squadron, or unit. Across commands, there are no helpful tools to find peers or connect with experts to solve problems or to share ideas. Countless man-hours are wasted, often recreating products that have already been created, and in some cases, multiple times before.

To address these areas of opportunity, my research, among other objectives, aims to:

- Identify leading social business networks that are currently being considered or already in use within the private and public sectors;

- Explore best practices and the reasons behind the success or failure of a network; and
- Recommend whether existing social business networks utilized within the DoD and DON should be expanded or replaced with a more effective alternative

Consideration will be given to methods, features, and functionalities that would encourage and sustain the use of social business throughout all levels of the DON.

Social business has a proven track record in both the private and public sectors in resolving many of the collaboration and shared learning challenges we currently face in the DON. Widespread implementation of a social business network would allow for greater efficiency and innovation at every level in the DON, save valuable man-hours, and facilitate greater exchange of information and ideas. Less time wasted on re-work and other inefficiencies could help create more time for warfighter training, readiness, and innovation.

Social Business is a critical strategic asset—one that will help shape the future and continued readiness of America’s Naval Forces.

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\*\* = LT Ray Lazott is a member of the FY17 SECNAV Naval Innovation Advisory Council (NIAC), a dynamic forum for advisors to conduct research, advance problem-solving projects, and advise the Secretary of the Navy on innovation opportunities within the DON. The DON Office of Strategy and Innovation coordinates support and oversight of the NIAC. For more information, please contact [DON\\_Innovation@navy.mil](mailto:DON_Innovation@navy.mil).