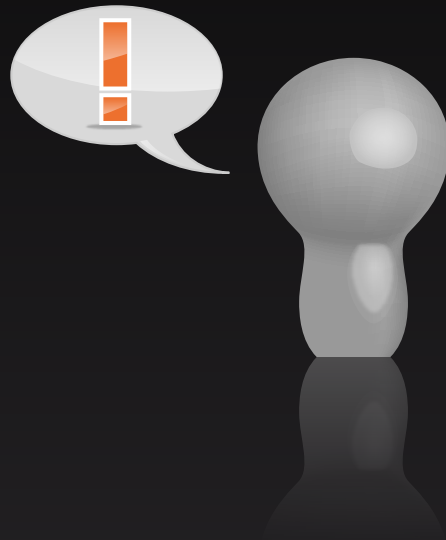


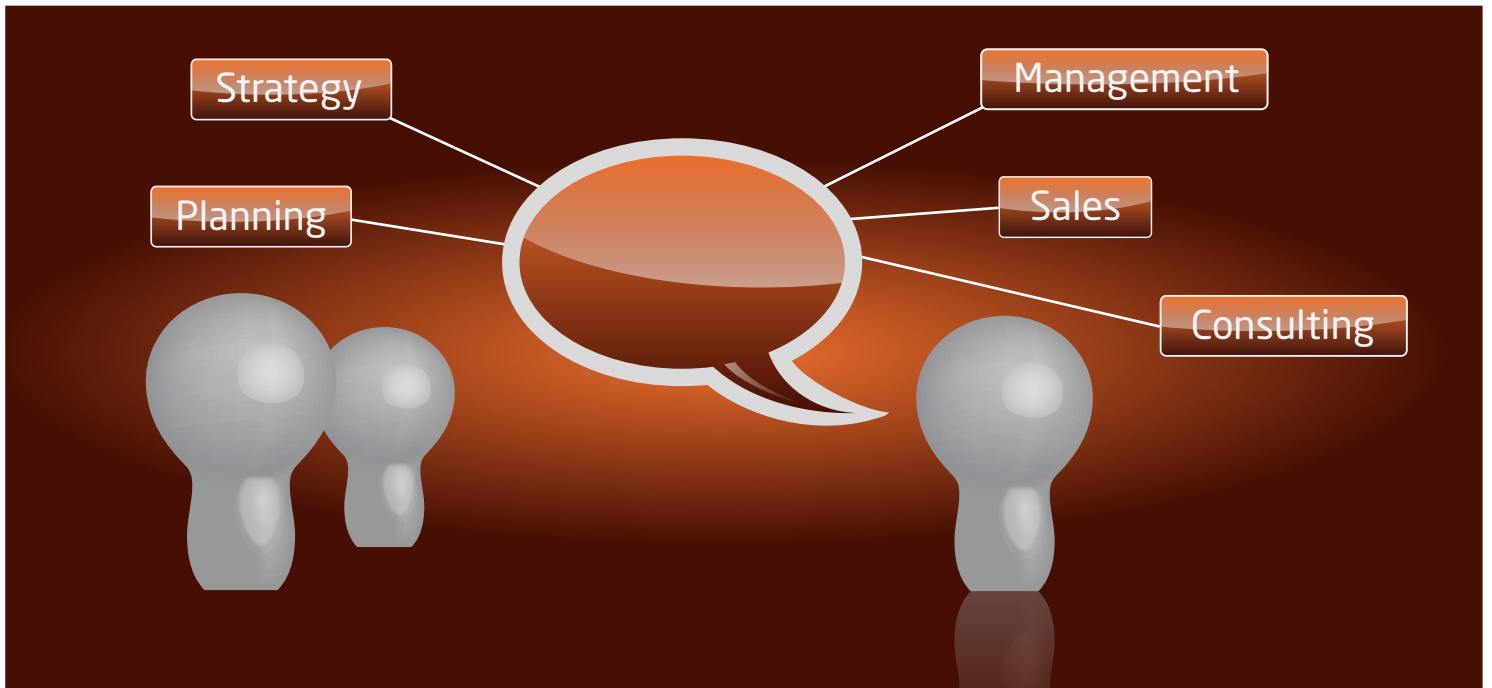
# Enable Transparency through "Conversations"



# White Paper

## Enable Transparency through 'Conversations'

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If you participate in one of those 'take your kids to work' days, you risk having your son or daughter watch you sitting in meetings, talking on the phone and answering email all day. Your child's skeptical assessment may be "Is that what you do all day—just talk?!"

It's strange but true that a good deal of white collar work really is just having conversations. Once we recognize how much of our working lives really does revolve around conversations it's fair to ask if we can use technology to get more value from them. The answer is yes and the key is finding the right means for capturing conversational information.

In this white paper we'll look at how email began our first steps towards capturing conversations, touch on how Google Wave is trying to better organize conversations, and then focus on one company, Zapoint, that has discovered a way for using conversations to map the skills of the workforce.

### From Voice to Text

A big change in the past couple of decades is that many of our conversations are now carried out by email rather than by voice. There are times when there is no substitute for a phone call or face to face meeting, but we've come to learn that much of the time email (or Twitter or Facebook) is preferable. The main advantage of text based conversations is that they are asynchronous. There is no telephone tag with email. However, there is another essential benefit; text conversations don't evaporate half forgotten into air. Have you ever had a voice conversation that ended with "Can you send me what we just talked about in an email"? That indicates the power of stored conversations in text; but that is just the start.

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### Leveraging Stored Conversations

A couple of firms, Google and Zapoint have noticed the value of stored conversations and are trying to take them to new heights—Google in terms of better structured conversations and Zapoint in terms of talent management.

The Google tool is Wave and their insight is that while it's great to have conversations recorded in text, a string of emails isn't the best way to compose it. In Google Wave a conversation occurs on a page which allows people to organize and summarize their exchanges. This is a big improvement over simply having a long trail of emails many of which may be irrelevant or out of date.

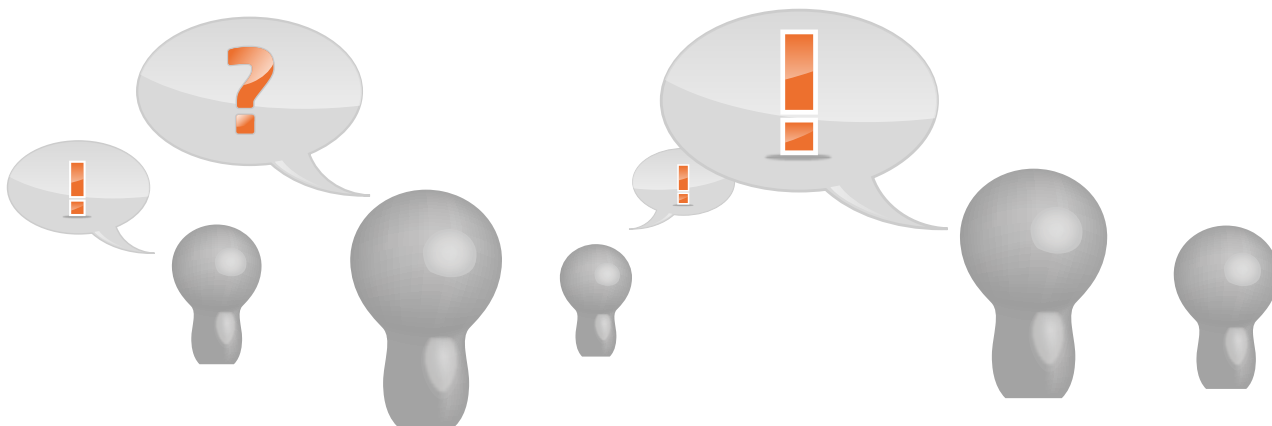
Zapoint's insight is that conversations contain information about skills and skills are a foundational element of talent management. Zapoint has introduced a feature to their software they call "Conversations"; it combines a social networking style of communication with a way to track relevant skills.



### How to Track Skills through Conversations

The mechanics of Zapoint's "Conversations" are straightforward. An employee starts an online conversation by, for example, asking a colleague for "help with online marketing"—just as you would in email or on Facebook. Then the employee adds value by taking a moment to tag the conversation as being about "online marketing". By choosing to have conversations that are relevant to core skills in the Zapoint system, employees can ensure their skills are tracked.

It's easy, but what is the payoff? The payoff is that now instead of just capturing raw text in email you have content that is linked to specific job related skills. The CIO of one Zapoint client sees his people involved in project after project and it is very difficult to know what skills they currently have, which are being used and where the gaps may be. With Conversations up-to-date information about skills will be available to the CIO as employees tag their relevant conversations.



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### How Employees put Skills Data to Use

We tend to think of talent management tools as systems that exist for management. In the case of the CIO he needed an up-to-date inventory of the skills amongst his 500 programmers. But taking advantage of conversations to capture information about skills is valuable for employees too.

Let's look at an example; imagine an employee has many conversations tagged with the skill "video streaming". This is useful for that employee because they now have visibility in the company as a video streaming expert. It's also good for employees interested in advancing their own knowledge of video streaming because they can search for and follow the work of those who are experts. Finally, it's good for employees managing their own careers because they can see what kinds of skills are needed in higher level positions and map their own career plans accordingly.

### Talent Management 2010 A.D.

Good talent management requires good information about skills. The best information about skills will be found in the living breathing work of the organization where skills are deployed each day. What Zapoint's Conversations feature does is to allow everyday conversations to be given skill tags which make those skills visible to anyone (that individual, HR or other employees) who might benefit.

There are several important aspects of this approach which may prove to be characteristic of how talent management will work in the future. The first is that the system is for the benefit of all employees not just management. Another is that the information comes from the employees as a natural part of their work; it's not an extra project nor is it a burden on HR. A third characteristic is openness and transparency—the advantages of having the data open to all is that it engages employees and they will no doubt find value in it not even anticipated by management.

Conversations are as old as mankind, but through technology we are still finding novel ways to leverage their value.

The screenshot shows the 'Conversations' interface. At the top, there are buttons for 'Conversations', 'Search', 'Author', and 'Start Conversation'. Below this is the 'Start a Conversation' section. It includes a dropdown menu for 'Select conversation type' (set to 'Discussion') with a note: 'Discussions are useful to resolve issues, to get feedback on something or simply to get someone else's point of view.' There is a text input for 'Discussion title', a 'Your Message' text area, and a 'Skills Added' section. The 'Select Skill Tags' section has an 'Add a skill' input and an 'Add' button. Below this are two lists of skill tags: 'My top 10 Skills' (ONLINE MARKETING, HUBSPOT, SEO, ADVERTISING, TEAM STRUCTURE, DESIGN, PLANNING, WEBSITE DESIGN, STRATEGY, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT) and 'Recently used skills' (BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, ADVERTISING, M&A, COMMUNICATION, TEAM STRUCTURE, DESIGN). At the bottom, there is a checkbox 'Check here to follow this conversation' and a 'Start conversation' button. Two lightbulb icons are visible at the bottom right of the interface.

## About Us

Founded in March 2006, Zapoint has developed career and learning technology that lets companies build more effective partnerships between HR and employees. Headquartered in Cambridge, MA, Zapoint helps organizations engage, retain and develop their workforces, to sustain their competitive advantage.

For more information, please visit [www.zapoint.com](http://www.zapoint.com)



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