Reinventing the IT War Room:

A use case paper for social IT collaboration

ITinvolve

People Powered IT™

Does this sound familiar to you?

Your IT organization is ready to do a major ERP upgrade. To ensure its success, you bring all the key players together into a "war room" — a single location where they can collaborate as they work to quickly resolve any issues and ensure a successful rollout. Business analysts, help desk staff, developers, administrators, and many other experts all join in this process. Mass quantities of pizza, coffee, and sodas are available to help "fuel" the team for a week or more until management is confident that all is going well.

While this approach can be very effective for collaborating and problem solving, it's also costly and time intensive. You may have transportation and hotel expenses for bringing people in from various locations. Gathering people in a room for this all-hands-on-deck approach also pulls them away from their day jobs. These are some of the reasons why most IT organizations take a war room approach to IT projects infrequently and only do it for the most critical projects or initiatives.

What if you could apply a war room approach to all projects and remove many of the time, cost, and distraction elements from the equation? This would enable you to have the same benefits and experience from the war room across a much larger set of initiatives and projects. Think about the positive impact you could have on your IT organization and your business, as well as on the quality and the perception of IT service delivery from your users.

You can make this a reality with an agile war room approach.

The agile war room extends the benefits of traditional war rooms beyond a single point in time. It provides the ability to bring together your best talent and your collective knowledge to become hyper-responsive to the needs of the business around a key project or initiative on an ongoing basis without many of the time, effort, and cost challenges of a traditional in-person war room approach.

Achieve the Benefits of the Traditional War Room with a Virtual, Collaborative Approach

In order to fully understand the value of an agile war room, it's important to identify some of the key activities that happen in a traditional war room. These include:

- Quickly routing incoming issues to the war room
- Assigning a lead for each issue and a "collaboration team" to develop potential resolutions
- Grouping issues into "major incidents" when they impact many users
- Documenting what's learned in the war room for reuse in the future and for feedback to the rest of the project team
- Keeping impacted end users updated (and all other users updated when warranted)

ITinvolve enables IT organizations to seamlessly execute each of these activities and more, helping you obtain benefits even greater than those of a traditional war room without the burden of having to take people away from their jobs and bring them together in a central location.

Delivered as a SaaS-based cloud service on Force.com, ITinvolve empowers you and your team to fully understand your IT environment and more easily collaborate to capture, share, and leverage collective knowledge through the use of social knowledge objects (e.g. servers, network devices, policies, people, applications, and business services).
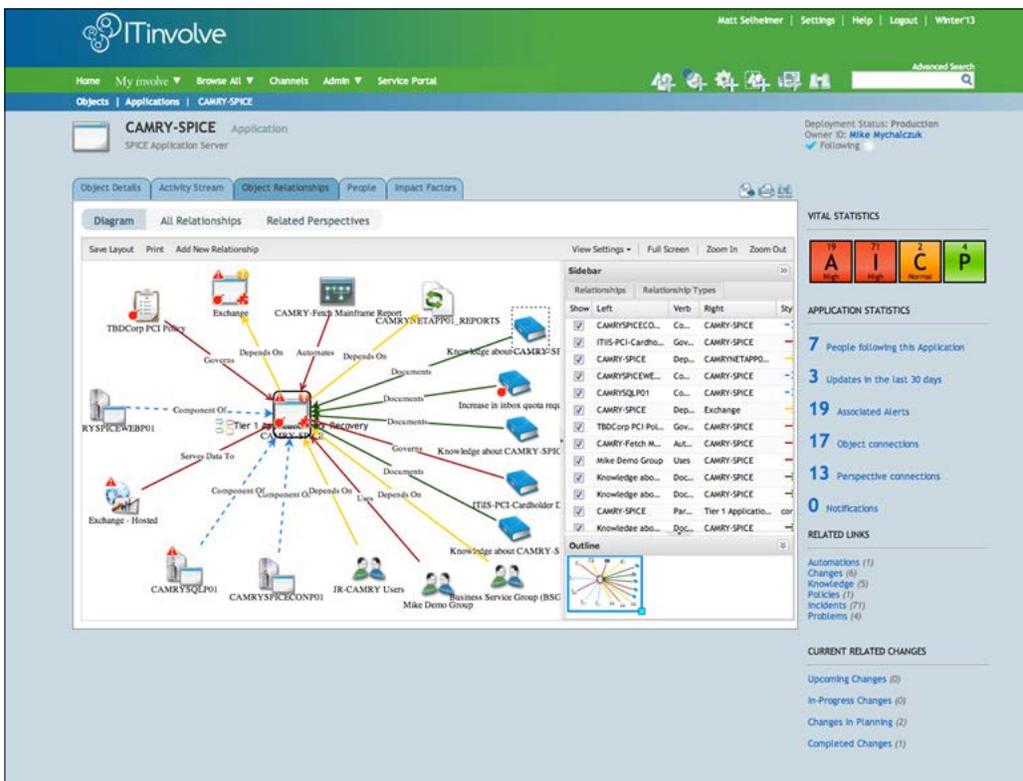

Figure 1:
A social knowledge object in ITinvolve

The ITinvolve solution ensures that all relevant knowledge is accessible from one place in the context of the project being managed by your war room and uses social collaboration to crowd source and peer review knowledge, in addition to importing or federating information from existing systems.
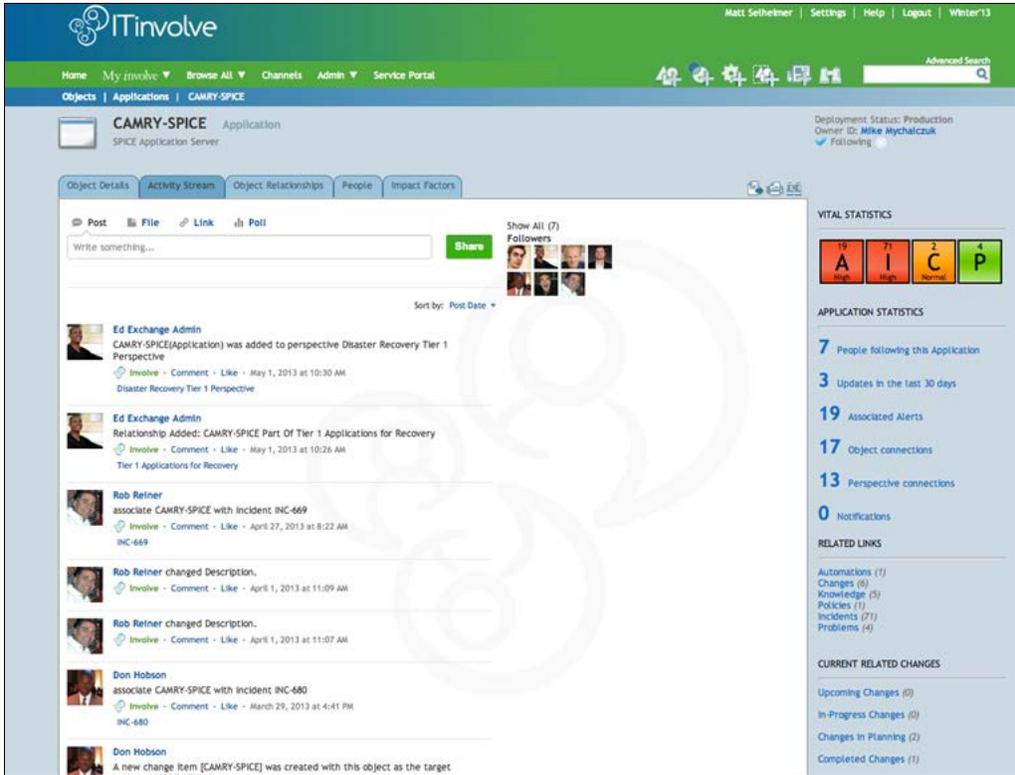
Figure 2:
An activity stream used for collaboration, crowd sourcing, and peer review around a social knowledge object

The ITinvolve solution also automatically assesses knowledge, relationships and dependencies in the IT environment to determine who and what are impacted by changes, incidents, alerts, and problems, as well as a wide range of scenarios including application release planning, policy compliance, and business continuity planning. The key to the ITinvolve approach is involving only the relevant stakeholders in collaboration, providing the right context for the collaboration, and capturing the appropriate information so that it can be shared with others and reused in the future.
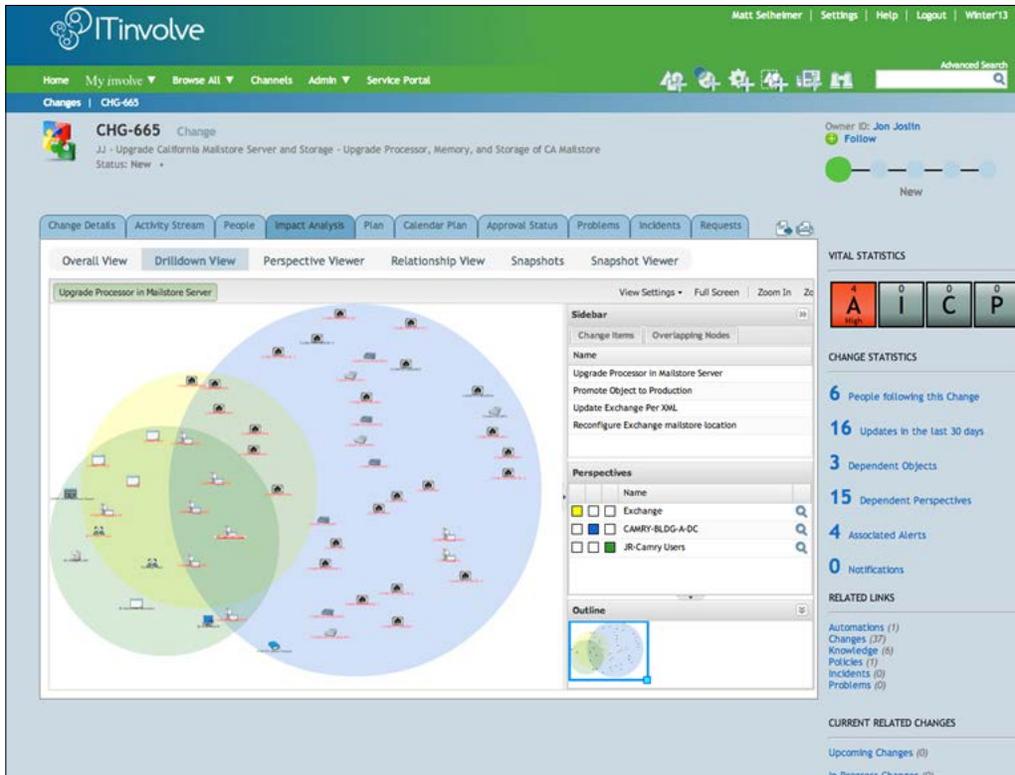
Figure 3:
An example of visually intuitive change impact analysis in ITinvolve

The Traditional IT War Room and the Agile IT War Room

Traditional IT War Room Requirement	Estimated Labor/ Productivity Cost
Location activity: 20 people in a war room for one week. Minimum of 40 hours x 20 = 800 hours at an average burdened rate of $50 per hour ($100,000 / 2000 hours per year).	$40,000
Travel expenses for 10 people (half the team) from global locations outside of the war room facility at an average total cost of $2,000 per person.	$20,000
Cost to the business of lost productivity due to an estimated number of 500 incidents resolved at Level One support and 200 incidents resolved at Level Two support. (Assumption is that incidents related to Level One support impact 1 hour of business productivity and for Level Two support impact 1.5 hours of business productivity at a burdened rate of $50 an hour. Total hours spent on incident resolution: 800 hours.)	$40,000
Estimated total cost for 1 project	$100,000
Estimated total cost for 4 projects a year	$400,000

Agile IT War Room Requirement	Estimated Labor/ Productivity Cost
20 people are only needed for 10 hours per week each — the solution makes them more efficient. Minimum of 10 hours x 20 = 200 hours at the average burdened rate of $50 per hour.	$10,000
No travel costs required. People can perform their functions from any location.	None
Cost to the business of lost productivity due to an estimated number of 250 incidents resolved at Level One support and 50 incidents resolved at Level Two support. (Assumption is that fewer issues occur at Level One because issues are resolved with permanent fixes more quickly so that incidents don't repeat themselves. In addition, more issues can be resolved at Level One and do not require escalation to Level Two given the knowledge now available at Level One. Total hours spent on incident resolution: 325.)	$16,250
Estimated total cost for 1 project	$26,250
Estimated total cost for 4 war room projects a year	$105,000

Get started working on issues more quickly and effectively

Most IT projects, like an ERP upgrade or a new marketing automation application, introduce new systems and software into the environment, as well as changes to existing devices and configurations. In a traditional war room, when there is an issue the team in the room (which could include more than 20 people) may spend 30 minutes or more simply discussing what has changed in the environment before actually starting to work the issue. IT environments are complex and there are likely going to be some detailed aspects of the new project and the infrastructure supporting it that everyone in the room isn't aware of, no matter how much preparation is done for the war room.

With ITinvolve, however, your virtual war room can respond to an incident more rapidly because the people in your organization don't need to be caught up on the current state of the environment. The proactive nature in which you follow objects within ITinvolve keeps everyone informed and up to date on what is changing. The process is similar to the way you might follow someone on Twitter or Facebook so that you receive a feed of what's changing as new knowledge is added.

Additionally, ITinvolve helps you get the issue routed to the right individual or team quickly without needing to have everyone in the room physically. The solution identifies where to route the issue and places it into a virtual channel and notifies those people who are members of that channel so they can pick up the issue and start collaborating with other channel members and experts.

Here is an example of how it works:

Assume that the agile war room is being set up to support the deployment of a new version of SAP and you want to make sure this new version rolls out without a hitch. With an agile war room, you can assign different people based on their areas of expertise to particular channels. For example, you might have a channel for SAP end-user support, a channel for SAP database issues, a channel for SAP hardware issues, etc. As incidents come in related to SAP and this new rollout, they get automatically assigned to the specific channel. Perhaps the first few calls that come in for the new SAP rollout are reports that the application is displaying oddly or not at all when some users try to log on. This information gets routed to the SAP end-user support channel where it's picked up first by a web browser expert. As he/she starts working on the issue and collaborates with other war room members, the team leverages their collective expertise to identify that there is an unexpected browser version issue with some SAP users running older browsers that aren't compatible with the new release.

They can then use the virtual channel to assign an action item to get the configuration team to make sure that all of the SAP users have at least a minimum version of the browser on their desktop. All of this can be done with the team distributed around the globe working from company offices, from home, at the airport, or anywhere with an Internet connection (even at a child's baseball game or at the beach!)

Have the most up-to-date collective knowledge available and make it easy to collaborate

The agile war room members can document knowledge with ITinvolve quickly, and make it easily accessible to the right people, which reduces the time to resolve issues and restore services.

Continuing our example of the SAP browser issue, this information can be documented as a new knowledge object associated with the SAP application such as, "The new SAP app release requires Microsoft IE version 9 or higher." If any further incidents come in from users because the automated push of the new browser version didn't execute as planned on a particular laptop, the service desk will have this knowledge available to them and can notify the user of the browser requirement when the user calls in and provide instructions and guided support to resolve the issue. This can be done without involving the war room (freeing them up to work on new issues instead of resolving ones that have already been solved).

Some issues may be more complex than a simple browser issue, however. It might be the combination of the browser version, VPN access, network bandwidth, and other factors that contribute to another type of incident. ITinvolve and the agile war room can help here, too. Any activity associated with the knowledge

Figure 4:
An Incident channel to facilitate the agile war room in ITinvolve

object, such as the SAP application, is written to its unique activity stream, which is based on the Chatter interface from the Force.com platform. Individuals who are following the object, such as the agile war room members, will be alerted. The system can be configured so they receive an alert on their smartphone from Chatter, they can have an email sent to them, and they can also see the update live in the activity stream if they are logged into the ITinvolve application.

This capability enables teams to correlate new knowledge being added in real-time to quickly crowd source potential solutions to new incidents that may be coming in. And because these conversations are captured in the activity stream, the collaboration activities and knowledge do not get lost like with instant messaging, emails that get buried in inboxes, and water cooler conversations that only benefit those who participate. As war room members review the activity stream and identify a piece of information that is valuable for reuse, they can simply click on the ITinvolve logo and then the link that is labeled "promote to knowledge." This action captures the knowledge as a new object for easy access and reuse. This real-time collaboration and knowledge-sharing approach greatly expedites the capture of critical knowledge and keeps it in a place where it can be shared, reused, and correlated to solve both simple and complex issues.

Social knowledge management helps to promote a culture that Gartner, Inc. refers to as extreme collaboration (XC)

"XC is enabled by combining four nexus forces into a pattern that can dramatically innovate the way people behave, communicate, work together and maintain relationships — often across wide organization and geographic boundaries — to collectively deliver breakthrough process performance. Collaboration is a critical activity in many operational business processes, both structured and unstructured. An XC environment is essentially a virtual war room or crisis center, where people can come together to collaboratively work on a shared purpose," said Janelle Hill, VP and distinguished analyst at Gartner. "This environment is available 24x7, thus enabling people to work when, where and how they need in order to meet shared goals and outcomes."

- "Gartner Outlines Six Best Practices for Moving to a Culture of Extreme Collaboration"
December 6, 2012, www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/2267115

6 Steps to Create Your Agile IT War Rooms

To pursue an agile war room, begin with one project or key application to prove the approach. Then, as your team becomes more experienced with this type of approach, you can add war rooms as needed.

Here are six simple steps to help you get started:

1. Identify the application or project for your war room.
2. Document the business goals, key changes that are going to be made, and likely risks.
3. Determine the experts who need to be involved in your war room and their roles.
4. Crowd source and peer review the current knowledge for the application or project.
5. Collaborate with the experts in advance of the rollout and fill in knowledge gaps.
6. Set up your virtual channels.

Other Uses for Agile War Rooms Beyond Incident Management

Does your application development team follow the SCRUM software development framework? The agile war room approach can be applied to application development efforts like QA/testing to assist with capturing knowledge around identified bugs and assigning actions to determine whether they can be addressed while still meeting the release schedule. The agile war room can also be used to facilitate collaboration around development "sprints" going beyond the capabilities of a traditional wiki with stronger visualization of release dependencies, task and action item assignment, and agenda setting.

Agile war rooms can also be used by operations teams for alert management around key applications, change and release planning, SLA management, merger and acquisition efforts, security certification projects, business continuity and disaster recovery planning, and more.

Closing Thoughts

It is widely viewed that war rooms can help to ensure project success, but the costs, time, and effort required are so significant that war rooms are reserved for only the highest-priority projects and initiatives. Through use of the agile war room you can bring the same benefits to more projects without much of the cost, time, and effort being required. Thus, you can apply the war room to more projects and increase your project success rate as well as improve user satisfaction. ITinvolve's innovative IT collaboration solutions can help you establish agile war rooms quickly and cost effectively — even without replacing your existing service desk solution. For more information, explore the wealth of resources available at www.itinvolve.com.

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Or contact us by email at info@itinvolve.com

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