

No More Walls!

Protiviti's Flexible, Collaborative Ecosystem Model Shatters Silos to Earn a 2022 ASAP Alliance Excellence Award Nomination

By Jon Lavietes

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Ask any senior executive at a global systems integrator (GSI) or management consulting firm and they will tell you that they aren't merely selling technology solutions. Rather, they're solving business problems and selecting the technology that helps execute on clients' chief objectives. It sounds simple, but in a fast-paced business climate in which breakthrough technology innovation comes to market seemingly each month and the needs and desires of customers and stakeholders frequently change on a whim, companies serving enterprises and midsize corporations need to be incredibly agile and nimble to keep pace.

A few years ago, global consulting firm Protiviti, which delivers business performance management, data analytics, digital transformation, internal audit, legal consulting, risk and compliance, and technology consulting services, among other offerings, set out to restructure its partner program to respond more quickly to changes in its clients' business and emerging technology trends. The firm's ecosystem partnerships were managed by heads of individual solution teams within its professional software services arm. Protiviti's partners had the potential to bring powerful capabilities and expertise that could help the firm's clients enhance their business models and overcome specific challenges, but the Protiviti client teams lacked insight into the ecosystem's full complement of offerings because they were siloed from the Protiviti ecosystem's global operations framework.



"Expanding the visibility across the firm in terms of our ecosystem strategy and approach was key, then building a program that would allow people to see who are some of our very strategic partners that we go to market with," said **Claudia Kuzma**, CA-AM, managing director and Protiviti's global ecosystems program leader, who was recruited in 2019 to spearhead the company's ecosystem activities.

Putting Partners on the Map

The first step in getting everybody on the same page was to secure buy-in from senior executives.

"We have the support from our leadership team," said Kuzma, before specifically acknowledging the commitment of the firm's CEO and executive vice president of global solutions. "Without their support, it's a much harder, uphill battle. They are constantly pushing the ecosystem forward in their communications."

"[Senior leadership is] constantly pushing the ecosystem forward in their communications."

With the top brass demonstrating a commitment to an ecosystem approach, the ground troops meeting with clients every day are incentivized to monitor Protiviti's partners for new developments that could potentially improve their customers' business. Kuzma said it is up to her team to deliver "the newest information on our ecosystem in an organized way" to client- and account-facing executives. To meet this challenge, her charges developed a PowerBI dashboard that functions as a capability map organized by solution and industry, which managing directors and other personnel can refer to at any time.

"A visualization and mapping of those capabilities has really enhanced the collaboration [within the company]," said Kuzma, who added that the map laid the groundwork for Protiviti to tailor solutions for different clients and situations. A new initiative could combine features from Microsoft, SAP, ServiceNow, Celonis, Salesforce, and/or other partners to augment a business process or develop a capability that addresses a bigger-picture issue. "We're expanding across various alliances versus just one alliance to leverage the power of collaboration across solutions."

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Silver Linings Ecosystem Playbook

To help Protiviti stakeholders put these capabilities into action, Kuzma's team meets with the company's industry and solution leaders to outline the top two or three growth drivers in their respective areas. The ecosystem team then works to align Protiviti's partners to those themes and "build out the collateral that we need to educate and socialize more broadly," according to Kuzma. "The outcome of that [exercise] is an ecosystem playbook, but it's more of a map to industries and solutions, giving all of the firm increased visibility into the ecosystem partners that are contributing to those growth drivers or have active offerings and solutions that we have built."

Of course, as client demands and broader business growth drivers change, Protiviti needs to continually reassess its ecosystem to ensure that its members collectively deliver the functionality needed to evolve with the times. This often entails recruiting new strategic partners, and in 2021, the company utilized its "Alliance Review Board" process to vet over 100 prospective partners, ultimately adding 12 of them to the ecosystem.

A diverse committee evaluates several factors in making its selections. Is there a significant client demand for the prospective partner's offerings? Is the vendor the best in its class? Is the company in good financial and legal standing? Does its culture mesh with Protiviti's? Is the vendor easy to work with? Does this potential partner company align strategically to the proposed collaboration? The group's recommendations are approved by the company's CEO, executive vice president of global solutions, and global quality and risk management (QRM) leader.

"Every new relationship that comes into our firm has been vetted by the ecosystem team and approved by our senior C-suite leadership," said Kuzma.

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A Series of Sprints Accelerates Partners

Protiviti has had to revamp its enablement programs to ensure that its ecosystem has the desired flexibility. As part of this effort, the company developed what it calls "30-, 60-, or 90-day sprints" with partners to kick-start joint solution development efforts in emerging technology categories. Protiviti and its partners assess the market opportunity, the client's demands, and the resources needed to execute on both in order to devise a strategic plan.

"It's a workshop-type approach that we take to really flesh out some of the newer areas that our teams are focused on and capture innovation in an accelerated fashion," explained Kuzma.

Protiviti has also categorized its partners using its proprietary Ecosystem Maturity Model, which crystallizes a roadmap for each ally vendor's evolution and growth. Based on their respective teams, training and development status, assets, and program maturity, partners are classified as either Foundational (exploratory and developmental), Adoptive (reactive and tactical), Adaptive (proactive and strategic), or Optimized (best-in-class). The sprints, along with other accelerators and target key performance indicators (KPIs), are designed to shepherd partners through each phase and promote higher levels of maturity.

Foundational partners start with a core team that includes a managing director-level executive sponsor and an alliance manager to operationalize the relationships. Once the appropriate training and certification have been identified and executed, partners begin delivering projects, and over time the joint sales and marketing messaging and value proposition are refined. Kuzma said the long-term goal for any partner is to get them to achieve Adaptive or Optimized status, a process that can potentially take three to five years. Over time, partners are evaluated based on financial growth, global collaboration, innovations delivered, advancements in their particular partner segments, training and certifications, and marketing program analytics.



Enter the Matrix: “Embedding Innovation in Service Delivery”

Take it all together, and what’s left is a matrixed organization with a flexible, collaborative organizational model capable of evolving to stay on top of client demands, market trends, and internal and external priorities, as well as “embedding innovation in service delivery,” a term used internally at Protiviti. When pressed for an example that illustrates what the phrase means to the company, Kuzma recounted an automation and integration developed by Celonis that enabled joint clients to pinpoint bottlenecks in their audit assurance controls operations—Protiviti used its domain expertise to integrate Celonis’s app into the services it delivered to its clients.

“We’re always working closely with our valued ecosystem relationships to more deeply understand their product roadmaps.”

“We’re always setting ourselves up for that next round of innovation and working closely with our valued ecosystem

relationships to more deeply understand their product roadmaps,” said Kuzma.

Protiviti’s ecosystem contributed mightily to the company growing its customer wins by 120 percent in 2021 and delivering 55 percent growth in influenced revenue over 2020. The company’s global collaboration metrics were positive last year as well; more than half of its priority partners generated revenue in the APAC and EU regions. The ecosystem has also made an impact on the reseller side of the company’s partner-generated business, netting a 47 percent increase in gross resell revenue and a 75 percent spike in resell margin growth.

Protiviti’s success in shattering the silos walling off its ecosystem from the rest of the organization has resulted in recognition as a finalist for a 2022 ASAP Alliance Excellence Award in the Alliance Program Excellence category—finalists were unveiled at the 2022 ASAP Global Alliance Summit last month. The winners of this year’s awards will be unveiled at a special live virtual ceremony on Thursday, May 19. In addition to Alliance Program Excellence, winners will also be recognized in the Individual Alliance Excellence, Innovative Best Alliance Practice, Alliance for Corporate Social Responsibility, and Best Ecosystem Solution categories, the latter of which is debuting as the awards’ newest honor. ■

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As a practitioner of collaboration in a variety of perhaps non-traditional alliance functions myself, I've found so many key elements of partnering and collaboration management for synergistic outcomes were perfectly encapsulated by ASAP's offerings.

—Kevin Little, CSAP
Senior Partnership Director
Novo Nordisk