BOOK REVIEW

Review of
Implementing Collaboration Technologies in Industry: Case Examples and Lessons Learned

Reviewed by Jesus Carmona, Texas A&M International University, USA;
Ned Kock, Texas A&M International University, USA; and
Karthikeya Bandaru, Texas A&M International University, USA

Implementing Collaboration Technologies in Industry: Case Examples and Lessons Learned
Bjørn Erik Munkvold

Collaboration technologies have been around for some time (Kock, 1999); the tools (hardware, software, and telecommunications) we have available nowadays have changed the way collaboration is conceived, creating what some may see as a relatively new buzzword — e-collaboration (Kock, & D’Arcy, 2002).

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on the technologies used for e-collaboration. Sometimes we forget that each technology’s implementation has a soft or human side to it. The human part of the implementation comprises not only the individual, but also the individual’s mental schemas, physical environment surroundings, and social environment surroundings (Kock, 2005). We may have the best computers and collaboration software, even the best telecommunication infrastructure, but if the human side is neglected, all of the effort, time, and money spent on the equipment can be squandered easily.

Bjørn Erik Munkvold, in his book, Implementing Collaboration Technologies in Industry, gives us a glimpse of how collaboration technologies can be used successfully in organizations through a variety of very specific case studies, involving real-world implementations and practical examples. This work looks at e-collaboration from an information sys-
tems (IS) perspective; that is, from the perspective of the introduction of the technology (hardware, software, and human interaction) into the organizational setting and the ensuing effects on the organization and on the individuals who are part of the organization.

The book is a collection of chapters from different authors; Munkvold is the editor and author of the majority of the chapters. The structure that the book follows is somewhat unique, not just focusing on the practical aspects of the collaboration technologies, but also giving some insight of current and future academic research on the topic. The book is divided strategically into three parts: overview and current trends; lessons from industry; and conclusion and implications.

The first part of the book is divided into four chapters: introduction; overview and current trends; implementation of collaboration technologies: a review of literature; and a taxonomy of implementation factors for collaboration technologies. The first part is devoted mainly to the definition of key terms in the field of collaboration technologies, followed by the history and classification of those technologies and their applications.

Chapter 2 introduces a matrix used to classify collaboration technologies in four quadrants according to time (either synchronous or asynchronous) and space (same place or geographically distributed), which reflects the classic time-space view of collaboration technologies (Johansen, 1988). Here, different collaboration technologies are presented and placed in the appropriate quadrant of the matrix. The matrix serves as a guide to help in the creation of a taxonomy that is presented later in chapter 4.

Of special interest to academics, chapter 3 reviews some of the empirical literature on e-collaboration, trying to derive a comprehensive set of findings based on what the author sees as methodologically sound and objective research examples. Key concepts are presented, followed by the review of some classic papers in the area of collaboration technologies. In this chapter, some field studies of implementation of collaboration technologies are presented as well. These field studies fit into the classification matrix presented in chapter 2.

Taxonomies are tools that can be used to conceptualize certain processes in a visual and hierarchical way. Chapter 4 presents a taxonomy of implementation factors for collaboration technologies. The taxonomy presented gives us a clear overview of several factors influencing the implementation of collaboration technologies. A quick inspection of this taxonomy is enough for someone to become familiar with the elements in the e-collaboration implementation process, which is definitely a big advantage for a book of this nature. This taxonomy serves as a platform or guideline for the rest of the book, particularly when field studies are presented.

Real-life case studies are presented in the second part of the book; six chapters (one for each company) are devoted to a detailed explanation of each implementation, with a good discussion of their problems and challenges. Each chapter in this part starts with a brief description of a company followed by the motivations for the implementation of one or more col...
laboration technologies. After this introduction, the implementation process is discussed according to the matrix and the taxonomy presented in the first part. In this way, each chapter follows a predictable path, and all of the relevant elements of each case are described and explained in some detail. Some of the chapters in this second part of the book include a summary section, called Lessons Learned From the Case, in which solutions to several of the challenges faced are presented. Later in the book, a chapter combines lessons learned based on all case studies.

In the third part of the book, two chapters are presented with conclusions and implications related to previously addressed topics. An entire chapter (chapter 11) is devoted to the description of a combination of the lessons learned from all of the case studies. This chapter is strategically structured (using the taxonomy presented in chapter 4) to best explain the challenges, related solutions, and a general overview of each case. Some similarities and differences across companies and cases also are presented as part of this chapter.

Finally, the last chapter discusses a set of critical factors that need to be addressed as part of a collaboration technology implementation strategy. The author uses a unique method when framing these critical factors; rather than recommending a step-by-step unique solution, he provides general recommendations based on a combination of practical solutions, which are based on the lessons learned from the cases and academic literature. The chapter concludes with implications for future research in the area of collaboration technologies.

One of the many positive aspects of this book is the way in which the real-world cases are interlaced with scholarly research. The book manages to cover topics from an academic perspective and, at the same time, provide real-world flavor through cases and lessons learned.

One element that is arguably missing from this book is a more developed discussion of future trends. The author talks about trends of specific tools and applications but perhaps not enough about how the e-collaboration field as a whole is progressing and where it is going. This is a weakness that easily could be addressed in future editions of this book.

This is a very well organized book and undoubtedly a great addition to the e-collaboration literature. The way in which the book is structured and the rarely encountered scholar-practitioner flavor that it provides make this book a must-have for institutional libraries as well as individual libraries of practitioners and researchers interested in e-collaboration issues.

REFERENCES


Jesus Carmona is a doctoral student in the MIS concentration of the PhD program in international business administration at Texas A&M International University. He is also an adjunct professor in that University’s Department of MIS and Decision Science. He holds a BA in agronomy from the Instituto Tecnologico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) and an MS in information systems from Texas A&M International University. His research interests include e-collaboration, software engineering, and human-computer interface design.


Karthikeya Bandaru is a research fellow in the College of Business Administration, Texas A&M International University. He is pursuing a master’s in information systems in the Department of MIS and Decision Science. He has served as the student convener for the IEEE Student Srinidhi chapter in India. His research interests include databases, business research methodologies, and e-collaboration.