Foreword

What is e-collaboration? Although this term means many things to many people, Ned Kock broadly defines it as “collaboration among individuals engaged in a common task using electronic technologies.” E-collaboration is not limited to computer-mediated communication (also known as CMC), or computer-supported cooperative work (known as CSCW), because other electronic technologies exist that are not (strictly speaking) computers and that can be used to support collaboration among individuals engaged in a common task.

This encyclopedia reflects the broad definition adopted by Ned Kock and will help expand the boundaries of e-collaboration. The multidimensional, interrelated e-collaboration boundaries include theoretical, technical, and use boundaries. Without overstating the obvious, e-collaboration research is very challenging. Not only does one deal with humans, one deals with understanding and facilitating the joint outcomes of groups of people. Existing theories guide further exploration but they can limit the scope and even direct attention towards paths that prove to be dead ends.

Technological enhancements are the core of e-collaboration—they make up the “e” in e-collaboration, so to speak. However, technological enhancements, in and of themselves, are not necessarily relevant to expanding e-collaboration boundaries. Functionally driven technology, without integrating with other boundaries; that is, “Build it because you can and they will use it,” can waste resources and limit usefulness. For example, it is not necessarily an expansion of an e-collaboration technical boundary if one just substitutes a wireless connection for a physical connection. Some issues related to wireless technology and e-collaboration might be: Does wireless enable or limit collaboration in certain ways? Do users compensate for overcoming limitations in unexpected ways? Does bandwidth affect collaboration technology directions? What are ways to provide collaboration support despite current limitations?

The act of using any system changes expectations of what can and should be supported. Some questions related to use boundaries include: What are the levels of use of e-collaboration? Are organizations still stuck at the lowest level of use? And, if yes, why?

What are the experiences of those who employ e-collaboration technology? What works and what are the lessons learned in implementing e-collaboration technology? How can I use e-collaboration in my situation?

Although no book can provide all the answers to these questions, Ned Kock used his skill and vision to compile a broad spectrum of work that begins to address the theoretical, technical, and use boundaries of e-collaboration. The encyclopedia provides a compendium useful to those who are just entering the field and those who have extensive knowledge and experience. I know of none more qualified than Ned Kock to tackle such an ambitious project as to compile an encyclopedia of e-collaboration.

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