Preface

This book focuses on e-collaboration technologies that enable group-based interaction, and the impact that those e-collaboration technologies have on groups. The term e-collaboration is being used here as an umbrella term that comprises several other closely related fields, commonly known as computer-mediated communication, computer-supported cooperative work, groupware, group support systems, and collaboration technologies. Within this scope, this book addresses a range of e-collaboration topics, with emphasis on two broad areas: (a) interdisciplinary perspectives on e-collaboration, a theme that permeates the entire book; and (b) adaptation and creativity in e-collaboration, which is addressed in a targeted fashion by several of the chapters.

The explosion in the use of e-collaboration technologies in organizations and society in general is a relatively recent phenomenon. The idea that successful group collaboration is important for organizational performance was quite well established already in the mid 1900s, during the post World War II period. Technologies were indeed available to support e-collaboration in that period, mostly in the form of mainframe-based systems. However, the use of e-collaboration tools to support group work in organizations was slow to catch up, mainly because the cost of computer technologies was too high for those technologies to be used by anyone other than specialized personnel (often called the “computer folks”) working in central information processing departments.

This situation has of course changed substantially over time, especially after the 1980s, when there was an explosion in the use of computer networks, and when computer equipment became relatively cheap. This allowed for the provision in organizations of increasingly decentralized access to computer and information resources. Central information processing departments gradually lost their monopoly on computer and information resources, and many central information processing departments were dissolved and replaced by information technology support departments.

Loss of monopoly on information by centralized departments was soon followed by another business trend. This new trend was the increasing involvement of computer experts in highly successful entrepreneurial endeavors, which led many of the previously called nerdy types to become extremely wealthy and assume different organizational titles, such as president and chief executive officer (CEO). Two examples are Steve Jobs at Apple, and Bill Gates at Microsoft. Many others exist.

With the explosive growth of the Internet and the Web in the 1990s, most computers became interconnected, which led some to see the computer as less of an autonomous processing unit than an entry point to a vast pool of network-based resources. The increasing use of e-collaboration technologies that this enabled led to many possibilities, of which one of the most exciting has been the ability to conduct collaborative tasks with individuals interacting at different times (i.e., in an asynchronous manner) and from different places (e.g., different cities or countries).
E-collaboration’s success attracted attention from researchers, and an increasing number of them shifted their attention to the study of e-collaboration phenomena. New publication outlets for research on e-collaboration were started, including the *International Journal of e-Collaboration* and the Book Series that comprises this volume.

This book, the fourth in the Advances in E-Collaboration Book Series, is organized in three main sections – Section I: Emerging Issues and Debate; Section II: Adaptation and Creativity in E-Collaboration; and Section III: Advanced Conceptual and Theoretical Issues. Each section contains several chapters written by experts. In Section I a range of emerging e-collaboration topics are discussed, setting the stage for the next section, which is the core section of the book. That core section then explores in more detail the topics of adaptation and creativity in e-collaboration; that is, how individuals and groups adapt their behavior in order to improve their e-collaboration performance, and how individuals and groups explore creative ideas employing e-collaboration technologies. The third and final section discusses advanced conceptual and theoretical issues related to the topics covered in the previous sections.

Most of the chapters in this book are original or revised versions of selected articles published in the *International Journal of e-Collaboration*. I have had the pleasure and honor of serving as Founding Editor-in-Chief of that Journal since its first issue was published in 2005.

The contributing authors are among the most accomplished researchers in the world today in the areas of interdisciplinary e-collaboration research, and adaptation and creativity in e-collaboration. I am most grateful for their contributions to the *International Journal of e-Collaboration* and to this book, which has been a great pleasure to edit together my colleagues at IGI Global.

One attractive aspect of this book is the nice blend of conceptual, theoretical and applied chapters found here. This blend makes me confident that the book will serve both academics and practitioners very well. I hope that this book will stimulate further research interdisciplinary e-collaboration research, adaptation and creativity in e-collaboration, and related topics. It is also my hope that this book will serve as a valuable source of ideas for managers involved in projects that rely heavily on e-collaboration technologies.

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