INTRODUCTION

I learned two weeks ago that I have a new manager who works in another part of the country. Talk about needing to interact and create identity “out there”...

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-994-6.ch004
For many people, collaborative writing projects are a daily workplace reality, as are collaborative projects that include writers working at remote locations. Members of writing teams large and small interact with colleagues across the globe using such tools as instant messaging (IM), videoconferencing, e-mail, and phone. Collaborating writers now intermittently switch between typing and talking orally in their communications through newer technologies that combine the affordances of screen-sharing, IM, and embedded voice-over-Internet software. They distribute drafts, files, images, and notes through shared databases and content management software. They share professional and personal information with people whom they have never met in person and likely never will. They experience frustration and enjoy successes together and remotely.

When beginning to work on a virtual collaborative writing team, what factors should be considered? In this chapter, we address some of the issues and strategies that can be critical to new groups of virtual collaborative writers. These issues and strategies speak directly to the need to develop a culture of collaboration and to establish trust among writers, which are the first and third principles that ground this book as discussed in Chapter 1. We draw from the literature on and our own experiences with virtual collaborative writing. We also draw in part from a small pilot study conducted in 2001 that focused on three writers working for high-technology firms at three different locations. On specific days, the participants kept logs of every type of interaction they initiated or took part in, noting the nature and purpose of each interaction, its duration, the parties taking part in the conversation, and the medium used to communicate. Participants also responded at length to questions about their remote interactions and the communication tools used to support them. Using these pieces as a backdrop, we address issues related to unifying remote individuals into a team of writers working on a shared project.

Although some people believe that writing collaboratively makes writing easier, we argue that writing collaboratively requires additional care, coordination, and cooperation and can substantially complicate the writing process. In general, when writers attempt to arrive at a shared understanding of what needs to be said in a piece and how to say it, communication problems and other difficulties seem inevitable (Kraut, et al., 1988). Difficulties can occur as team members try to convey their ideas, agree on goals and purposes, share personal knowledge or perspectives to arrive at common understandings, coordinate individual and shared perspectives, use both individual and collective contributions, and then guide all of the distributed writing to a unified end (Bond & Gasser, 1988). Given such factors, writing collaboratively is not easy to do—even when collaborators are colocated, sitting next to one another in an office (Fleming, Kaufer, Werner, & Sinsheimer-Weeks, 1993). Collaborative writing can be even more challenging when colleagues write and interact in virtual environments.

Communicating online in general can be a difficult endeavor. Virtual communication makes some aspects of communication more difficult, introduces new issues, and mitigates if not reduces others (Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & McGuire, 1986; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Virtual teaming on collaborative writing projects, we argue, does the same. We know much about teaming and small group work processes from theory, research, and practice (see, for example, McGrath, 1984; Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999; Gouran & Hirokawa, 2003; Salas, Priest, Stagl, Sims, & Burke, 2006; Klein, DiazGranados, Salas, Le, Burke, Lyons, & Goodwin, 2009). We know far less about the implications of teaming and small group processes when collaborators write solely or primarily online.
Related Content

Exploring the Effects of Enterprise Instant Messaging Presence Information on Employee Attendance in a Distributed Workforce: An Ethnographic Study of a Large Professional Services Organization
[www.igi-global.com/article/exploring-effects-enterprise-instant-messaging/68163?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/exploring-effects-enterprise-instant-messaging/68163?camid=4v1a)

Determinants of Manufacturing Firms' Intent to Use Web Based Systems to Share Inventory Information with their Key Suppliers
[www.igi-global.com/article/determinants-manufacturing-firms-intent-use/1973?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/determinants-manufacturing-firms-intent-use/1973?camid=4v1a)

Pragmatic Approaches to Supporting Reasoning Communities
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/pragmatic-approaches-supporting-reasoning-communities/67327?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/pragmatic-approaches-supporting-reasoning-communities/67327?camid=4v1a)

Investigating eResearch: Collaboration Practices and Future Challenges
Lina Markauskaite, Mary Anne Kennan, Jim Richardson, Anindito Aditomo and Leonie Hellmers (2012). *Collaborative and Distributed E-Research: Innovations in Technologies, Strategies and Applications* (pp. 1-33).
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/investigating-eresearch-collaboration-practices-future/63501?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/investigating-eresearch-collaboration-practices-future/63501?camid=4v1a)