A Comparison of the Features of some CoP Software

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INTRODUCTION

There are now significant numbers of software houses supplying services and solutions for community collaboration. In this article we briefly review the requirements for virtual support and the current offerings. This is not intended as a comprehensive survey, but rather an overview of what might be available.

BACKGROUND

In 2004 the Directorate of Science and Technology Policy (DSTP) in Canada produced a report reviewing portal technology. In particular, DSTP reviewed a specific subset or portals for community support. They looked at four specific program offerings, operating under portals, across eight areas of functionality. These eight areas were:

1. ongoing interactions,
2. work,
3. social structures,
4. conversation,
5. fleeting interactions,
6. instruction,
7. knowledge exchange, and
8. documents.

These program suites—Tomoye, community Zero, iCohere, and Communispace—were all strongly oriented towards Fleeting interactions and Instruction (apart from iCohere), but weakly supportive of social structures, knowledge exchange, and documents. In addition, all software suites contained taxonomy, a local search, an experts database, discussion, and an events notification facility. None provided audio- or video-supported meetings or webinars, and only Communispace provided a (limited) virtual meeting space. All, except for Tomoye, provided community governance and polls.

Other Software Offerings

Enable2 was not considered by DSTP. It is provided by Fount Solutions, who claims that it provides the essential capabilities required for CoP support. These, they say, would include: content management (to generate domain-specific content), discussion forums, document management, member profiles, and a search engine. As we see, the ‘missing’ capabilities of this software suite are also missing from the software reviewed by the DSTP—that is, support for audio and video meetings, webinars, and virtual meeting spaces. Fount also recommends the provision of weblogs so that users can publish specific content and a tool called Really Simple Syndication (RSS).

Table 1. Core technology features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>Member networking profiles; Member directory with ‘relationship’ focused data fields; Subgroups that are defined by administrators or that allow members to self-join; Online meetings; Online discussions.</td>
<td>Recorded PowerPoint presentations; E-learning tools; Assessments; Web conferencing; Online meetings; Online discussions; Web site links.</td>
<td>Structured databases; ’Digital stories’; Idea banks; Web conferencing; Online meetings; Online discussions; Expert database and search tools; Announcements; Web site links.</td>
<td>Project management; Task management; Document collaboration; File version tracking; File check-in and check-out; Instant messaging; Web conferencing; Online meetings; Online discussions; Individual and group calendaring.</td>
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