Chapter XVIII

Evolution of the Groupware Concept

In the early 1990s, Lotus created the concept of groupware with its revolutionary (for the time) product, Lotus Notes. For the first time, Lotus Notes tied together into one package various components needed for collaboration (an especially attractive premise for the SMB marketplace)—directories, electronic mail, group calendaring, file sharing, chat rooms, and so forth. This was the first attempt at creating a collaboration environment for teams and organizations to foster a sense of community and improve information sharing and communication. Early versions of Lotus Notes tended to be very top down—a central administrator was needed to set up a chat room, file sharing area, and the like. While Lotus Notes wasn’t very flexible, it was (in a pre-Web, pre-Intranet world) an attempt to improve collaboration at a time when teams were becoming increasingly geographically and organizationally dispersed.

Over time, market changes have evolved the concept of groupware, sometimes pressuring it to centralize (e.g., Microsoft Exchange) and sometimes pressuring it to devolve into “best of breed” products. The Web provided a new framework for groupware and made it easier to include business partners (outside the firewall) to participate in shared collaboration areas. Improvements such as better document review mechanisms, more flexible administration, and more granular security also followed.

One interesting philosophical change in groupware (by the late 1990s, it was better referred to as “teamware” or “team collaboration”) was Groove, a product developed by Lotus Notes creator Ray Ozzie. The basic version of