Examining the Process of Electronic-JAD

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One of the more common approaches to involving users in the system development process is called JAD (Joint Application Development). The JAD approach is based on highly structured, facilitated meetings and, as such, has the potential to be supported by Electronic Meeting Systems (EMS). A multiple-site field study was conducted in which JAD meetings — both traditional and electronic — were observed. Some differences between traditional JAD and JAD supported by EMS were found. The quality of group member participation was more equal in supported JAD meetings. Some supported JAD meetings lacked the session discipline of traditional JAD. Conflict resolution (closure), emphasized in traditional JAD, was not achieved in several electronic sessions. Session management activities — the responsibility of the facilitator for integration of the session with other life cycle activities — was weak in some electronic sessions.

Our review of literature and practice encompasses several intersecting fields: JAD, Electronic Meeting Systems, and the focus of our research, Electronic-JAD. Our study also has practical implications — similar to those of Olson and Olson (1991) — for identifying opportunities for successful computer support.

We begin with a literature review of the intersecting methodologies and technologies, describe our field study approach, and discuss our observations of JAD sessions for four broad process-related areas of interest.

Literature Review

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Joint Application Development

JAD came about because of a pragmatic realization that more intense user participation would lead to better systems.

One of the leading methodologies for user involvement and user participation in the system development process is called JAD. JAD (Joint Application Development) involves users in a series of structured meetings which, traditionally, have benefitted from little explicit computer support. Yet, given the highly structured nature of JAD meetings, and the prominent role of the JAD facilitator, it appears that JAD meetings have the potential to benefit from additional computer support. Our research question is how and whether JAD can benefit from computer support in the form of Electronic Meeting Systems (EMS) (See Figures 1 and 2). The study we conducted to investigate this question can be classified as descriptive, as there is no theory of JAD and no overarching theory of EMS. Dubin (1978) argues that “...there is a fundamental place for accurate description in any science. Description...provides the input for developing units of a theory, its laws of interaction, the system states, and the boundaries of the model (p. 219).” Our findings are a starting point for the development of a theory of meetings, supported by computing and not, that includes structured processes like JAD. Our study also has practical implications — similar to those of Olson and Olson (1991) — for identifying opportunities for successful computer support.
Figure 1: A typical JAD room  (Adapted from Wood & Silver, 1989)

Figure 2: A typical electronic meeting room
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