

BOOK REVIEW

Collaboration Systems, Concept, Value and Use

Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group

Edited by Jay F. Numamaker Jr., Nicholas C. Romano Jr. and Robert O. Briggs.

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The book is the 19th issue of the series entitled “Advances in Management Information Systems (AMIS)”. As Vladimir Zwass states, in Series Editor’s Introduction, it presents, beside the theoretical foundations, the authors’ thoughts and conclusions drawn from their experiences and practical application results. There are 29 authors: well-known scholars, leaders of research centres and young researchers. The volume is edited by J. F. Nunamaker, one of the founders of the domain, R. O. Briggs, who, together with his colleagues, sets up the basis of *collaboration engineering*, and N. C. Romano, an already consecrated author in the fields of group support systems and electronic commerce. The volume is composed of 13 chapters organized in an introduction and four parts as follows.

The first three chapters are meant to set the stage for the remaining chapters. After the introduction of series editor, in the first chapter entitled “Introduction to Collaboration System. Part 1: A Brief History and Lessons Learned”, the editors of the volume describe the evolutions in the domain of collaborative systems mainly based on their experience from an information system perspective. In the second chapter, entitled “Introduction to Collaboration System. Part 2: Foundations”, the same authors present the five “pillars” of collaboration systems: anonymity, teamwork, business process analysis, focusing attention and maintaining team and organizational memory. It also contains an overview of the book, so that the reader could get a preliminary list of the concepts and results to be presented in the remaining chapters.

Part I, entitled “Proof of the Concept” contains from chapters as follows. Chapter 3, entitled “Organizing the Theoretical Foundations of Collaboration Engineering” of G. L. Kolfshoten and R. O. Briggs, contains the theoretical understanding of phenomena to be met during collaboration activities. The authors

examine two classes of theories. While the first one is meant for explaining and predicting, the second one addresses the design and action issues. They present three levels of abstraction that are useful for studying the collaboration effort: a) the work practice level; b) the activity level and c) the behavior level. Chapter 4, entitled “Classification of Collaboration Technology” of D. D. Mittelman et al. is an attempt to understand the software tools available on the market and contains several practical recommendations of the use of the classification scheme provided. Chapter 5, entitled “An Empirical Test of the Focus Theory of Group Productivity” is due to F. Chen and R. O. Briggs. It aims at investigating the usefulness of the *Focus Theory*, which is meant to specify the ways the human limited resources are distributed to the interaction, communication and deliberation processes. Chapter 6, entitled “Patterns in Collaboration” is signed by G. L. Kolfshoten et al. It contains a plea for the study of collaboration in the three specific abstraction levels: a) the effort of the whole collaborative process, b) emerging patterns in collaboration, and c) interventions in the collaborative effort. The authors present six collaboration patterns: a) generate, b) reduce, c) clarify, d) organize, d) evaluate, f) build consensus that extend the four procedures of GSS (Group Support Systems) of Nunamaker and colleagues (idea generation, organization, evaluation and exploration).

Part II is entitled “Proof of Value” and is composed of four chapters as follows. Chapter 7, ,entitled “Maintaining Credibility in Group Collaboration”, is the contribution of J. K. Burgeon, et al. Starting from the observation that, in group interaction, there might be hidden agendas, exaggerations, misrepresentations and other falsehoods that might harm the “pivotal concept” of *trust*, the above authors examine the theoretical basis for why deception is detectable and

point out the difficulties in achieving rich communication among group members who are geographically dispersed and use computer mediated communication. Chapter 8 is entitled “Enabling Large Group Collaboration”. In it, J. H. Helquist et al describe the challenges of accommodating large groups (over 50 persons) in the current GSS paradigm and recommend participation-driven group support systems as an effective solution. Chapter 9, entitled “Mobile Computing and Collaboration” is the contribution of J. S. Valacich et al. The authors provide an up-to-date description of *mobile computing* (MC) architecture and highlight the value of the MC for collaborative activities. Chapter 10, entitled “The Future of Writing Together. Emerging Research in Collaborative Writing Technologies”, is signed by M. Keith. The chapter contains: a) an overview of the most utilized *computer writing* (CW) schemes, b) a review of authorizing and control strategies and c) a description of the modern tools characteristics.

Part III, entitled “Proof of Use” contains two chapters as follows. Chapter 11, entitled “Collaboration Support Technology”, is the contribution of G. L. Kolfschoten and J. F. Nunamaker. The authors examine the research carried out in the GSS field over the last 30 years and highlight two parallel trends in technology meant to support collaboration: a) the very generic and multipurpose tools, b) the very specific tools meant to support specific tasks or processes. Chapter 12 is entitled “Group Systems in the US Army”. The author, J. Gantt, describes the use of *Group System*, perhaps one of the most well-known and used GSS, in various specific activities, such as the Y2K problem or fighting the terrorism.

Part IV is entitled “Future Directions” and contains one chapter. Chapter 13, entitled “A Six-Layer Model of Collaboration” is signed by R. O. Briggs et al. It contains an excellent presentation of a methodology for designing collaboration systems. The authors present six areas of designers’ concern (collaboration goals, group products, activities and procedures, collaboration tools and behaviours) and the corresponding six layer model for the design.

“With apologies to Robinson Crusoe, productive work is largely done in collaboration with others”. This is the first phrase of V. Zwas’s introduction. One can firmly state the authors of the book gave an excellent example of collaboration to attain their goal to transfer to the book reader a significant part of their knowledge and research results. Though the domain of collaboration systems was addressed from various (economic, social, cognitive, technical) perspectives, the format of the book and the presentation styles of the chapters are remarkably homogeneous. This is a token of a long term collaboration effort of authors in research and practical applications. The reference lists that conclude every chapter contain many common papers of the authors who clearly explain the reference of the maps and results contained in the book.

Having carefully studied the book, this reviewer feels that many researchers in the field of collaboration systems can get the answers to their scientific interests and concerns. Also, the people who are novice in the field might be stimulated to start approaching the domain after reading the volume.

The excellent editing conditions of the book ensured by Rutledge contribute to making its reading not only scientifically rewarding, but also a very enjoyable experience.

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