

Implementing Collaboration Technologies in Industry - Case Examples and Lessons Learned

(Book Review)

Reviewer:

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Textbook Details:

Munkvold, B. E., Agder University College, Kristiansand, Norway
Implementing Collaboration Technologies in Industry - Case Examples and Lessons Learned
2003 XII, 308 p. 26 illus. Softcover
1-85233-418-5
CSCW Series, Springer: GB

The book, of operative nature, identifies a taxonomy of factors that affect implementation of collaborative technology and provides a series of practical advices for successfully realising such implementation. Collaborative technology is intended in a broad sense, that is as all the types of information and collaboration technologies that have a potential to support collaboration and the corresponding infrastructure technologies. Attention is mainly focused on the adoption problems due to the attitude and feel of users and to the organisational context.

Factors affecting implementation and their taxonomy are discussed on the basis of previous research in the field, in particular experimental. Advices are derived mainly by the analysis and the comparison – guided by the taxonomy - of a number of case studies, that refer to the experience of a number of big companies.

The content is organised into three parts, each one including several chapters, and three appendices. Bibliographical references and an analytical index complete the book.

Part 1 (including 4 chapters) is introductory with respect to collaborative technology, frames the context and the main problems. Chapter 1 shows the book plan (this choice is a bit confusing). Chapter 2, after a very brief historical overview, defines collaboration technology, presenting a classification framework that comprises five categories: communication technologies, shared information systems, meeting support tools, coordination technologies and integrated products. These categories are presented mainly from the point of view of their functionalities and of the possible applications. In Chapter 3, research findings and experiences in industry, collected from academic publications, are analysed, with the attempt of identifying factors that affect implementation. On this basis, a taxonomy of these factors is constructed and presented in Chapter 4, aimed at guide the interpretation of the case studies presented in the following part.

Part 2, that includes 6 Chapters from a number of authors from academy and companies, presents a number of case studies of organisational implementations. This part aims to clarify key aspects which contributed to successful adaptation of collaborative technology in a number of big companies. Chapter 5 (by Munkvold and Tvedte) discusses the ten-years experience on the introduction and use of a variety of collaboration technology in Statoil, a Norwegian oil company. Chapter 6 (by Munkvold), reports the empirical findings deriving from the establishment of a collaborative infrastructure and its use to support collaborative projects in Kvaerner, a Norwegian engineering and construction group. Chapter 7 (by Poltrock and Mark) reports the problems related to the adoption of a data conference service in the Boeing Company. Chapter 8 (by Palen and Grudin) focuses on the use of collaborative calendaring applications. The factors that contribute to the current use of these applications are discussed, by comparing findings about experiences of the mid-1980s with the results of two interview studies carried out at Microsoft and Sun Microsystems (mid 1990s). Chapter 9, (by Evjemo, Akselsen

and Grav) outline some practical guidelines deriving from the 10-years experience carried out by Telenor, an ICT Norwegian company, in particular from projects a tele-radiology service employed in the health care sector, a collaborative solution to support local politicians interactions, a lotus note application aimed to support management, daily collaboration and team maintenance in case of a Telenor distributed teams, a technical and organisational structure for clusters of companies. Chapter 10, by Bostrom, Kadlec and Thomas refers to the experience gained through an e-learning project referring to an MBA programme developed by the University of Georgia Terry College of Business for a North American Consulting Group (PricewaterhouseCoopers). The findings are based on data derived from the actors involved in the overall process (teachers, students, implementation team, management).

Part 3 is organised into two chapters, 11 and 12. Chapter 11 revises the case studies of Part 2 trying to identify elements particularly influencing the implementation of collaborative technology, and discusses them at the light of the taxonomy presented in Part 1. On this basis, Chapter 12 presents a number of general recommendations aimed to guide the planning and implementation of collaborative technologies.

A number of Appendices complete the content: Links to collaboration technology forums and resources, links to the sites of examples of products (both quite limited) and the taxonomy (useful).

The book aims to address the research results about the complexity of the process involved in the implementation of collaborative technology towards their practical implications. In my opinion this is reached only indirectly, as the focus of the work is mainly on the practical side. However, researchers can find in the book very valuable hints and indications about the problems to be faced to transform research results into companies' innovation. The book, which is easy readable, is full of practical indication deriving from experiences in real organisational contexts and covers a wide spectrum of collaboration technologies: thus, it is particularly interesting for practitioners, such as managers of enterprises who have to plan the introduction of collaborative technologies in big companies and people who has to realise this introduction.