



Combined effort equals success

In the past decades, as technology became more and more important and frequently used in the commercial world, the shape of our daily business processes have drastically changed. Companies have expanded, opened offices in various locations around the world, outsourced their work to cheaper countries and created remote or tele-working jobs. The colleague you work with or your project manager might not be located in the cubicle next to you, but several thousand miles across the globe.

This did not only change our business opportunities but also our work processes and how projects are managed. Almost all projects require cooperation between various departments or multiple persons. Employees traveling around in different countries still need to access information and must be reachable by their colleagues. A variety of technology solutions have been utilized for this purpose, such as remote connections to the intranet, storing data on external drives or e-mailing corporate data back and forth between employees in various locations. However, this was not the most efficient way of data sharing or managing projects.

In order to achieve an efficient cooperation, data sharing and communication between various project groups and locations had to be as productive as possible. For this purpose various groupware applications, also known as collaborative software have been developed. Groupware are powerful software applications that support new ways of work by providing efficient tools to solve "collaboration oriented" tasks. It allows a close and in most cases, real-time cooperation and communication between several people on a single valuable business project from different locations. This technology also allows members to work on different but correlated tasks, share documents, information, and data by allowing them to essentially work on the same page at the same time, without creating duplicate ideas and work. Many extra groupware features include group calendars that are used to schedule videoconferencing meetings, multi-player games using live video and chat to communicate, newsgroup discussions as well as document change tracking to allow for easy identification of who is working on the latest revision of the project.

With these new technological advances and Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) environments such as Lotus Notes and Microsoft Exchange it allows for tasks and business processes to get done more efficiently and faster by using all required human resources, even when not in the same location. The advantages of a groupware system in comparison to a single user system are mainly when working in a project environment where communication is essential between collaborators. Groupware allows for and facilitates a much faster and clearer communication where it would not otherwise be possible and is built so that every single user can benefit from the advantages of groupware, by allowing for multiple perspectives, expertise and assistance with group solving. Project managers and executives can generate various reports for tracking and monitoring the status of business projects, resources, and departments. At the same time



business project managers can use the robust benefits of groupware to increase revenue, reduce meeting times, boost customer satisfaction and minimize operational costs.

Although there seem to be only benefits in groupware, the probably two biggest hurdles with implementing it is the failure of achieving the critical mass of users and the lack interoperability or compatibility of systems. When planning to implement groupware successfully, it means achieving the critical mass of users. Typically a groupware system will not succeed unless most or all of the target group is willing to use it and adopt the system. In contrast, a single user application can be successful even if only a small portion of the target group adopts it (Brink, 1998). A difficult task which IT managers as well as executive staff need to face is convincing people to use groupware. This can only be done by providing the required training to make people comfortable using it. If people don't feel comfortable with the system or do not see a benefit in it, they won't use it, even if in the long run it facilitates the group work process and project management. Executive and management staff should also provide employees with benefits or incentives to encourage groupware implementation and usage. Researches have examined social factors in the adoption of groupware tools and came to the conclusion that mandated use or executive measures seemed to be necessary. These high-level mandates might be received with mixed responses, but groupware will be used. Besides the management, it is up to the groupware designers who must find a way to make sure the application is perceived as useful for individuals even outside the context of full group adoption. In many cases collaboration is at odds with the company's corporate culture so implementation will be disruptive and therefore shifting the corporate culture from being competitive to being cooperative is no a small undertaking and will require changes at all levels of the organization.

The second hurdle that needs to be considered when planning to implement groupware is the potential lack of interoperability/compatibility. Many groupware applications fail, because anyone who wanted use the system efficiently needed to have the same technology in place, otherwise it would not work. A good example is instant messaging (IM). The user can only use IM, when the other party is using the same system such as AOL IM or Yahoo. These compatibility issues lead to general wariness among customers, who in general wait to see what standard emerges and which technology becomes the most popular.

An alternative to groupware that allows similar functionalities and features has been and still is the intranet. Intranet is a technology that has been used by corporations for a much longer time than groupware and is focused on a less formal communication and the distribution of relatively unstructured information. Files and data uploaded to an intranet are not very well structured, the search capabilities might be limited and tracking of document changes is not as efficient as groupware solutions. In addition to that it is very hard to manage "simultaneous" work, as such extensive collaboration features are not very supported. The loose structure of the intranet allows to stimulate the creative use of corporate communications and the diffusion of knowledge. But at the same time



they are not designed to facilitate the management of data, documents, and document-centered transactions within a distributed environment as groupware solutions do.

In addition to that, groupware applications obey strict rules and produce precise types of results. But an intranet application, must allow for "accidental encounters and unpredictable outcomes". Accordingly, the application development tools associated with groupware are tightly integrated with the product itself and seem to be highly developed than those used with intranets. Intranet tools are typically generic, open, and unfocused.

There certainly are enough advantages as well as disadvantages when implementing groupware solutions, but at the same time, our constant technology development is taking away the location barriers, which allow us to work in much larger dimensions and without boundaries. In order to maintain the technological advantages we have and use them efficiently for business opportunities, corporations are forced to implement systems that allow an easy, fast and efficient way in getting the work done, staying in touch with employees, business partners and contractors all over the world. Keep corporations more organized and unified in this global business environment is one of the biggest tasks managers have to face and only groupware systems provide a solution to this dilemma. A solution that allows employees to collaborate on information, ideas, and many other facets of their work and allow them to be more effective, productive, and organized. Much research has been done and shown that if efforts of each individual in an organization are combined, the greater the achievements will be and the more success the organization will have in the long run.

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About Stealth - ISS® Inc.

Stealth - ISS®, headquartered in Tampa, FL., is a privately owned Information Technology security consulting company with main focus on regulatory compliance, security integration, security consulting and managed security services for both government and commercial customers.

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About the Author

Dasha Deckwerth is the CEO at Stealth - ISS, with extensive experience in international business and computer security. Prior to her position as CEO, Dasha had gained extensive international business experience in various European, Asian and Central American countries and later became the VP of Marketing and Business Development at Stealth - ISS® in Berlin, Germany. She also worked on several projects as security and regulatory compliance consultant in the commercial sector as well as for various NATO countries and government agencies. Dasha's current focus includes managed data center services, knowledge management, regulatory compliance applications and services and security implementations and consulting. Mrs. Deckwerth holds a B.A. in International Relations and Foreign Affairs from Eckerd College, is currently pursuing an MBA in IT Management from Touro University and speaks six languages.