



CollabraSpace Builds Collaboration Structures

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Management Summary

As your business grows, it changes from a village into a country. Whether you add branch offices or partnerships, there are suddenly issues of immigration and emigration. Local congeniality, when exported, takes on the trappings of diplomacy. The problem of keeping everyone in sync - without tying them up in meetings - becomes harder and harder to solve. One good way to address this problem is by means of various technologies classified as *collaboration* – but what collaboration means can vary widely. It can mean everything from sharing ideas, to more traditional workflow processes and business reporting, to the wide-open world of *Wikis*, web sites where every visitor is an editor. Technology has also given us various modes (audio, video, email, IM, chat) with which to collaborate, shared spaces in which to use them, and the presence awareness to manage the intrusiveness of all these possibilities.

Collaboration, in a business context, is more constrained than collaboration for pleasure or diversion. For business, collaboration must be targeted, effective, and auditable. It also must be consistent with organizational and cultural parameters. Business – indeed, any human organization – inevitably has an undercurrent of politics, well characterized by Lewis Carroll’s “ambition, distraction, uglification, and derision.” The veneer of civilized behavior that covers these murky depths may be thick enough so that it can be ignored by policymakers as a local problem. However, when you are building collaborative structures to foster productivity, you had better include business security as an underlying component, for the tools of collaboration also offer hostility vast new environments in which to inject politics into process.

CollabraSpace, Inc., based in Annapolis, MD, was started to enhance workflow with collaborative capabilities – or, as Chief Operating Officer Shawn Davis says, “To bring collaboration to the data.” It has been working with the U.S. Department of Defense, mediating information exchange between security-conscious organizations, and its *CollabraSuite* has been extensively used by army units in Iraq. CollabraSpace provides the variety of secure spaces and collaboration accessories needed to satisfy both the need for hierarchical reporting and for *ad hoc*, peer-to-peer collaboration. Granular audit trails are kept – down to the strokes on a whiteboard. Its *Java* environment is lightweight and enhances enterprises security. As the system is browser based, up-front costs are low, and geographic dispersion is very well supported. CollabraSpace also offers *J-Foundry*, a J2EE Development platform to use with applications that are not Web or Java based.

If this sounds like an architecture that could support your brave new enterprise, read on for the details.

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Pragmatic Considerations

Success in business comes not just from an optimized exchange of information, top notch supply chain systems, and scalable commerce support, but also by inspiring people to do difficult or improbable things (often a face-to-face thing); *and then, non-intrusively, making sure they stay on track.* This is where collaboration software comes in.

Consider your enterprise communication structures – how you use meetings now, and how you would like to use them if they could be virtual. Consider your culture – are you report readers, or do you need the visual evidence of buy in or dismissive gesture, and the reality check of dialog to accomplish your business goals at less risk? How much of your job is the analysis well presented in reports, and how much is inspiration, where reports often fall short? Consider how you could use collaboration, as both a workflow assist and as an enterprise assist.

The CollabraSpace Environment

CollabraSpace permits a hierarchy of environments, from campuses (usually defined by organizational boundaries) down to buildings, floors and rooms, which may be owned by an individual person. Each of these environments can be equipped with file cabinets holding documents and links to other applications. Each space can negotiate with others to collaborate, and can be locked and unlocked by their owners. Individuals who participate in a CollabraSpace environment have a briefcase, whose contents are private, until s/he chooses to share them.

For the traditionally regimented or the highly-distributed enterprise, what makes collaboration work well is the defined and secure structure of these spaces. In the enterprise, the structure of collaboration, not the modes themselves, is what will support horizontal collaboration by peers, organizational (vertical) reporting and discussions, and the diplomatic negotiations between business units and partners where a neutral territory with negotiated and auditable capabilities is needed. **CollabraSuite can also be used for ad hoc collaboration, but its use is more targeted at facilitating the functioning of the organization as a whole, not just the sum of**

its operational processes.

The CollabraSuite Solution

CollabraSpace offers a variety of collaborative structures and connective modes as portlets on a browser. This allows companies to start small, perhaps with a single business process or application, and add components as needed, and processes as desired. It allows the collaborative structures to be designed for the role, rather than the location. It incurs fewer start-up costs than a thick-client kind of solution, and incurs fewer security exposures.

CollabraSuite is the basic tool set. It was recently certified by the Joint Interoperability Test Command for inclusion in the Defense Collaboration Tool Suite. It features the following collaboration modes:

- **Document storage and retrieval**
- **Instant Messaging** (public, private, directed and sidebar sessions with users from multiple locations). This IM system includes the ability to push URLs and launch whiteboards.
- **Audio/video and Web conferencing capabilities**, which can include information about participants and desktop application casting, where users can share all or a portion of their desktop with multiple users.
- **Whiteboards**, with tabs to support simultaneous work on multiple images. The presence awareness allows the whiteboards to identify lurkers as well as active participants – and to generate an audit trail of annotations and who made them.

It includes the essential amenities of:

- presence awareness,
- navigation,
- paging, and
- online user display

Basic CollabraSuite Elements

Rooms

Rooms are the most granular building blocks of the CollabraSuite environment. Each room has the following element options:

- A list of room occupants
- Access to detailed information about the occupants
- Audio conferencing
- Audio/video conferencing
- A chat screen
- A page viewer
- A white board
- A paging button
- A phone button
- A file cabinet for room-specific resources.

File Cabinet

The File Cabinet in each room provides secure read and write access to its contents. It also provides revision control, change history and change notification, comprising a complete documentation of its use.

Briefcases

Briefcases, as mentioned above, provide users with private storage. They are also the means by which users can take information privately from one room to another, adding an element of discretion that is sometimes missing in collaborative environments.

J-Foundry

For enterprise legacy applications that are neither Java nor Web-based (CollabraSpace can work with Microsoft *Share Point*, for instance), some integration is necessary. *J-Foundry* is a model driven application development environment that includes reusable software modules and a source code tree. It may be just what you need to modernize the human side of legacy processes that must be maintained. CollabraSpace is a select partner of BEA Systems¹. For custom implementations, it also partners with CACI², and Engineering Systems Solutions³.

Sizing the Environment and pricing options

The number of concurrent users determines how many servers you need; this is a scale-out,

J2EE environment. CollabraSpace software is priced by the number of processors on which it is run.

CollabraSpace software runs on Sun's *Solaris*, *Linux* on Intel, Microsoft's *Windows NT 4.0/2000*, *98*, *95*, and *ME*, IBM's *AIX*, SGI's *IRIX*, HP's *HP-UX* and *Tru64 UNIX*, and Apple's *Mac OS X*.

Moving into commercial space

CollabraSpace has designed spaces to suit a variety of government organizations. With its move into commercial accounts, it is gaining the experience to deliver repeatable, industry-specific solutions. There will be many interesting chapters to come in this story.

Conclusion

Many vendors offer collaborative tools. CollabraSpace adds the definition of a hierarchy of spaces to deliver a more complete solution, transcending the office environment to encompass a vaster complexity of organization. It offers the ability to collaborate within the context of an application, and within the context of a business.

Technology can be pervasive, but people cannot be. Solutions – such as the ones CollabraSpace offers - give enterprise the opportunity to rethink how and where people can be useful to the business, as well as to business processes. It offers people the ability to work with sufficient corroborative context, no matter where they are.

Now is the time to start thinking about how to use our human assets more wisely, as well as out information. Proper use of collaboration is going to be a key strategy in the growth phase that most enterprises hope to enjoy. If the freewheeling nature of Wikis and other loosely regulated forms of collaboration leave you uneasy, take a look at CollabraSpace.



¹ www.bea.com

² www.caci.com

³ www.essworld.net

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