User Adoption Strategies (2nd Edition)
Shifting Second Wave People to New Collaboration Technology
“Michael’s ideas on user adoption are action-oriented: learn by doing, learn now and fast. There is very little abstract ‘consultant speak’ about the importance of collaboration. An idea of his I like a lot is ‘Facilitated Group Re-Imagining.’ It’s easier than it sounds! It means getting groups or teams together to discover how they work today, then define—with them—how they can work in the new collaboration context. This lets teams define their way of working together. Getting an intact group to agree on working in a different way is critical to success.”

Jane McConnell
Intranet and Portal Strategist, NetJMC
France
www.netjmc.com

“Michael has been a ‘collaboration strategist’ for 15 years—well before ‘workplace collaboration’ entered mainstream business vernacular. All his thoroughly researched, expertly written, and accessible books and articles attest to his deep experience and abiding interest in effective team work and the various technologies produced over the last decade or so to support collaboration. In this latest publication, Michael focuses on the user—the key to achieving success from collaboration technologies, regardless of the product. Providing a wealth of insight and guidance, User Adoption Strategies is a must-read for anyone planning a technology implementation or seeking practical means of helping users make effective use of today’s technologies to improve their workplace collaboration.”

Lynn Warneke
Information Management & SharePoint Consultant
Melbourne, Australia
au.linkedin.com/in/lwarneke

“Michael’s book provides a comprehensive toolkit which you can put to good use when you need to get people to use the new stuff you have developed. Obviously the book is centred around online tools, but most of the approaches work equally well with many other kinds of projects—and not only things online. Michael has written a book for everyone who is working with change management and adoption. Whether you’re an experienced change agent or you’re coming to terms with your first project, I’m sure that you will find many useful tips and strategic approaches, and that you’ll find yourself reaching for the book again and again.”

Martin Risgaard Rasmussen
Application Consultant, Grundfos Holding A/S
Denmark
www.linkedin.com/in/martinrisgaard
"Michael Sampson’s book *User Adoption Strategies* is a must-read. In it, he compellingly outlines the need for behavioural change if collaboration tools are going to succeed within organisations, and provides a simple four-stage model for planning this transformation. Most importantly, he outlines 20 different change strategies that can be applied to gain adoption of collaboration tools. These range from quick-and-easy activities to major enterprise initiatives; all are worth considering. This is a masterwork, and it highlights what organisations must do to make collaboration tools work.”

James Robertson
Managing Director, Step Two Designs
www.steptwo.com.au

“What I enjoyed most from the book is the way Michael explains these strategies. Not only do you get to know how they work, but also when to apply them (in which situation), and why they actually help you. All this is written in very understandable language filled with lots of examples, making it easy for you to grasp the concepts immediately. While reading, a few times I thought ‘why didn’t I think about this before?’ These aren’t complex frameworks for which you need to read and think a lot beforehand to understand them, and neither does it take a lot of time to apply them.”

Rene Modery
Web Program Manager
www.modery.net

“Although most of us work on the technology end of collaborative software, we almost always get involved in the discussions surrounding the age-old question ... ‘Why aren’t people using <insert-vendor-software-name-here>?’ The easy knee-jerk answer (and one I’ve used a number of times myself) is that it’s not the technology, it’s the culture. While true at a certain level, there’s so much more behind getting people to adopt collaborative software so that it delivers on the promises that were made. Michael Sampson, a well-known expert on the topic of collaboration, dives deeply into what makes for successful user adoption in his book *User Adoption Strategies: Shifting Second Wave People to New Collaboration Technology*. This should be one of the first books that is read and studied before launching your SharePoint/Connections/etc. rollout. And since the book is vendor-agnostic, it really doesn’t matter what platform you’re rolling out. These problems are common to all of them.”

Thomas Duff
Developer, Regence
www.duffbert.com
User Adoption Strategies
(2nd Edition)

Shifting Second Wave People to New Collaboration Technology

Michael Sampson
Foreword—by Nancy White, Full Circle Associates

Collaboration shouldn’t be an elusive practice. We recognise we can and must work together. We recognise that technology has changed what it means to work together, both when we are in the same place or scattered across the globe. We have the business imperatives. We have the technology. Yet why does it remain so hard?

Let me tell you a story.

A research organisation had a support team who recognised early on the possibilities of the use of social media for their scientists. So they installed blog and wiki software, created training sessions and thought that it would be a quick and obvious adoption. It was SO clear to these smart individuals. Their scientists were clever. Easy.

Not so. After some missteps, the team changed their strategy. They were not scientists. They needed the scientists to define the rules of the game. Instead of training sessions, they convened conversations about research, not about social media. As real collaboration needs surfaced, they offered suggestions and experiments between them. The technology folks created prototypes for experimentation, taking a page from the very practices the scientists used on a daily basis. Prototypes were set up, feedback offered and applied and tools and practices subsequently adjusted.

What happened? Practices to enhance collaborative research emerged. They just happened to use technology as part of the process. The scientists did science, not “blog and wiki” classes that they felt were a waste of time.

To follow up, the technology team readjusted their roles to stewarding the technology—keeping an eye on how the scientists were using the tools, making adjustments and looking out for new options. They were careful not to define the conversation, instead listening and contributing. They lived the words Michael shares with us on page 249, "Go! Learn! Adjust! And then go some more!"

Instead of training sessions, they convened conversations about research, not about social media. As real collaboration needs surfaced, they offered suggestions and experiments between them. The technology folks created prototypes for experimentation, taking a page from the very practices the scientists used on a daily basis.

Through the process these “technology stewards” redefined their roles. What about the scientists? Think about it. Are scientists “second wave adopters?” In reality, the scientists are first wave adopters in their fields of research, but second wave technology adopters. It took
seeing the collaboration from their context to bring them on board, but without making them feel like second-class citizens and by respecting their way of working.

I'm attracted to the idea of second wave adopters—that large group of people Everett Rogers writes about in *Diffusion of Innovations*. They are the people who are out there getting work done. If we as leaders are about creating the conditions for that work to happen, then this should be a group we pay attention to and support. When we did our research about technology for communities of practice for our book *Digital Habitats: Stewarding Technology for Communities*, we recognised that people use technology creatively, often in ways the designers or IT never expected. We realised there is a role that is different from IT, a role that requires both knowledge of technology and knowledge of the people. In this dynamic interplay, we have the issue of technology adoption.

Waves are funny things. Think of ocean waves. They go up and down, they can be gentle or pound us into the sand. Just when we think we have their rhythm, the next wave changes and surprises us. The key is staying alert, knowing how to swim, and being ready for the unexpected.

Michael Sampson is about to take you surfing on the ocean of collaboration technology adoption. In clear, practical language, he offers us insights that can reduce the pain and increase the benefits of collaboration software adoption. Come on, catch the wave!

Nancy White
Full Circle Associates, [www.fullcirc.com](http://www.fullcirc.com)
Author, *Digital Habitats: Stewarding Technology for Communities*, with Etienne Wenger and John D. Smith
Chapter 1.
Focusing on User Adoption is Critical

Adoption can be hard ... particularly with broad-brushed tools that can do so much.¹

Scott Jamison, Jornada

The world is filled with groovy technology to support people working together. There’s no shortage of it. During the decade that I tracked all new product and service announcements in the “collaboration” space, hardly a day went by without at least one existing vendor releasing new features, if not a new entrant vendor making a splash on the global stage. My contention is that the technology to support collaboration is no longer the limiting factor. User adoption is.

In this chapter, we will:

1. Consider the evidence on the importance of user adoption

2. Contemplate the cost and risk of not developing a user adoption approach for your organisation.

3. Define the term “user adoption strategies” and its derivatives, as used in this book.

4. Learn the difference between first and second wave people.
The “Why” of User Adoption Strategies

The user adoption “problem” is a refrain I hear all over the world when I’m working with organisations on collaboration strategy—in Singapore, in Australia, in the United States, in Europe, and yes, even in my home country of New Zealand. But it’s not just what I’m hearing. There is growing agreement among multiple groups of people involved with collaboration technology—the vendors, the consultants, the internal evangelists, the end-user organisations—that an intentional focus on user adoption is essential. I’d go as far as saying that many are coming to the view that this is the main game.

The basic thinking goes like this:

- It is important to choose the right collaboration technology for your group, organisation or community—not too much to confuse them, and not too little to annoy them. For this you need to know certain things (e.g. how the people within the target group work), you need to get various things right (e.g. vendor selection, risk mitigation, and technology integration), and you need to have the right people in place to make it work well (e.g. business-focused IT administrators). I talk about this in depth in Collaboration Roadmap.

- There will be a group of people in any organisation who quickly and actively embrace the new collaboration technology. These are people we have traditionally called “early adopters,” but in this book are called “first wavers.” They are the people for whom getting to use the new technology is sufficient reward to experiment and try things out. They don’t need someone else to actively advocate how new technology will help them, make their lives better, or be better than the current technologies they are using today—they’re able to intuit it for themselves.

- There are only a few first wave adopters within any group, organisation or community. Getting beyond them to the second wave adopters is essential to driving better business performance. This is because second wave people are carrying out vital business activities, there are many more of them numerically within any group, organisation or community, and as a consequence they have a much greater impact on business performance.

- Second wave people, however, are different from first wave people. They don’t easily make the intuitive leap from what the technology does to how they could use it to do their work better; they need help from others to adopt new ways of working.
This book is about how to help second wave people do this.

**User Adoption Problems in SharePoint Land**

I have done a lot of work with SharePoint during the past six years, resulting in two SharePoint-focused books. One of the problems I have frequently observed involves the “IT-department-led” implementation of SharePoint. This isn’t a problem with the technology of SharePoint as such, but rather a problem of how specific organisations approach the use and adoption of SharePoint.

By the time IT professionals have SharePoint ready to go for everyone else, they have forgotten the pain and frustration they experienced when learning SharePoint. In addition, while SharePoint is “the job” for IT professionals, it’s definitely not the job for business end users. Business end users have a job to accomplish, and SharePoint is merely a means to an end. These factors create two problems for IT professionals when working with business users on SharePoint adoption:

1. They think all business users know what they know—SharePoint has become second nature to them, and they can’t understand the “big deal” users are making about changing their work and embracing SharePoint.

2. They don’t share a common motivation or language with the business users, and so talk at cross-purposes. Both sets of people may be speaking English (or French, or German, or Danish), but for all intents and purposes, there is no common ground on which a conversation can be held.

Again, this isn’t a technology problem—it can happen regardless of the specific collaboration technology your organisation embraces. The problem is the approach taken by the organisation (or part of it), and its effects can be very damaging.

Other people who work with organisations on SharePoint have commented on the same phenomena. For example:

Lee Reed frequently presents on the user adoption challenge with SharePoint at conferences and events in the United States.² Lee says, *Oftentimes, SharePoint is rolled out with great fanfare and is lauded as a fantastic solution to a huge number of business challenges. “We’re transforming our organisation through collaboration,” the mass e-mail notification might say. Well, your users have*
Chapter 1

Focusing on User Adoption is Critical

heard that before, haven’t they? Users have a hard time believing such pontifications, and their skepticism can quickly undermine any efforts to roll out SharePoint.

Kim Lund from Mindsharp wrote a blog post in late 2009 entitled *How to Increase SharePoint End User Adoption*. Kim writes, *If you find that user adoption of SharePoint is avoided or slower than anticipated in your working environment, you are not alone. Many students that I have trained, consulted [with], and listened to have expressed their pain points for SharePoint adoption.*

Clare Stone from Pentalogic Technology wrote a white paper on barriers to end user adoption on SharePoint in October 2009. Clare starts the white paper with this statement: *It’s easy to deploy an application like SharePoint within an organisation; the hard part is getting people to use it in a way which makes them more productive.* Many people I talk with disagree that deploying SharePoint is “easy,” but fully agree that user adoption is the “hard part.”

Various research reports on SharePoint during 2011 also highlighted the same issue—adoption is a major challenge.

**User Adoption Problems with Collaboration Technology**

I wrote above that many people are coming to see that an intentional focus on user adoption is essential. While it’s definitely a problem for organisations with SharePoint, it’s not exclusively a SharePoint problem. For example:

Socialtext ([www.socialtext.com](http://www.socialtext.com)), an enterprise collaboration software and professional services company, released a white paper on user adoption in 2009. In the opening section, the white paper states: *The success or failure of any social software solution ... is a direct result of its adoption rate .... There are plenty of examples of failed social software projects. Why did they fail? Because they were not embraced by users.*

NewsGator ([www.newsgator.com](http://www.newsgator.com)), a software company focused on enterprise social computing extensions for SharePoint, also released a white paper on user adoption in 2009. In the opening remarks, NewsGator says: *This paper presents a model for proactive analysis that should be undertaken prior to or during the early phases of deploying an enterprise social computing initiative. Investing the time and effort to complete the analysis should greatly increase the opportunity for successful adoption and active ongoing participation.* In other words, how you approach social software in the enterprise has a big impact on adoption.
The UC View published an article I wrote on user adoption and Lotus Connections in April 2009. I started with, *Increasing user adoption is a common challenge for organisations that introduce collaboration and social software tools such as IBM Lotus Connections. Administrators often find it difficult to teach business users how new tools can help them in their work. People are busy, and in today's economic maelstrom, people are scared. In such times, the safe approach is to stay with what you know given the inherent productivity and efficiency of this option.*

**User Adoption Problems with Other Technologies**

Vendors outside the collaboration camp are also advocating the importance of user adoption, thereby illustrating that it's a broad and general issue.

- In a March 2005 white paper from Business Intelligence (BI) vendor Business Objects, the author writes: *A typical BI project has a return on investment (ROI) of 430%—assuming proper implementation and organisation-wide user adoption. Failure to achieve user adoption results in missed deadlines and compromised business performance. Despite today's pressures, proactive organisations with an eye to business advantage can enjoy unprecedented benefits. New thinking suggests that user adoption is a key determinant of success.*

- In late 2010, a study from IBM and MIT commented on the difficulties with gaining acceptance of business analytics inside organisations, and pointed the finger at user adoption issues. *Business analytics is atop most companies' apps wish lists. The business goal, of course, is to make sense of the enormous amount of data and information housed in their servers—and stop making critical decisions from the gut. The problem, however, is that the adoption of analytics is being hindered not by technology but by age-old people problems: change management and cultural resistance.* The research cited four main obstacles to widespread adoption: lack of understanding of how to use analytics to improve the business, lack of bandwidth due to competing priorities, lack of skills internally in the line of business, and an existing culture that does not encourage the sharing of information.

This book does not contextualise user adoption within these other areas, but the approach and strategies outlined in the book can be applied to mitigate the problems noted above.
What’s Going On?

Why all this discussion and interest in user adoption strategies? Here’s what I see:

- **The technology is easy to buy and install.** It’s easy to get the latest and greatest technology; it’s fairly cheap, it’s widely accessible, and it’s available from many different vendors. When Nicholas Carr said that IT doesn’t matter, part of his argument was that the widespread availability of mature technology to any purchaser eliminates opportunities for competitive differentiation. It’s not the IT that matters—it’s what you do with it.

- **“Just because” isn’t enough.** Having “cool” stuff is directly appealing to some people, and unappealing to others. Even the latest and greatest SharePoint or Enterprise 2.0 technology lacks the punch required to get everyone to shift “just because.” Something more—an intentional approach to encouraging user adoption—is required.

What’s the Cost of Not Doing It?

Have you heard the saying, “Hope is not a strategy”? Unfortunately, hope is the “strategy” in which many organisations put their trust when rolling out new collaboration technology. The IT department builds it, makes it available, and then “hopes” that the target people in the organisation will make good use of it. While hope is not an upfront strategy, it’s a frequently embraced surrogate.

What’s the cost of embracing this surrogate approach? Consider the following three stages:

- The IT department at your organisation decides a new piece of collaboration technology would be a good idea.
- The IT department goes out and purchases what they think is needed, and gets it installed, configured, and ready to go.
- The CIO sends out a one-time email to everyone in the organisation, saying “The new kit is available; go for it.”

What’s going to happen? In 99% of instances, a big fat nothing. There has been no communication or expectation setting about where the new tool should be used, nor how much, nor what it’s designed to replace. No stories have been told about the benefits people and teams will receive by using the new tool—neither exemplar stories from within your organisation, nor real-to-life scenarios that have been
developed to communicate context and prospect. And there is no cultivation of a movement among the staff to reinforce the validity and potential of the new tool. The CIO’s email is going to fall flat. End of story!

What are the costs of this?

1. Waste of money, time, and effort from IT in discovering, learning and deploying the new tool. In a large organisation, this could range from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars wasted. In light of today’s economic realities, few organisations have the freedom to do this.

2. Further erosion of the trust and partnership between the IT department and the rest of the business. In too many organisations, IT is already seen as the “business prevention department.” Failure in collaboration technology initiatives represent further strikes against this trust and partnership.

**Low Adoption is Costly**

One way to understand the cost of not doing any intentional work around user adoption is to include it in your financial models! Do a sensitivity analysis on the impact of less than perfect user adoption. In a recent blog post, Jason Whitehead wrote:

> ... most business cases assume 100% user adoption and ignore the impact low levels of adoption have on return on investment (ROI). As you know, benefits are only realised if your people actually use the system consistently and effectively. Unless you currently have full and effective adoption of your existing systems, it is naïve to think that you will achieve 100% adoption of your new systems.

> To account for less than perfect user adoption, you need to examine how different adoption levels affect your business case. If you find that the projected ROI no longer makes sense you can either scrap the project or determine what additional resources and effort is required to increase adoption to the point that it will deliver an acceptable ROI.  

What’s the benefit of doing this sensitivity analysis? You will gain a very clear picture about the importance of user adoption in a language that senior executives can understand. This will be of great benefit to you in advocating for the kind of intentional user adoption work proposed in this book.
Looking at the cost of low adoption from another angle, consider an organisation of 1,200 employees embarking on the collaboration journey. The technology costs $200 per employee, and the decision is to license it for everyone immediately, and then run a pilot program for 6 months with 400 staff. These 400 staff receive training and encouragement to use the new approach (at $300 each). Twelve months later, only 200 people are using the technology, and then only in a half-hearted way. Of the $360,000 out-of-pocket expenditure, $260,000 has been wasted.

The failure to adopt new collaboration technology and ways of working results in wasted expenditure, missed opportunities, and a low chance of achieving the initial vision that drove the investment in the first place. User adoption is critical to success.
There is a third way that adoption is costly too: it creates a littered landscape of poorly-adopted tools. One team uses Yammer. Another team uses SharePoint, plus a bit of Basecamp for working with external parties. A third team uses LotusLive. A fourth uses another tool. This situation has many negative implications, such as confusion among staff about what tool to use, high ongoing licensing fees payable to vendors, high internal support costs due to the burden of supporting so many tools, difficulties in delivering training, and severe challenges when on-boarding a new employee. There is no “way we do things around here,” but rather an incoherent collection of tools used by specific teams for specific purposes. Complexity reigns.

User Adoption Strategies—The What

In the first half of this chapter, I set the background on the user adoption challenge and its importance. In order to be clear on what we are talking about with user adoption strategies, this section defines three ways this book uses the phrase and its derivatives.

The collective phrase “User Adoption Strategies” refers to a grouping of individual strategies that an organisation can use to encourage people to start using a new collaboration technology. In this sense it’s the global term to refer to all available strategies for user adoption.

A “User Adoption Strategy” is a single self-contained way of encouraging people to start using a new collaboration technology—for example, the Real-to-Life Scenarios strategy, is a “user adoption strategy.” When I profile a particular user adoption strategy in chapters 6-9, the strategy includes a name, a description, and instructions about when the strategy can best be applied within the process of user adoption work.

A “User Adoption Approach” refers to the intentional plan developed by a specific organisation to encourage the process of user adoption by a specific group or set of groups. Either one user adoption strategy or multiple user adoption strategies will be embraced within the User Adoption Approach. The approach should be contained in a document of some form, although the document is intended to convey a shared agreement and commitment from a group of people within the organisation about the user adoption approach.

Second Wave People

The term “second wave” is used throughout this book, and “second wave people” are the intended audience for your user adoption work. They are your target market. Let’s examine what second wave people are like.
“Second wave people” or “second wavers” represent the largest body of people in a group, community or organisation. They are generally the ones who have to use the new collaboration technology as it’s given, rather than having any direct input into what it is and how it could be used. They are very different from “first wave people”—the early adopters of anything new, the advocates, the champions, the enthusiasts. First wavers are more at peace with change, permissive of chaos, unfazed by ambiguity, and actually derive enjoyment from figuring something out. As I said, they are very different from second wave people!

Here are the differences between first and second wave people, differences which form the fabric within which the advice in this book is given. Think of these differences as “ideal-type hallmarks.” Not all of them will apply to every individual in the two waves, but if you see more than two in a given person, then it’s likely they are a second waver.

- **What-why reversal.** A first wave person is attracted to the “what” of the new collaboration technology, but may struggle to articulate the “why”—the future oriented picture—to other people. They may “get it” implicitly, but struggle to put it into words. A second wave person gets the “why” (if it’s conveyed in terms of their work), but will need help with the “what.”

- **Different reference groups.** A first wave person sees their use of the tool within a self-created reference group, usually outside of their organisation. A second wave person sees their own work, and the use of tools contextualised within an internal reference group.

- **Different rewards.** Getting to use new tools is reward enough for first wavers, but second wavers have to understand where and how the new tools will improve their current work.

- **Speed of adoption.** First wavers will quickly embrace new tools, and will learn how to do so through trial-and-error. Second wavers need greater external help and handholding to successfully make the transition from current tools and approaches to work.

- **Nature of involvement.** First wavers have a high degree of involvement in defining what could be done, what should be done, and how to do it. Second wavers are generally expected to follow along and do what they’re told.

- **Dealing with the old.** First wavers will be quick to call the old stuff "dead" and will want to move away from it as quickly as possible. Second wavers want to embrace new things within the context of what they already know and have.


- *It is their job vs. It could be used for their job.* First wave people often have an organisational responsibility to try out new things, and see what could be useful to the way work gets done. It’s part of their job to explore the new. For second wavers, they actually have a “real job” to do—that’s how they describe it—and the specific technology to enable interaction and collaboration is, at best, tolerated.

Note that second wavers won’t wear a badge proclaiming their membership in the Second Wave Adopter Club. Recognising them requires paying attention—looking out for the types of indicators I have listed above. Note, too, that although the book is focused on people in the second wave, the advice will also help people in the third and subsequent waves.

People sometimes ask how first wave people can influence or “preach to” the second wavers. The most effective way is to “live the message.” Once you have people in your organisations who are using the new tools as part of their day-to-day work, other people will see that. If the new tools and approaches are relevant to their work as well, they will be “brought into the fold.” Clearly this means the new system has to work, it has to show benefit compared to current ways of working, and it needs to become absorbed into the working approach of the organisation. People who are not in the early waves don’t want to invest time and effort learning a new system that lacks the capability to deliver on its promises.

The difference between first and second wave people is a key reason why deployments of collaboration technology driven by the IT department usually fail. Having people in the IT department actively using the new system doesn’t solve the user adoption problem. In fact, if it’s just the IT department that is actively using the new system, it is more likely to cause the user adoption problem. IT people are “abnormally profiled” in comparison to the rest of the organisation, and there can be quite a level of antagonism between IT and other groups. For user adoption to become less of a problem, you have to get beyond the IT department through engagement with business teams and groups. For more on business engagement, see Chapter 6 in my book *Collaboration Roadmap: You’ve Got the Technology—Now What?*

**“Users” or “Staff Members”**

A quick note on the use of the word “user” in this book. It’s been said that drug addicts and people who use computer software are the only two groups in society who go by the label “users.” While I don’t have a particular love for the use of the word “user,” other alternatives sound worse. We could talk about “staff members.” But then we’d have “Staff Member Adoption Strategies”—quite a mouthful. We could
talk more generally about “people,” but then we’d have “People Adoption Strategies.” That doesn’t work for the same reason. Let’s be clear though that the focus is on people who work inside the organisation—the employees, the staff members, the managers, and the executives. In short, “user adoption” is the best phrase we have.

**Summary**

This introductory chapter has laid the foundation for this book. We’ve talked through why an intentional focus on user adoption is important, and have considered the evidence that user adoption challenges are not limited to any one particular technology. It’s a broad-based problem. User adoption doesn’t happen by default, regardless of the technology involved.

This chapter also looked at three other issues. First, it addressed the cost of not taking the user adoption challenge seriously, and proposed one way of quantifying the financial impact of less than perfect user adoption. Second, it defined key terms that will be used throughout this book, such as “user adoption strategies,” “user adoption strategy,” and “user adoption approach.” Third, it provided insight into the difference between first wave and second wave people, the latter being the key focus of this book.

In Chapter 2 we turn our attention to the organisational context in which our work with user adoption takes place.
Chapter 4.
New Ways of Working

*Business data and business processes are unifying forces within the enterprise. By putting your new collaboration tools in the context of a business process or objective business measure, you can drive adoption across the entire spectrum of employees.*

*Joe Schueller, Cisco Systems*

There are hundreds of products that fall under the phrase of “collaboration technology.” Since we are focusing on user adoption of new collaboration technology and approaches for greater business benefit, it is helpful to have an understanding of the types of technologies that are available, and that set the context for our work. In this chapter, I will discuss common collaborative scenarios—the fundamental building blocks of technology-supported collaboration—and highlight new technologies for approaching each scenario.

In this chapter, we will:

- Learn about collaborative scenarios people do regularly.
- Consider current ways of approaching each collaborative scenario, and the problems that result.
- Look into new collaboration technology that can support existing scenarios in new ways, and the associated benefits.
Collaboration Scenarios

Various approaches can be taken when talking about the technology that is used to support collaboration. For example:

- You can differentiate by product groupings—such real-time interaction (presence and availability, instant messaging, and web conferencing), calendaring (enterprise, web-based, and mobile), team workspaces, and social collaboration (activity streams, rating, and commenting). Such a lens creates a differentiation based on accepted industry product areas.

- You can differentiate by intent—for teams that would be creating a shared place for joint access, location independence, and real-time joint editing and review, among others. This approach looks across different product groups to highlight the specific needs of a team, group, or organisation from the technology.

- You can differentiate by Collaboration Scenario—an approach that starts with the different collaborative activities people carry out as a regular part of their work, and then links those activities with particular types of technology. The technology is only considered in the context of the scenario.

This chapter takes the third approach.

Common Collaboration Scenarios

Among the many Collaboration Scenarios, common ones include:

- Managing a Team Project. When teams work together on a project—an initiative with a particular outcome, set membership, and definite end signal.

- Sharing Team and Organisational Updates. How different parts of the organisation are kept up-to-date with current happenings and future plans.

- Finding Expertise. When people need to locate others who have expertise or special knowledge in a particular topic or field.
Collaboratively Authoring Documents. When two or more people work on a document together—planning, drafting, writing, editing, and the final polishing.

Collaborative Idea Management. When many people have ideas on what could or should happen, and how those ideas are brought together for analysis.

Making Group Decisions. When many people are involved in forming decision options, evaluating the options, and making a decision.

Managing Meetings. When people meet to discuss ideas, make decisions, explore possibilities, and otherwise communicate "in the now." The scenario includes the pre-meeting planning activities, as well as the post-meeting follow-up.

Sharing Learning and Best Practices. When many people are doing similar work, and innovations in the work approach made by one person could benefit other people doing the same work.

Holding Discussions. When teams or groups discuss ideas, challenges, problems, and opportunities, with a view to exploring the boundaries of what’s known.

Individual Coherence. A special Collaboration Scenario that considers the impact of introducing new collaboration technology on an individual—how they track and coordinate everything they have to do.

Examining Collaboration Scenarios

In this chapter, we are going to focus on six of these scenarios:

1. Managing a Team Project.
2. Sharing Team and Organisational Updates.
3. Finding Expertise.
5. Collaborative Idea Management.

The chapter concludes with a brief look at three other scenarios: holding meetings, requesting feedback, and sharing best practices.

**Managing a Team Project**

Email is the most commonly used collaboration technology today. It’s the most common tool people use to collaborate on team projects—discussing issues, checking up on timeframes, swapping documents. But email is not ideally suited to managing team projects, for a variety of reasons:

- **Document Chaos.** When co-authoring a document, no one is sure if they are working on the most recent edition, and someone has to bring together all the suggested changes to create a new master copy. It’s messy, error-prone, and takes far too long.

- **Versioning Chaos.** When Jim is looking for a particular document or spreadsheet, how does he know whether the copy on his desktop, in the file folder, or one of multiple copies in his email inbox is the most current version? Basically he doesn’t. It’s a wild guess.

- **Communication Chaos.** Using email for conversations leads to chaos. Although modern email clients offer the ability to show related messages in a thread, threading is not sufficient to give a proper and natural ordering of email messages when many people are conversing on an issue over a multi-day or multi-week timeframe. Messages will be sent and received out of order. Some team members will respond to earlier messages in the thread, not the latest one. They’re not trying to be malicious (in most cases)—they’re trying to contribute—but since their contributions are handled via email and not a more appropriate tool, they contribute to conversation confusion.37

What can be done? Many organisations are experimenting with collaboration sites for team projects—Microsoft SharePoint, Lotus Quickr, and Central Desktop (see Figure 4-1), among others. A change of collaboration technology introduces changes to the way work is done:

- People switch to the collaboration site, and stop using email for the communication, collaboration and coordination work of the team project. The big idea with a collaboration site is that all of the documents, conversations, meetings, and tasks related to the project are brought together in a single application, instead of being separated across several different applications.
• Documents are stored in the team site, and not emailed around. All work on a document, spreadsheet or presentation is done out of the collaboration site; people don’t work any more with local copies. That means a document is opened directly from the collaboration site, and after the changes have been made, it is saved directly back into the collaboration site.

• Communication and discussion happens in a discussion area within the collaboration site, rather than in email. This can be quite a big change for people, because discussions no longer come through to their BlackBerries and iPhones. Although the discussion can be much easier to follow, there is a single version of the truth, and no one has to keep their own copy of the discussion.

• The coordination around the team project happens within the collaboration site. Tasks are created and assigned to people. Meetings are scheduled, and held. Project time lines are shared, and updated.

• People can be easily added to and removed from the collaboration site, to accommodate changing project membership. New project team members can quickly review what’s been happening in the project, and examine the current status of its different aspects.
Figure 4-1. Central Desktop for Managing Team Projects

Central Desktop’s cloud-based collaboration platform, SocialBridge, connects people and information in the cloud, making it possible to manage projects, share files, combine knowledge, inspire ideas, and more. See www.centraldesktop.com for more.
Chapter 4  New Ways of Working

Sharing Team and Organisational Updates

Keeping everyone on the same page, whether it be in a team, a department or across the entire organisation, is a major communications job. The act of getting the message out is just one small part of the overall process; ensuring that people understand the message, and can then change to work in a different way are much bigger aspects.

The most common approach to sharing updates across a group of people is email blasts.

- A project leader sends out a weekly project status update email to all team members, with the message in the body of the email along with an attachment for them to read (probably a new version of the dreaded project plan). The project leader knows that she’ll have to deal with at least one person in the coming days who is working off the wrong project plan.

- A departmental manager writes a fortnightly email to everyone in his department, explaining senior management’s current top priorities, and outlining where he’ll be in the coming weeks. In inviting comments and feedback, he knows that a few people will ask the same question, but he’s become used to copying-and-pasting from previous emails so as to save time.

In keeping with our focus on changing work practice, each of these areas can be revamped given new collaboration technologies. For example, a blog could be used in both instances to facilitate the same process of communicating, but in a different way:

- The project leader would post her weekly update on the team’s blog, and everyone on the team would know where to find the current edition of the project plan. In that respect, the project plan changes from being a “file” that has to be downloaded and reviewed, and becomes a web page in the team’s collaboration site that is always up-to-date with the latest information. There is no more searching or calling around to find the current plan.

- The departmental manager changes his work practice and now writes a regular blog on his departmental intranet site. Rather than merely restating what management have been talking about, he is able to link to the blog posts from his seniors, in order to give his people access to the source message. He is then able to add his interpretation of the message for his people. Through the comment function on the blog, people within the department are able to ask questions and provide their feedback directly, without having to send private emails. Everyone in the department is able to see the questions that have already been asked, as well as the responses that have been given. They can seek further clarification on particular topics if something remains unclear, or put their energy into asking a different question.
Figure 4-2. Sharing Team and Organisational Updates via a Blog

Blogs provide a way of sharing updates within a team or group. People can request that updates are pushed to them (via a subscription), and are able to leave comments for the original author and other blog readers to see.
A law firm used a blog to replace its monthly inside newsletter. One benefit they quickly discovered was the faster “time-to-market” for newsletter articles, which no longer sat around for weeks on end before being released. A second benefit was that management developed a more natural and informal “voice” for staff communications.

**Finding Expertise**

How do you find experts within your organisation? For many it’s a hit and miss endeavor. You know someone, who knows someone, who knows someone, and eventually you get linked up to ask the question. But sometimes it takes too long, and the customer on the other end of the phone isn’t getting the answer they want. Or it does sort-of work. You get through to someone who is apparently the expert, but they can’t understand what you are trying to say. Unfortunately this work practice is all too common in organisations today, leading to lost opportunities, disappointed customers, and much wasted time.

With new collaboration technologies, locating experts can be done in a different way—through a different work practice.

- People have a profile within the collaboration technology, where they describe what they see as their areas of expertise—such as strategic analysis, financial projections, facilitating group discussions, or automotive industry analysis. Other people are able to browse through the profiles and expertise areas, to see who has expertise and experience in a particular area.

- When looking at a profile, there are links to the person’s current work projects, some recent blog posts, and some items they have posted in discussion forums. Before you make contact, you are able to read the source material and evaluate for yourself their expertise.

- Once you have found the person you want to speak with, embedded presence information tells you if they are currently online and available for interaction. If they are not available, through a link to their electronic calendar, you can see where they are and when they expect to be back.

- Newer expertise profile systems also highlight areas in which the other person has a common interest to you, and lists people that both of you know. The point of this is to convey their trustworthiness, put the person in a wider social context, and to suggest some topics to talk about when making contact with the other person for the first time.
There has been a lot of recent vendor activity around expertise profiles. For example, IBM includes these capabilities in IBM Connections.

**Figure 4-3. Discovering and Evaluating Experts via Profiles**

IBM Connections includes a personal profile page for each person, which displays key information about their work and areas of contribution. Contact information is also displayed, to speed time-to-contact. See [www.ibm.com/lotus/connections](http://www.ibm.com/lotus/connections).
The profile part of IBM Connections started life as an internal system at IBM to help people find experts—it was called BluePages. One of the enduring challenges with expertise profiles is that asking people to manually keep their profile up-to-date doesn’t work, and secondly, the experts in the organisation may not want to be found because of the extra requests for assistance they’ll receive. IBM found that having ways for experts to share their knowledge through non-real-time means made the adoption challenge much easier:

*Once we gave Contributors the choice about how to share their knowledge and experience, we found that they were more likely to contribute using these social options, since they realised that the result would be fewer emails, IMs and phone calls asking for their basic expertise. Once Seekers find an expert via Profiles, they are able to consume some of their knowledge and expertise without disrupting them. The nature of the remaining email/IM/phone requests from Seekers were about their deeper experience, their knowledge that will always remain tacit. In effect, Contributors sharing their more ‘basic’ expertise online enabled Seekers to accelerate whatever collaboration they further required from Contributors.*
Collaboratively Authoring Documents

Preparing a document—a snapshot in time as to the current thinking of a team or group—is a frequent process for information workers. The standard work practice today revolves around a lead author drafting the document on their computer, attaching it to an email message, and sending it out to other people to review. Once the other people have marked up the document with their comments, the lead author gets numerous copies back which they have to reconcile and collate into a new authoritative “master” copy.

Thanks to new collaboration technologies, there are different ways of collaboratively authoring documents.

- Using a wiki like Socialtext or Atlassian Confluence, the lead author can start writing using an online web-based document. When they are ready for others to add their input and feedback, they send a link to the wiki page. The other authors have the ability to change the text directly (with roll-back capabilities in a wiki, the lead author can roll-back to an earlier version if required), or leave comments on the bottom of the page.

- With a tool like PleaseReview, the document can be uploaded to a central server and all the reviewers can be invited to see the document. All edits and changes are carefully maintained on the PleaseReview server, and reviewers are able to see everyone else's changes, thus leading to a reduction in the duplication of the same comment. Finally, because everyone is working directly within the master copy, albeit in a controlled way, the integration of multiple copies into a new master goes away for good. See Figure 4-4.

- At a more basic level, rather than the document being sent out by email, the lead author can store the document in a Microsoft SharePoint team site, and when they are ready for input and review from others, can start a “Collect Feedback” workflow process. This prompts reviewers for feedback, and all in-line edits and out-of-line comments are saved into a single copy stored in SharePoint. The lead author no longer has to correlate multiple copies, and reviewers can see the comments and input of others.

In essence, there are many new and different ways of collaboratively authoring documents—and the three examples above are by no means exhaustive. It’s a different work practice from what most people are used to.
Changing the way teams work on documents can have significant advantages. When I discuss the collaborative authoring scenario in a workshop, we invariably get a saving of at least 50% in process time across the target collaborative team. This is a result of eliminating the need to merge comments into the master document, make comments that other people have already stated, and giving quicker access to each team member to review and comment on the document. PleaseTech, the vendor of PleaseReview, say that their clients are seeing savings of up to 65%.

Figure 4-4. Document Co-Authoring with PleaseReview

PleaseReview from PleaseTech is a collaborative document authoring and reviewing service. It enables many people to work on the same document simultaneously. See [www.pleasetech.com/pleasereview.aspx](http://www.pleasetech.com/pleasereview.aspx).
Collaborative Idea Management

Creating, collecting and ranking ideas for process improvements, new products and services, and many other areas of business and organisational life are great ways to make continual innovation a part of the fabric of how work gets done. To do so, you need some way of collecting the ideas in the first place. This can be done by email, where people send their ideas to a particular address (newideas@mycompany.com for example), but then the ideas are hidden, not available for everyone to see, and generally get forgotten. This leads to cynicism among employees because they never hear back about their ideas, and the organisation misses out on a potential treasure trove of insights and motivation for improving operations, technology, and customer service.

New collaboration technology provides a much better approach to idea management. Ideas are submitted in an open forum, allowing for everyone inside the organisation to see what is being proposed. Any employee can contribute their perspective on an idea, providing a way for managers to gauge the motivation and feeling behind specific ideas.

Here’s how this different approach works:

- A space for new ideas is created, most likely with sub-spaces for different groupings of ideas (an idea space for a product, one for a particular client, another for a certain process, and so on). This needs to be set up so people can see related ideas together, without having to wade through ideas that are irrelevant to them.

- People are invited to visit the idea space, and type in their ideas. The idea space displays an up-to-date list of all the ideas which have been contributed.

- Other people are able to browse through the ideas in the idea space, and read what others have written. They have some options for contributing: they can add a new idea themselves, they can comment on someone else’s idea (“I think this is great, and would really help Sales move more of these,” for example), and they can vote. Ideas with greater numbers of votes move to the top of the list, while those ideas with fewer votes move to the bottom.
When it's time to make decisions about where to invest in new products, how to serve clients better, and how to improve processes, the underlying contributions have been made, and the person responsible has a goldmine of thinking to help guide their decisions.

People can search for ideas on particular topics, related to particular products and services, or with particular keywords in the title or description. In very active collaborative idea management systems, this helps people quickly find ideas that are relevant to their work.

Collaborative idea management is supported by collaboration technology from Elguji Software (see Figure 4-5), NewsGator in Social Sites, and Kindling, among others.41
Figure 4-5. Idea Management with IdeaJam

IdeaJam from Elguji Software enables everyone within a group, team or organisation to see what ideas have been proposed, to give more details (via comments), and to vote for ideas. See www.elguji.com.
Making Group Decisions

A final example of changing work practice is how decisions are made in a group. Today a common work practice is that the group meets once a month and reviews the various ideas and requests they have received. Some decisions are made, and the meeting disbands. This approach leads to “decision crawl,” as it takes too long for decisions to be made.

There is a different work practice in how groups can make decisions. This involves creating a collaboration site where all inputs for the decision can be located, combined with a new work practice which sees the different members of the decision group visiting the collaboration site on a regular basis to read and review the requests or ideas. When someone has a point of view to share, they type their reaction directly into the appropriate place in the collaboration site. When everyone has had sufficient time to review the materials, everyone is asked to vote for the requests they think are best. Most decisions get made outside of a traditional meeting as such, leaving any actual meeting time to debating particularly difficult issues.

Collaborative decision making can be undertaken using a range of collaboration technology:

- A SAP StreamWork site could be set up for a particular decision. Depending on the nature of the decision needed, various tools—an Agenda, a Pro/Con table, a SWOT analysis, a Quick Poll, and others—can be added to the site to provide structure and focus for the team members. See Figure 4-6.

- A Microsoft SharePoint site could be set up with a Custom List, where each item is a decision request. Members of the decision group can review each decision request, and discuss and vote on the various matters. This approach to decision making is quite popular among some large organisations using SharePoint.

- GroupSystems ThinkTank is another collaborative decision-making tool. ThinkTank offers a variety of decision-making tools—for structuring ideas, for commenting on ideas, and for voting on ideas, among others. ThinkTank is also available as a hosted service, called ThinkSpace.

These tools can also be used by people during face-to-face or virtual meetings. They provide a way of structuring and visualizing the decision being discussed. Direct Relief International uses SAP StreamWork in this way:

“We were looking for a solution that could help us drive projects forward,” said Ross Comstock, IT director at Direct Relief. “It helps us quickly get a group of people together and focused on working through a problem, even if they’re in different countries. For that purpose,
SharePoint was too general. SAP StreamWork was much simpler, with a lot of tools built into it to drive decision-making. When I have a meeting with stakeholders, I can pop into SAP StreamWork and illustrate where we are on a project. It offers a simple way to tell a story, and it helps our communication with stakeholders.”

Figure 4-6. Collaborative Decision Making with SAP StreamWork

StreamWork is an online collaborative decision-making service from SAP, which enables people from one or more organisations to work together on decisions. See www.sapstreamwork.com.
Other Collaboration Scenarios

There are other collaboration scenarios not covered above, but that doesn’t make them any less valid. For example, change of work practice can be explored for:

- **Holding meetings.** Travel is frequently used as a way of bringing people together for meetings, or the meeting is held by phone (one-to-one, or a conference call). New technology can be used to replace or enhance both types of meetings—video conferencing and TelePresence instead of travel, and screen sharing as a complement to phone-based interactions and meetings.

- **Requesting feedback.** Asking other people what they think about a particular work item—a report for a client, a quotation from a potential supplier, a blog post for the outside blog—is a common collaborative scenario. Email is frequently used today as the means of sharing the work item and seeking feedback. In the future, there is an opportunity to use new tools which offer better support for this scenario, such as workflow routing systems, screen sharing, and quick surveys.

- **Sharing best practices.** Being consistent in service delivery is essential to winning the reputation of being great at what you do. It can be hard enough for one person to deliver to the same consistent standard day-after-day, but it’s even harder where many people do similar jobs for different clients or segments of the market. How do good ideas get debated and brought into common practice? Today’s approach is usually based on email distribution lists and the odd face-to-face meeting. New technology can support sharing best practices using group-editable web pages in a wiki, with ties to the group’s core methodology.

Summary

Technology is important when it comes to supporting collaboration between people. The technology creates opportunities for new ways of working, but demands an alignment between what the group needs to get done, and the nuances of the work practices. We have looked at a number of common collaboration scenarios in this chapter, and explored how current scenarios can be carried out in new and better ways with new collaboration technology.

We have covered a lot of ground up to this point, all aimed at setting the context and getting our thinking in line for the user adoption challenge ahead. Chapter 5 marks a significant shift in focus. The Four Stages Model of User Adoption is introduced, followed by extended discussion on each stage in chapters 6-9.
About the Author

Michael Sampson is a Collaboration Strategist. He advises end-user organisations around the world on strategies for making collaboration work. He is the President of The Michael Sampson Company in New Zealand.

Beyond consulting engagements with clients and in-house workshops, Michael shares his research on strategies for making collaboration work through multiple avenues:

- Michael's blog on current happenings in the collaboration world, covering collaboration thinking, philosophy, approaches, and technology. See [michaelsampson.net/currents/](http://michaelsampson.net/currents/).

- Books on strategies for making collaboration work, with a focus on culture, governance, and adoption. Current titles are *Seamless Teamwork* (2008), *SharePoint Roadmap for Collaboration* (2009), and *Collaboration Roadmap* (2011). This second edition of *User Adoption Strategies* is Michael's fifth book. See [www.michaelsampson.net/books/](http://www.michaelsampson.net/books/).

- Presentations at conferences around the world, both in-person and remotely. Michael has presented at conferences in the United States, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Australia, and New Zealand.

Michael holds a Master of Commence with first class honours in telecommunications-based IT from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand.

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Michael lives in New Zealand with his wife Katrina, and their ten children—David, Matthew, Philip, Daniel, Timothy, Susanna, Jonathan, Elizabeth, Joseph, and Joshua. Michael and Katrina home school their children.