Chapter XLII
Implementing Client-Support for Collaborative Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the critical task of providing client support for virtual environments. The vast majority of information workers are not familiar with virtual solutions and need guidance on how to best utilize and integrate this technology into their day to day operations. A company's ability to manage information effectively over its life cycle, including sensing, collecting, organizing, processing, and maintaining information, is crucial to the long term success in a global economy. Over the past few years, the case study organization has been actively engaged in building, deploying, and managing the procurement, education, and strategic direction for a Fortune 500 company. The success of the studied organization can be seen by reviewing the metrics as the collaborative content continues to grow by an average 28.08% per month and the usage rates have grown by 21% per month. This growth rate was accomplished by focusing on building communities of practice, physical and electronic training programs, promotional road shows, self-service procurement processes, templates, pattern libraries, and an evolving online environment that supports the business user every step in the learning process.

INTRODUCTION

The boundaries of the workplace are shifting and are frequently less defined by organizational structures than by the value added to the business. As the work force becomes mobile, businesses embrace globalization and the speed to market becomes a better determinate of competitive advantage, collaborative solutions will play a more strategic role. Collaborative technologies can be defined as any application that allows more than two people to interact. Baltzan, Haag, and Phillips (2006) describe collaborative systems as a technology-based set of tools that support the work of teams by facilitating the sharing and flow of information. Most organizations collaborate with other businesses or customers through a variety of applications including Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and the World Wide Web (WWW). Collaboration tools create virtual workplaces and include of a wide variety functional information categories including: knowledge management, content management, online meetings, discussion groups, Weblogs, wikis, and so forth. Collaboration tools are actually a subset of a much larger tool palate denoted as the tools of the information worker. This expanded tool collection includes: security tools, enterprise applications, portals,

office suites, client applications, process automation, and enterprise knowledge stores. Deploying collaborative solutions is different than simply implementing traditional enterprise applications which operate over structured data and generally focus on specific business processes. Collaborative environments operate over unstructured information and can span several business processes and organizational boundaries. Since the need for virtual workspaces emerge when organizational collaboration occurs, the ability to predict demand is nearly impossible. More importantly, when the business need arises for a virtual workspace, the technology cannot wait or the competitive advantage may be lost. In this environment, self-service or self provisioning is an imperative. The objective of this chapter is to lay out a framework for building a self-service environment for provisioning virtual workspaces as well as providing the education to support such technologies. After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the components of the information worker portfolio;
- Define the requirements for developing a client-support organization;
- Distinguish between management, measurement, and governance of the information technology portfolio;
- Explain the role of self-service in deploying virtual work spaces.

BACKGROUND

Virtual workspaces are generally designed for distributed teams which can be defined as groups of people that interact through interdependent tasks guided by common purpose, and work across space, time, and organizational boundaries primarily through electronic means (Chudoba & Maznevski, 2000). In order to be effective in sharing information and working in an online environment, end users need to understand and develop knowledge sharing practices (Becerra-Fernandez & Sabherwal, 2001). The background section will establish the foundational elements of information worker, virtual workspaces, and the criteria for success.

Knowledge or Information Worker

Peter Drucker was one of the first people to use the phrase "Knowledge Worker" to describe individuals that work with information instead the physical objects of labor. Today, many people use the term information worker in a similar reference to people that work with information vs. manual type activities. The value of information workers to an organization is their ability to gather and analyze information and make decisions that will benefit the company. They are able to work collaboratively with and learn from each other; they are willing to take risks, expecting to learn from their mistakes rather than be criticized for them (Rogoski, 1999). Information workers now account for as much as 70% of the U.S. labor force and contribute over 60% of the total valued added in the U.S. economy (Apte & Nath, 2004). Unlike the information worker of the 1970s, today's expert has a much large collection of tools available. While most of these tools are not semantically connected, they do fulfill the basic functional requirements such as office automation, business intelligence, collaboration, e-mail, elearning and search. Over the past few years, a collection of integrated applications are emerging to connect people, processes, and environments. Virtual workspaces or collaborative environments provide enormous value to the business by reducing the barriers of information flow. The new economy thrives on producing, collaborating, and passing knowledge between partners, employees, and customers.

Virtual Workspaces

Virtual workplace environments allow people to work separately while still experiencing a mutual sense of presence. Working collaboratively over networks is ultimately about real communication