Chapter 9

Alignment of Collaboration Technology Adoption and Organizational Change Findings from Five Case Studies

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The chapter presents an analysis of the alignment process of the adoption of collaboration technology and related organizational change identified in a multiple case study in five organizations. Special emphasis is put on the sequential relationship between technology adoption and organizational change, and the question of whether successful adoption of collaboration technology requires the pre-existence of a collaborative organizational culture. Findings from the case studies imply that successful adoption of collaboration technology can follow different patterns, and that contextual factors can be equally important in explaining adoption as characteristics of the technology and implementation project. The case studies also illustrate how elements of learning and maturation in the implementation process can help in overcoming barriers to adoption.

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration technology has now come of age. Over the last decade it has developed from something exotic and esoteric, to become a vital element in many organizations' IT architecture. The main driving force behind this has been the increasing focus on organizational learning, knowledge management and virtual organizations. Collaboration technology is seen to provide the necessary infra-

structure to realize these organizational strategies (e.g., Kock, 1999; Neilson, 1997). The term collaboration technology is here used in a broad sense, including all forms of IT that enable communication, coordination and collaboration within and between organizations.

The need for alignment of technology and organization for effective implementation of IT is well acknowledged (McKerzie and Walton, 1991). However, the nature and dynamics of this alignment process is still a question for debate. Due to the potential impact of collaboration technology on organizational work and social relations, the relationship between this technology and organizational change is believed to be of crucial importance for successful adoption of the technology. Several recent studies have addressed the dynamics related to the adoption of collaboration technology (e.g., Bardram, 1996; Ciborra, 1996; Karsten and Jones, 1998; Orlikowski, 1996). These studies show that this adoption process involves a complex interplay between characteristics of the technology and the organizational routines and social processes into which it is assimilated. An example of a question that is still open for debate, is whether collaboration needs to be established prior to the technology implementation, or whether the technology can serve as the catalyst for a change towards collaborative work practices. In general, this research is still in an early stage, and several authors have argued for the need for more field studies of the adoption of collaboration technology in different organizational settings (e.g., Grudin and Palen, 1995; Karsten and Jones, 1998), to be able to develop a more detailed understanding of different adoption patterns and their implications for implementation strategy.

This chapter presents an analysis of the alignment process of the adoption of collaboration technology and related organizational change identified in a multiple case study in five organizations. The organizational context in these cases is common in that each organization comprises several semi-autonomous units, implying a decentralized adoption process. The focus here is mainly on adoption at the level of the organizational units. Thus, this research can be seen to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge related to the adoption of collaboration technology in different organizational settings.

The chapter is structured as follows: The next section presents a brief overview and discussion of previous research on adoption of collaboration technology and the relationship with organizational change. Section three describes the methodological approach and provides a brief description of the technology adoption in the five case studies, as a basis for cross-case comparison in section four. The findings are discussed in section five, and the final section presents conclusions and implications for practice and further research

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