

Clarifying Collaboration

An overview of the Collaborative Ecosystem

Jake Sorofman



A Technology Whitepaper



The purpose of this whitepaper is to discuss the role of the digital workplace in the context of your extended enterprise environment: the types of collaboration it supports, and how it augments and extends the collaborative capabilities of other technologies in your enterprise environment. It also serves as a primer for understanding the nature of business collaboration, and for clarifying the capabilities of technologies in this space.

Companies across virtually all industries are quickly recognizing that business collaboration is a core area for gaining efficiencies and securing competitive advantage. As such, software vendors of all stripes have entered the collaboration space with their own take on what companies need to effectively collaborate within and beyond their corporate firewall. But because of this spate of new entrants, definitions have blurred. What exactly is collaboration? How does it fit into the context of my organization? How, when and with whom will I collaborate? And what are the “best fit” solutions for supporting the collaborative needs of my company?

These are the questions we will attempt to answer.

We begin with a description of the various types of collaborative interactions common to an enterprise environment, presented as “The Five Truths of Business Collaboration.” We then go on to discuss the specific tools, applications and platforms that play a role in an enterprise collaborative environment. We conclude the discussion of the eRoom digital workplace as the unifying collaborative layer.

↔ Collaboration 101

Collaboration is at the core of any business activity. However, as new demands emerge, many companies are pressured to maintain meaningful collaborative interactions. For example, across virtually all industries there’s a trend toward outsourcing activities that are “non-core” to a company’s business model; these are business activities for which a company cannot claim a unique competitive advantage. Further pressuring today’s companies is a nearly universal push to expand operations into new global geographies. This, too, causes a breakdown in traditional collaborative interactions.

Geography, time zones, divergent cultures, functional and organizational differences, technology and application disparities all create large gaps between distributed teams charged with contributing to large-scale projects and business initiatives.



The solution, many companies are finding, is a flexible digital workplace solution for bridging these gaps, tying into cross-enterprise business processes, exposing important operational data, integrating with the business systems that run the enterprise, and providing a rich cross-enterprise environment for rich collaboration and project work.

The eRoom digital workplace is the only collaborative environment that addresses the full scope of collaboration requirements for mission-critical projects and business processes—structured and unstructured, synchronous and asynchronous—tying these capabilities into a unified collaborative environment that includes the systems and processes at the core of the enterprise.

📌 The Five Truths of Business Collaboration

1. A Document Does Not Collaboration Make

While there's a common tendency to mistake file sharing for collaboration, collaboration is multidimensional and files and documents are not. Complex projects are built upon a broad array of files, documents, group and one-to-one discussions, group polls, presentations and whiteboard sessions. Each format contributes a unique perspective to a project, wrapping context and collective knowledge around each deliverable or milestone. A document-centric collaborative architecture cannot map to the way people work because it fails to address the fact that collaboration is not confined to the structure of a file or document.

eRoom is built from the ground up around the way people work, not the limitations of a document.

2. Collaboration is Dynamic

Many collaborative activities are calendar-driven, reflecting tight timelines and milestones. But surrounding these planned activities are the exceptions, the ad hoc issues and the largely unpredictable interactions that are part of any complex project. People raise issues, make proposals, and discuss options at every stage of a project. A collaborative solution must support both planned and ad hoc interactions, tightly integrating with time management, organizational and project management applications, and providing tools for rich, in-context ad hoc collaboration.

eRoom supports both planned and ad hoc collaborative interactions.

3. Collaboration Spans the Extended Enterprise

Organizations are facing new collaboration challenges, as changing economics require companies to outsource and globalize. As a result, companies need new ways of working productively both inside and outside of traditional enterprise boundaries. A credible collaboration platform must support project work and business process alignment within a company and across the extended enterprise of customers/clients and trading partners.

eRoom is designed for secure cross-enterprise collaboration.

4. Collaboration is Both Structured and Unstructured

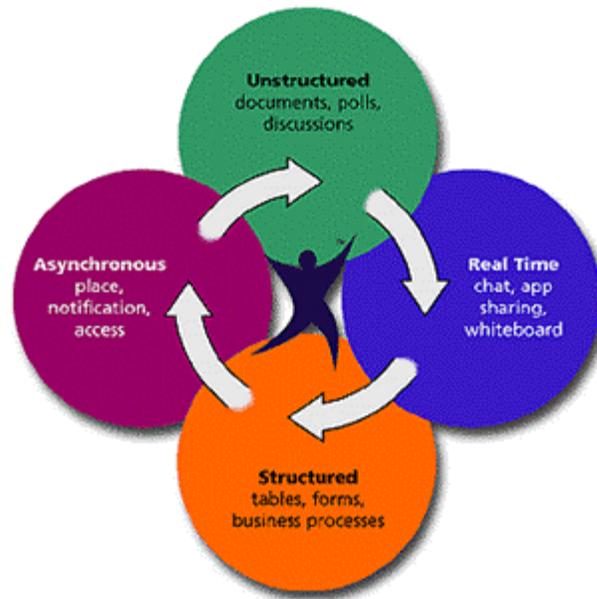
Collaboration involves both the unstructured, free form interactions that support strategy development and knowledge sharing, and highly structured applications and business processes that drive forward a specific action. A collaborative platform must support both unstructured collaboration for bringing together the ideas of distributed teams, as well as the structured processes that support recurring, highly dependent actions like change orders and budget approvals.

eRoom combines both structured and unstructured collaboration models.

5. Collaboration is Both Synchronous and Asynchronous

A complex project requires a unified combination of synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous collaboration capabilities to hit its full stride. While many collaborative activities are asynchronous in nature, real-time collaboration is an important element for supporting ad hoc issue resolution and augmenting ongoing project work. Asynchronous collaboration, on the other hand, is at the core of complex cross-enterprise project work, enabling participants to work across multiple projects, far-flung geographies and schedule constraints.

eRoom seamlessly blends synchronous and asynchronous collaboration capabilities.



✎ The Collaborative Technology Landscape

One look at today's high-tech trade magazines and you may conclude that every technology vendor is in the collaboration space. Now that traditional transaction-based e-commerce has lost its steam, the new moniker is "c-commerce," or collaborative commerce. And in the absence of opportunity, solution vendors of every kind have latched onto the *new* new thing that is collaboration. This has led to mass confusion over what categories contribute to business collaboration, and perhaps most importantly, the capabilities, limitations and intersections between all of these categories.

It's without question that collaborative technologies are central to today's enterprise IT strategies. But the first step to a whole solution is an understanding of all the pieces.

Content Management. Business collaboration involves lots of structured information in the form of documents and an array of files that must be stored, organized, and disseminated to various internal and external audiences and Web-based channels. This is the strength of content management solutions. Content management is largely transaction-based, managing large volumes of finished content, rather than supporting the collaborative creation thereof. Leading vendors include Documentum and Vignette.

Strengths: Managing and publishing large volumes of finished content.

Weaknesses: Facilitating the collaborative creation of content.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM). The CRM category is progressively converging with what we've traditionally seen as "sell-side" electronic commerce solutions. CRM solutions are customer-facing technologies that represent a company's interface with its downstream trading partners—that is, customers and distributors. This is where customer service is managed; product is researched, configured and ordered. CRM provides minimal true collaborative capabilities. Seibel and Clarify lead this space.

Strengths: Externalizing business processes to customer communities.

Weaknesses: Project-oriented collaborative capabilities.

Electronic Commerce (e-Commerce). e-Commerce is generally characterized by so-called “sell-side,” and “buy-side” (a.k.a. e-Procurement) solutions. Similar to CRM, sell-side e-Commerce is about extending the commerce channel to the Web. Buy-side e-commerce solutions automate and streamline the acquisition of supplies and materials. Both types of solutions are transaction-based, generally supporting minimal or no unstructured collaboration capabilities. Ironside and Net Vendor are leaders on the sell side. Ariba and Commerce One are the dominant players on the buy side.

Strengths: Streamlining the acquisition and sale of goods and services.

Weaknesses: Project-oriented collaborative capabilities.

Phone/Fax/E-mail. Phone, fax and e-mail are the earliest examples of collaborative technologies. Despite their limitations, they remain perhaps the most pervasive models for collaboration today. E-mail enables people to conduct asynchronous dialogues and to share information in the form of text, file attachments and embedded links. Fax enables people to share information asynchronously, in a manner that doesn't support non-repudiation. Phone, of course, is a tool for voice-based synchronous collaboration. In terms of project collaboration, all of these models break down quickly because they fail to maintain information context, relevance, structure and group access. They also fall down on the basis of content versioning, knowledge-capture and sharing and any sort of complex or simultaneous group work.

Strengths: Basic one-off communication and information sharing.

Weaknesses: Version control, knowledge-capture, contextual interactions.

Enterprise Resource Management (ERP). ERP platforms were developed to streamline, automate and integrate the complex business processes that drive business activity within an enterprise. ERP systems tie together all of the various functional areas—from human resources, to manufacturing and finance—ensuring that information systems are automatically updated in step with business activity. For example, when a product is ordered, inventory is flagged, revenue is booked, personnel are assigned and a customer record is created. ERP is an example of highly structured, transactional platform that addresses collaboration only inasmuch as it aligns rigid processes across a company. SAP, Oracle and JD Edwards are the leading players in the ERP space.

Strengths: Streamlining internal business processes.

Weaknesses: Anything outside the firewall or beyond the bounds of defined process.

Groupware. Groupware is a heavyweight client-server infrastructure designed for e-mail, calendaring, structured workflows, data storage and retrieval and custom intranet environments. As a result of a large footprint, requirement for IT support and cumbersome client-server architecture, groupware doesn't map to the way people work. Groupware remains a reasonably good all-purpose messaging and document store for intra-enterprise application. But groupware products, like Lotus Notes, fall down in complex cross-enterprise project environments where participants tend to work dynamically, collaboratively and across multiple enterprises.

Strengths: Document repository, custom applications and databases.

Weaknesses: Doesn't adapt to project processes, or cross-enterprise application.

Messaging Infrastructure. Messaging infrastructure is the generic terms for enterprise servers that manage enterprise and Web-based content, handle e-mail, and support structured workflows for sharing and collaborating around files and documents. Messaging platforms like Microsoft Exchange provide an enterprise-class workflow engine and a place to store content, but they don't provide unstructured collaboration capabilities for complex projects and dynamic person-to-person interactions.

Strengths: Highly tuned workflows and process-driven document sharing.

Weaknesses: No out-of-the-box collaborative tools and applications.

Portal Servers. Before a group can effectively collaborate, they must have access to content, context and specific project plans. This is the value behind portal servers: a single point of access to corporate, project and personal information, customizable and refreshed in real-time. While portals generally don't provide much of a collaborative layer, they do deliver on one of the most significant aspects of business collaboration—access to the information teams need to drive projects to completion. Leaders in this space include Plumtree, Top Tier and Microsoft SharePoint Portal Server.

Strengths: Knowledge access and enterprise rollup of information.

Weaknesses: Collaboration.

Product Lifecycle Management (PLM). PLM applications and tools support structured, process-driven collaboration across the entire product development lifecycle—from prototype, through product launch, and ultimate product retirement. PLM tools are useful for automating and streamlining predictable, repeatable product development processes, but generally do not support unstructured collaboration and person-to-person collaborative interactions. Major vendors in this space include MatrixOne and PTC.

Strengths: Predefined, process-driven document and file sharing.

Weaknesses: Project-oriented collaborative capabilities; unstructured interactions.

Real-Time Conferencing. Project work involves both synchronous and asynchronous collaborative interactions; synchronous provides added richness and rapid resolution capabilities, while asynchronous supports participation by large, geographically distributed teams. Real-time conferencing applications are an important augmentation to the collaborative project, but cannot support the full scope of collaborative requirements of complex projects and business initiatives. WebEx is a leader in this space.

Strengths: Real-time collaborative interactions.

Weaknesses: Project-oriented collaborative capabilities.

Supply Chain Management (SCM). Supply chain management solutions automate and streamline the upstream business processes that support the flow of direct manufacturing inputs. SCM provides very sophisticated transactional integration for sharing data between systems and platforms supporting the business processes of organizations and their upstream suppliers. SCM doesn't, however, provide collaboration capabilities beyond structured data-sharing and machine-to-machine integration. Leaders in SCM include i2 and Manugistics.

Strengths: Cross-enterprise process integration.

Weaknesses: Anything beyond the scope of these processes.

The Digital Workplace: The Platform for Business Collaboration

Beyond all of the posturing by solution providers looking to capture a piece of the collaborative opportunity is an enterprise platform that was built for a single purpose: To support the complex, demanding and multidimensional collaborative requirements of cross-enterprise projects. The digital workplace was designed to address the multitude of collaborative challenges facing today's globally distributed organizations. As such, it has emerged as the enterprise standard for cross-enterprise business collaboration.

The digital workplace is a Web-based collaborative environment that enables companies to come together to unleash innovation, facilitate cross-functional, cross-enterprise collaboration and drive complex projects to completion. eRoom, the earliest and leading digital workplace, integrates with mission-critical business processes and enterprise business systems across the value network of employees, customers, suppliers and strategic partners, providing a unified platform for unstructured collaboration, complex project work, alignment of mission-critical business processes, supply chain coordination, exception and crisis management, and any other initiative that drives complex cross-enterprise projects work to completion.

eRoom goes beyond traditional data sharing and transactional tools and applications, providing a collaborative platform that fills the gaps created by rigid systems and processes. This enables cross-enterprise teams to augment structured applications and processes with a comprehensive set of collaboration capabilities for working across enterprise, geographic, functional and technical boundaries.

eRoom is used as the digital workplace standard by hundreds of global organizations, spanning professional services, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and industries beyond. Unlike many other vendors purporting to represent the interests of business collaboration, eRoom Technology has created a category, defined the requirements and delivered the most widely adopted digital workplace solution for today's complex collaborative needs.

eRoom is at the heart of the collaborative ecosystem.

**Get to work in an eRoom.
Contact us at 617.497.6300 or visit us at www.eRoom.com**