

# Supporting Collaboration in the Enterprise

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## INTRODUCTION

During the past couple of years I have led several studies of MITRE's current work practices and business processes to identify our needs for improving collaboration and information sharing across the corporation. Since MITRE's primary business is to provide government agencies informed advice in support of the government's acquisition of large complex systems, MITRE depends on access to expertise distributed across our corporation. In addition, MITRE's project work often requires both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration within teams that are distributed across multiple locations. Our studies focused on identifying gaps in how well our current technology supports our distributed work force, priorities for technology investments to improve our staff's effectiveness, and evaluations of how well collaborative on-line technology will meet the needs of our staff.

## TECHNOLOGY INVESTIGATIONS

Four of our studies are particularly relevant for assessing the potential impact of Web 2.0 technology in the enterprise. In one study, we conducted a market survey and evaluation of collaborative tools. The evaluation concentrated on tools that would support virtual teams in synchronous and/or asynchronous document writing. We found that existing work practices and specific use cases mattered more to user preference and adoption than the sleekness of the tool or the number of supported features. The tools we recommended did not aim to be everything to everyone; no individual tool

provided an effective solution to all possible situations, but several provided very good solutions to specific use cases.

A second study compared several blogging solutions with the objective of finding one to recommend for use within MITRE. Based on our earlier studies of user work practices, we identified key requirements for a blogging solution that would likely enhance the likelihood that our staff would use the blogging solution to disseminate information and would facilitate the ease with which staff would find relevant information stored in the blog. Amongst our key recommendations is that a blogging solution enable users to create and post information to a blog from a variety of applications including email. In addition, we investigated how well a corporate blogging solution can be integrated into our overall corporate information architecture. We are conducting a series of small pilot experiments to evaluate user adoption and the impact of the blogging solution on staffs' work practices.

A third study investigated solutions that would enhance staff's ability to maintain situational awareness about the occurrence of meetings and other events. We observed in our work practice studies that our staff was interested in calendar information to support two distinct purposes. Staff primarily used on-line calendars to track their own meetings and schedule meetings with others. But staff were also interested in calendar information to maintain awareness of which meetings and events others in their team were attending in order to keep up-to-date with key

occurrences in a project that may impact their own work. To address these dual needs, we evaluated various group solutions and the ease with which these solutions were able to be integrated with our corporate standard calendaring solution.

The final study is an investigation of wiki use in the corporation. Although the corporation does not support a single standard wiki solution, use of wikis have increased across the company during the past year. This study will identify how wikis are currently being used, the factors that drive users to prefer wikis to other corporate supported solutions, and assess how well wikis meet the needs that users are trying to satisfy through their adoption of a wiki. This study is ongoing and will result in a recommendation on the need to adopt and support a single wiki standard across the corporation. Our early results indicate that there are a variety use cases that motivate the use of wikis including their use for sharing topical information across the corporation, their use as a team notebook to share information and emerging concepts within a team, support for collaborative

document production, support for asynchronous brainstorming, and to support the broad dissemination of meeting notes.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Each of our technology investigations have been motivated by a prior study of staff work practices and the identification of user needs based on these user research studies. Grounding our evaluations of technology in a thorough understanding of how the technology could impact the real-life work of our users has proven invaluable in identifying relevant use cases to evaluate the technology and in assessing the potential utility of the technology. Our work practice studies and technology investigations have identified several key areas for which Web 2.0 technologies may be effectively leveraged in the enterprise including information dissemination across the corporation, enhanced situational awareness amongst team members, and improved synchronous and asynchronous collaboration within geographically distributed teams.