



EFFECTIVELY USING COLLABORATION TOOLS

PCF 12.3.4 DESIGN AND LAUNCH KM PROJECTS



Best-practice organizations give employees a standardized set of tools, with some local adjustments allowed and encouraged.

APQC'S PERSPECTIVE

Just as different families of musical instruments make up an orchestra, an integration of various collaboration support tools and technologies is necessary to develop successful products and services.

If collaboration cannot occur without communication, communication in almost all enterprises cannot occur without some sort of technological support. Best-practice organizations leverage information technology to streamline collaboration throughout the development process. Using standardized technology enables employees to communicate in a consistent manner, regardless of where they are located.

With these concepts in mind, we conclude that technology support is a critical enabler of collaborative work environments, from complex global organizations to small offices. But if tools are not standardized, they can become additional barriers to collaboration by needlessly complicating everyday work interactions.

As the following case examples illustrate, best-practice organizations provide consistent tool sets that employees can adapt as needed, often within some limiting boundaries.

CASE EXAMPLE: THE DOW CHEMICAL COMPANY

Dow's collaborative technology is consistent organization-wide. A global information management team with representatives from all global businesses and functions maintains rigorous standards in identifying and implementing technology applications and infrastructure. Dow's top-down approach limits the number of homegrown or one-off technologies.

At Dow, all employees use the same work platform, a laptop, with a common set of applications. A series of servers support each platform so that all applications operate with the same version. Dow classifies technology applications based on how they apply to work processes, be it globally, business- or region-specific, or site- or application-specific. The classification helps ensure Dow selects only the most effective technology for the entire organization and identifies which tools are best suited for specific functions.

Dow's IT group supports and funds all global applications and infrastructure at the company. A global purchasing group manages technology agreements, and an information services group manages the support, packaging, and distribution of software and hardware.

Global applications and infrastructure at Dow include shared data networks, SAP enterprise-wide applications, and portfolio tracking and tools. Some homegrown applications are specific for ad hoc reporting or portfolio management. Dow also leverages Business Objects™, JMP®, and SAS® and provides the ability to query structured data. Collaborative tools for less structured data include

- the company intranet (with news, technology sharing, and business information)
- extranets (to collaborate with external parties)
- NetMeeting®

- Live Meeting®
- Timbuktu® (remote control software)
- LearnLinc (for training delivery)
- Web cast–Diamond TV
- SharePoint®
- blogs
- Idea Central® (idea capture, development, and sharing software)
- customer/partner/vendor-utilized software (such as WebEx®) and
- collaborative conferencing facilities.

Most of these tools are available organization-wide, although SharePoint, blogs, Idea Central, and vendor- or partner-specific tools are used only by specific teams. Dow frequently uses collaborative tools such as NetMeeting, Live Meeting, and Timbuktu because most teams are spread out globally.

CASE EXAMPLE: WACHOVIA CORPORATION

Wachovia uses a number of support tools and technologies to foster collaboration across the organization, including team sites and Web conferencing.

The team sites are short-term, quickly developed Web sites that allow project members to share documents, ensure version control on documents, access team calendars, store files, review action ideas and agendas, share applications, and access meeting recordings for later viewings. A central group manages that provides both business and technology support manages the 13,000 such sites created so far, assisted by a technical operations group and software partner that specify appropriate access.

With 3,700 Web conferences held each month, the site allows development teams to involve experts on demand and regardless of geography. With features like white-boarding, online surveys, and chat rooms, Web conferencing tools enable key collaborative activities at Wachovia. In the white-boarding function, virtual team participants can simultaneously diagram solutions, just as if they were in a conference room together.

The organization is working to introduce a number of technological enhancements to foster collaboration. In late 2007, Wachovia rolled out an expansive employee portal that has made resources more easily available. The Web site is customized to the projects of each employee and enables networking with co-workers.

CASE EXAMPLE: XEROX CORPORATION

Also a global organization, Xerox works to support its dispersed teams with tools and technologies that are centrally funded but locally controlled: that is, employees can leverage this support as they see fit.

Collaboration support tools at Xerox include CAD systems, code development, configuration and control systems, shared Internet repositories, Wiki- and blog-enabled technology, and online communities of practice. It also provides customer-led innovation processes that filter feedback from all customer touches to the development process. Further, each business unit has technology showrooms to enable collaboration with customers on ideas to meet their needs. The company has Web-enabled, large-scale remote collaboration systems that have led to a number of new customer solutions. An added benefit of such technology is that it is easier to track who invented what. In an effort to experiment with new technology trends, Xerox even has a presence in the online virtual world of Second Life to introduce and test potential new products.

Because collaborating with customers is a primary objective for Xerox, technological development is intrinsically linked to understanding user needs. See Figure 1 below. Xerox works to find customers' unarticulated needs by first looking at

their needs (Why would the customer need your product?), then examining business needs (Can I make money doing this?). It then develops the appropriate technology capability. In entities as small as a research laboratory of 50 people, Xerox employees can adopt a collaborative technique for a specific, well-defined objective. If that technique is successful, then the group shares their findings throughout the organization.

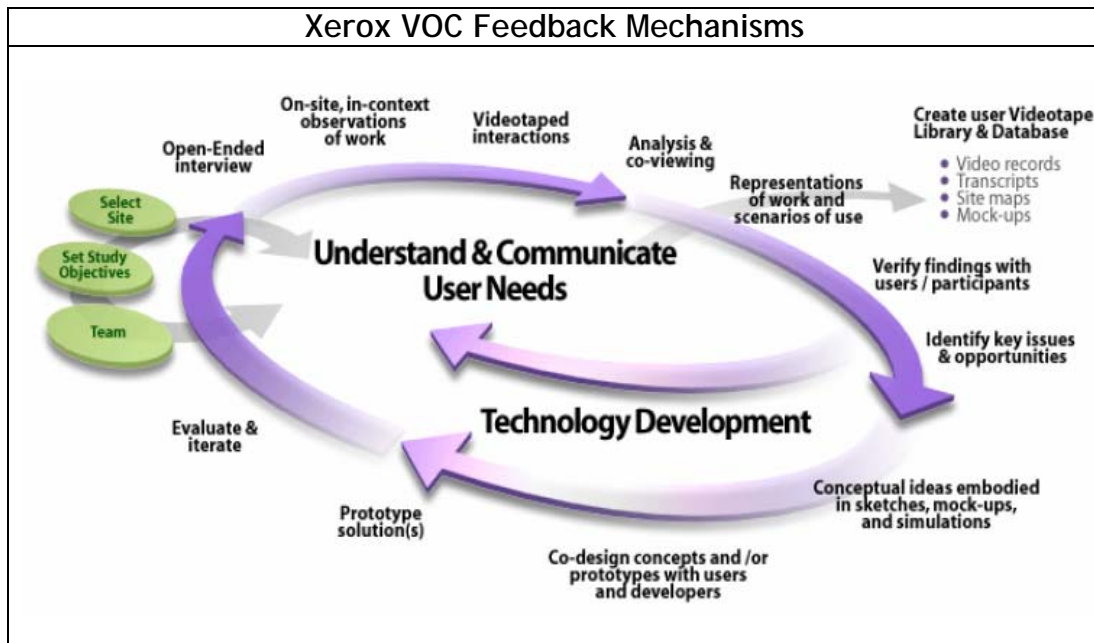


Figure 1