Global Virtual Collaboration

Robert M. Davison
Dept of Information Systems
City University of Hong Kong
Tat Chee Avenue
Kowloon, Hong Kong
Tel: +852-2788-7534
E: isrobert@cityu.edu.hk

Gert-Jan de Vreede
University of Nebraska at Omaha
& Delft University of Technology
Omaha, NE 68118, USA
Tel: +1.402.554.2026
E: gdevreede@mail.unomaha.edu

Karen Loch
Institute of International Business
Georgia State University
University Plaza,
Atlanta, GA 30303, USA
Tel: +1-404-651-4095
E: kloch@gsu.edu

Over the course of the last decade, the role played by collaborative technology applications has become increasingly important. The range of contexts in which these applications have been used includes (inter)-organisational communication and decision making, through distributed software inspections, to virtual education initiatives. The applications themselves include various forms of groupware technology such as group (decision) support systems, electronic mail, shared calendaring applications, document management systems, video and audio conferencing, and the like.

Much of the technology has been developed within the cultural milieu of North America, and to a lesser extent Western Europe and Australasia. This is evidently important, since the technology has been infused with the values present in these cultures, and consequently the technologies themselves may be culturally attuned to the needs and preferences of workers in these contexts. Nevertheless, the application domain is geographically and culturally much broader. Thus, not only do we see distributed groups within a single country, but also groups with members from many different countries. The application contexts thus span both time zones and cultures, involving considerable adaptation, interpretation and structuration of the technology to fit local norms and behaviours. In the future, we believe that these distributed applications of the technology will become increasingly prevalent as the globalisation of work intensifies and receives increased attention.

We are delighted to present three papers in this minitrack which address key issues in Global Virtual Collaboration. In our first paper, Elizabeth Davidson and Albert Tay outline a research program for studying global IT support teams. They draw on studies of global teamwork practices, research that has been conducted on small group dynamics and on virtual team processes. They review key findings in these areas, outlining the salient research questions and discuss an example of global IT support that illustrates the insights that can be achieved through these research perspectives.

In the second paper, H. Keith Edwards and Varadharajan Sridhar provide an analysis of the effectiveness of global virtual teams in software engineering projects. Noting that the quality of such projects is often determined by the clarity evident in stakeholders' requirements defined in early stages of the project development life cycle, they observe that in a virtual environment, complexities arise due to differences of time, culture, technological infrastructure and concepts of trust. They investigate these complex issues in a study of 24 virtual teams located in Canada and India, working on defining business requirements for software projects, over 3 weeks. Extensive data on factors relating to the impact of technology and tools, culture, academic orientation, time difference, and complexity of tasks after the successful completion of the project is analysed.

Our final paper comes from Daniela Damian and Didar Zowghi and identifies insights into the interplay between culture, conflict and distance in globally distributed requirements negotiations. They report on findings from two global software development organizations, from which they derive a model of impact of distance and the affected requirements activities due to problems of cultural diversity, inadequate communication, knowledge management and time differences. This evidence provides an important insight into the interplay between culture and conflict as well as the impact of distance on the ability to reconcile different viewpoints with regards to requirements and requirements processes.

Each of these papers discusses interesting aspects of global virtual collaboration. Each offers a unique contribution to our understanding of the challenges faced by virtual teams that have to cross national borders and time-zones to create value. We commend these papers to you as they promise to stimulate animated discussion at the conference and inspire future research efforts.