

Chapter 9

Socio–Cultural Factors and Collaboration

The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life.

George Simmel (1858–1918)

CHAPTER KEY POINTS

- Discusses the social aspects of information and communication technology in general and how they affect businesses.
- Discusses the ever important social issues of trust, law and security in the context of collaborative business.
- Discusses the impact of the collaborative environment on the customers of the business.
- Discusses the impact of the environmental factors on the collaborative businesses.
- Discusses the unique cultural features of the collaborative environment.
- Discusses the social challenges resulting from the collaborative environment.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the importance of the socio-cultural factors of collaboration. This social influence is experienced not only in the society where the customers exist, but also within the internal organization, employees, business partners and senior management. The transition to a collaborative business will affect all these involved parties and it is important to understand that effect and prepare the parties for the transition. This chapter starts by providing some definitions of the social aspects in information technology. The correlations between the IT changes and corresponding changes to the society are demonstrated. The discussion, in this chapter, is aimed to handle some of the risks associated with transitioning to collaborative business that are non-technical in nature.

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The social aspect of information and communication technology is one significant dimension of collaboration that tends to be left on the backburner as the business transitions to a collaborative one. The reason the social dimension gets ignored is because it is very difficult to put this dimension of collaborative business in a well-defined formula. The technologies of web services are promising communication and transaction between two or more parties that may not even know each other. However, in order to translate these technologies of communication into worthwhile business strategies, it is important to understand the underlying human element in collaborative business. Whenever collaboration becomes substantial and large, with ongoing service exchanges and business transactions that need support from people – the social issues start coming into play.

Information and communication technology has already moved from being used exclusively in the large computer centers of businesses to almost every aspect of our homes, schools, organizations and society in general. People need to gather and keep records and exchange information in order to remain active and be part of the ever-changing society. Based on Ranjbar (2002), no other technology has had such profound impact on our daily lives as information and communications technologies since it enables us to gather, store and exchange various records.

The computer applications in today's society are very broad and include online banking, online shopping, working at home (telecommuting), leisure, artificial intelligence and robotics to name but a few. Powerful search engines and the capability of sharing information are among the great advantages of the Internet. Some advocates such as Katz and Rice (2002) claim that the Internet is the greatest

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