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Panel 12 Supporting Teams in the Twenty-First Century

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PANEL 12

SUPPORTING TEAMS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Panel Chair: **Gert-Jan de Vreede**, Delft University, Delft, The Netherlands

Panelists: **Fran Ackermann**, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland
Joseph Valacich, Washington State University, USA
Clive Holtham, City University, London, England

Over the next two years, we anticipate that there will be major changes in the technology available to business teams. The Web will bring the Internet and internal intranets to virtually every desktop, and with it will come groupware tools such as Lotus Notes, and a host of other more specialized groupware tools such as GroupSystems, Graphics COPE and MeetingWorks. The challenge in this new groupware world will be the development of an integrated and seamless system allowing teams to work on *unstructured* problems both face to face and anywhere/anytime.

This panel will discuss the benefits of working in both anytime/any place and face to face modes, and will explore the implications these forms of working have on the management of team processes and content. While having a facilitator working with face to face teams can significantly improve effectiveness, we know little about how to support asynchronous dispersed teams, particularly when the team alternates between face to face and anywhere/anytime modes of working.

The panel therefore will consider how automation, education, and external (to the team) facilitation can be developed to support teams working in this extended mode, as well as discussing how teams might benefit from such groupware systems. Two instances (based on real world experience) that illustrate possible options are:

- Starting by using an asynchronous groupware system to capture ideas and their inherent structure and then move to meeting in a face to face environment to agree on a way forward within the social and political context of the organization.
- Starting by meeting face to face to develop and agree upon a strategic direction/plan of action before placing the agreed on plan in a location accessible to all for asynchronous implementing and monitoring of progress. In this way, the model takes on the role of a central, sophisticated project management tool and vehicle for organizational learning.

Each of the panelists has extensive experience with working with teams and groupware in the face to face mode, and more recently has been exploring working in dispersed and asynchronous modes. As such, the discussion will be focused toward both an academic/research and practical viewpoint. Furthermore, due to the international nature of the panel and their experience of working in countries other than their own, issues relating to different cultures will be addressed within the whole. While the discussion may refer to specific systems, the intention is to focus on the issues themselves rather than the tools. This focus will be carefully monitored by the moderator.

The panel will be run in an interactive manner with the moderator taking an active role in guiding the discussion and keeping the panelists (and audience) involved and on track. The format will comprise two slots of forty minutes. In the first slot, the panelists will briefly discuss their positions in relation to two common issues ("What is the role of a facilitator in distributed groups?" and "Can groups work off-line?") and one issue specific to each panelist (so as to ensure diversity). Through addressing the common and specific issues, the panelists will posit a controversial anecdote or hypothesis that will then inform the remainder of the panel session. The specific issues to be covered are "does the problem type affect the mode of working?" (Fran), "how important is trust within the group?" (Clive) and "what can we learn from MBA executives using groupware?" (Joe).

To ensure as wide an audience participation as possible, it is requested that each member write a single question for the panel on cards provided before the panel commences. The moderator will then sort the questions into broad themes while the panelists are presenting their positions. Following these presentations, the moderator will review the themes with the audience — to provide an overview — and then, taking each theme in turn, request the panelists to respond to the questions. If there appear to be too many themes, a “clap test” will be carried out — those themes with the loudest amount of clapping being addressed. Where the audience has further questions relating to the theme being debated these can be raised and incorporated into the discussion. Finally, the final five minutes will be used for a brief summation from each of the panelists incorporating his/her most important ideas and an external truth or exciting hypothesis.