

Collaborative Systems

As

Cultural Constructions



Luminous Group Consulting LLC

Many companies are unaware how their culture creates material effects within the organization. Social conflict and the deployment of new technologies can produce positive changes within an organization by altering social dynamics and promoting new cultural models.

Culture, those patterns of human activity and symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance, is not generally included as part of the design and deployment process when a company goes forward with a new technology. Many significant deployment failures are attributable to cultural issues (references to come).

While we do not normally think of computer systems as part of our culture, the manner, dress, language, belief systems, and norms of behavior found within an organization clearly extend beyond the boundary of a computational system, especially one that is collaborative. *People* define the essential meaning and structure of these systems. This is why we say that they are cultural constructions.

To say that a system is collaborative is to imply that the system is designed to help people involved in a common task achieve their goals. Examples of this include the development of an idea, the brainstorming of a design, or the tracking of a shared objective.

Collaboration technologies deliver functionality for multiple participants to create or augment a common deliverable. Document management, workflow, audit history, and other mechanisms designed to capture the efforts of many into a managed content environment are typical of these types of systems.

However, in recent years, we have also seen the rise of so-called “social networking” systems; collaborative platforms are evolving, enabling people to meet each other, share information, and provide new kinds of social activity which, prior to these systems, did not exist. Systems such as MySpace and FaceBook demonstrate that collaborative systems can be social and their mass use demonstrates cultural acceptance.

At Luminous, we take the perspective that collaborative systems are fundamentally a social construct that take the form of the culture in which they are placed. If placed properly, they can also help that culture to grow and change in new ways that are in alignment with the strategic goals of the organization. However, the ability of the organization to take advantage of this opportunity is highly dependent on the manner in which deployment of the collaborative system occurs.

That’s why we approach the deployment of collaborative systems such as Microsoft’s SharePoint with particular attention on the culture where that system will be deployed. Cultures, based on predisposition, both embrace and resist change, depending on their traits. It is therefore vital to map out where your organization sits on the fault line of change before you deploy next year’s technology.

To find out how Luminous’ unique cultural approach to technology deployment can benefit your business, contact us at collaboration@luminousgroup.net or 866-495-7354.