

Problem or Solution?

CSCW and the Paradox of Stalled Productivity

Moderator: Sara Kiesler, Social Sciences and Social Psychology, Carnegie-Mellon University

Panelists: Paul Attewell, Sociology, The Graduate School and University Center
of the City University of New York

John King, Information and Computer Science and School of Management,
University of California at Irvine

James Morris, Computer Science, Carnegie-Mellon University, and Maya Design Group

In 20th century dreams and nightmares of computing, computers build cars and win battles, and robots take jobs. According to research, the reality is both mundane and paradoxical. Whereas computers can process information faster and better than ever before, the productivity payoffs for organizations have (apparently) been negligible or worse. Some experts even fault computers that “help” people work together. (If people are busy talking, they don’t get their real work done, according to this argument.) Others claim we haven’t built the right CSCW technologies—those

that will link individual workers and information to organizational needs.

In this panel we look at evidence for the paradox and reasons it may exist. Then we air different views of how to think about CSCW and organizational productivity. And we suggest how design might be targeted at productivity.