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.

Commercial Products for CSCW

Moderator: Esther Dyson, Editor, Release 1.0, EDventure Holdings, Inc.
Panelists: Charles Digate, President, Beyond, Inc.
Irene Greif, Director, Workgroup Technologies, Lotus Development Corporation
Terry Winograd, Founder, Action Technologies, Inc., and Professor, Stanford University
Michael Zisman, President and CEO, SoftSwitch

This panel continues the discussion started two years ago at CSCW ’90 on “Commercial CSCW or How to Get Group Software out of the Labs and into Real Use.” At that time we found very few CSCW products in use. Email was still the main communications software outside research labs. A few organizations like Price-Waterhouse had adopted Lotus Notes. A panelist from Price-Waterhouse explained how they were deploying Notes and the panel debated whether groupware required that kind of corporate-wide installation or could be implemented on a one-at-a-time basis. An overview of a product based on the Information Lens (an MIT research project led by Professor Tom Malone) led to some discussion of the distance to be covered when taking ideas from research prototype to product.

This year, we look at what’s changed since then. We find that many of the same issues are still unresolved. Some of the questions are:

- Why is it taking so long for CSCW software to get to market?
- What is happening with current CSCW products that are on the market?
- Is CSCW research having impact on product design and deployment?
- What happened to Coordinator?
- What else is happening with Email? Lotus Notes?
- What will be the next breakthrough product?

The panelists all have commercial affiliations and some link to research. Their product experiences give each a unique perspective on topics that include the process of transforming research ideas into product, the importance of group-enabling of conventional desktop products, the potential of workflow technology in products, and the role of large electronic mail networks in groupware implementation.