

Collaboration

Joey and Nathaniel

Beyond Being There

About the Authors

- Jim Hollan
 - Professor at USSD
 - Director of Human–Computer Interaction Laboratory at UCSD
- Scott Stornetta
 - Co-invented concept of blockchain
 - "How to Time-Stamp a Digital Document"



Think about times when technologies made
collaboration/interactions with other people
easier and/or more efficient

“The crutch is designed specifically to make the best of a bad situation...
On the other hand, shoes are to correct some of the problems of our
natural condition... In telecommunications research perhaps we have
been building crutches rather shoes.”

Key Points

- Most work is focused on imitating face-to-face (F2F) interaction.
- Calls for development of system that people would use even when they're physically close.
- Take advantage of strengths of electronic mediums
 - Ephemeral interest group, Meeting Others, Anonymity, Semisynchronous, Beyond F2F

Examples

Ephemeral interest group

Asynchronous
short-live
discussions.

Meeting Others

Make meeting
people more
accessible.

Lower initiation
cost.

Anonymity

People are more
truthful in email.

Make
conversation
around sensitive
topic easier.

Semisynchronous

Encourage diverse
replies and
participation

Eliminate first few
responses
influencing later
reponses

Beyond F2F

Assisted F2F
technology.

Increase social
presence.

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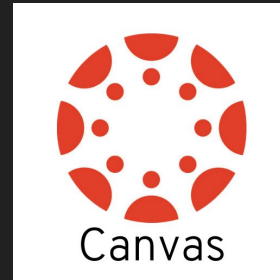
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Beyond F2F

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Questions

- 1.) How have we achieved building shoes rather than crutches in telecommunications?
How can communications and collaboration evolve from where we are now?
- 2.) Authors ended the paper saying, “In our view of the future, it is not so much distance that will be abolished, but rather our current concept of being there.” Given today’s technology, did we “abolish” the concept of being there? How has our concept of “being there” changed?
- 3.) What trade-offs emerge when we redefine what it means to “be there”? Who benefits most when “being there” becomes optional? Who loses power or access?

Distance Matters

Biography

-Both Judith Olson and Gary Olson worked as professors at the University of Michigan

-Gary Olson is a psychologist interested in computer supported cooperative work; he is Professor in both the School of Information and the Department of Psychology

-Judy Olson is a psychologist interested in computer supported collaborative work; she is Professor in the School of Business Administration, the School of Information, and the Department of Psychology



Central Claim

Distance Matters...

“Cairncross (1997) was wrong. Distance is not only alive and well, it is in several essential respects immortal.” (141)

Do you agree with the quote on the last slide?
Why or why not? (Split into 2 teams)

4 Key Concepts

Common Ground

- Face to face interactions provide opportunity for people to communicate through cues (gaze, gesture, tone, peripheral awareness)
- The more common ground participants already share, the less bandwidth they need to communicate effectively.
Conversely, when common ground is low (different cultures, new teams, ambiguous tasks), richer media (like video) or even in-person interaction becomes essential.

Coupling of Group Work

- Group Work can either be tightly coupled or loosely coupled.
- Tightly coupled:
 - Ambiguous, interdependent, nonroutine tasks.
 - Require rapid feedback, multiple channels
- Loosely coupled:
 - Routine, standardized, independent tasks.
 - Require minimal clarification
- Tightly coupled work was said to be harder to sustain remotely and loosely coupled work thrived remotely

4 Key Concepts (cont.)

Collaboration Readiness

- Tools only succeed if the organization already has a culture of sharing
- Incentive structures must reward collaboration, not just individual achievement
- “The third prescription is that one should not attempt to introduce groupware and remote technologies in organizations and communities that do not have a culture of sharing and collaboration. If it is decided that the organization needs to collaborate more, that more knowledge needs to be shared, then one has to align the incentive structure with the desired behavior.”

Collaboration technology readiness

- Tools must fit smoothly into existing work practices
- Reliability, ease of use, and low setup cost are essential
- Even small barriers (logins, poor audio/video) discourage adoption.

Other Considerations

- Time zones complicate coordination, but can enable 24/7 work with planning.
- Cultural differences affect norms, authority, and communication styles often leading to misinterpretations.
- Technology, time, and culture interact in complex ways with no single fix.
- Conclusion: Technology will improve, but distance will continue to matter for collaboration.

Questions

1) To what extent is the difficulty described by the Olson's due to the nature of human relationships and not distance itself? Why do you think this?

2) Can you recall a time you were working remotely and felt limited by distance? Such as miscommunication, delayed feedback, or lack of context? How did it affect your work or relationships?

3) Olson seems to treat distance as a neutral force affecting everyone equally. Do you think some people or teams are more resilient to distance than others? What does that suggest about his argument?

4) If technology continues to improve, do you think Olson's concerns about distance will become less relevant, or are there aspects of human interaction that technology can never fully replace?

<https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/hololens/hololens2-options-device-only#heres-what-to-do-next-with-the-hololens-2>

Now together!

Synthesis Question

- 1) Reflecting on your own remote work limitations, how do you see them differently when viewed through the lens of "abolishing being there" versus "overcoming distance"? What does this suggest about whether we need better tools or new mental models?