

This position statement outlines current thoughts raised by participating in fields of e-Social Science and CSCW. Over the past four years I have been coordinating projects to build synchronous collaborative tools to support distributed qualitative social science research, particularly tools to support the collaborative analysis of video data.

What e-Research can learn from CSCW

CSCW research has been raised within the emerging communities of Cyberinfrastructure, e-Science and e-Social Science. Current work is attempting to prevent these communities from 're-inventing the wheel' in supporting distributed collaboration. For example, Grudin's eight challenges for CSCW developers apply as much to e-Research tools as to workplace groupware, including:

- The importance of studies of work practice to inform the design of distributed research support tools. Researchers tend to give designers an insider's methodological view rather than a designer's practical system requirements on activities.
- Despite possible calculation speed gains, changing the style of to parallel or cluster or grid computing matters very little to scientific researchers. Changing the interface and its behaviour matters a great deal.
- Researchers do not collaborate simply because they have systems which are capable of sharing their information with each other (even very fast).

What CSCW can learn

Nonetheless, perhaps these communities may provide fruitful new directions for CSCW, which has largely abandoned systems to support real-time distributed research since the industrial research labs involved in HCI mostly completed their programmes on mediaspaces.

- Distributed research has taken more of a back seat in CSCW since the flurry of work in the mid 1990s on talking heads mediaspaces. Can we better supporting real time distributed research using newer technologies and techniques? Currently, much excellent groupware research is technique-driven rather than domain driven in HCI. This approach contrasts with HCI research in other domains, for example the Ubicomp research driven by the Equator IRC. Real time groupware needs to move into the real world more, and perhaps researchers offer a better testbed than companies/workers for real-time distributed tools?
- Most research support tools suffer overly person-focused (Buxton, 1992) designs, creating problems for tools such as mediaspaces and access grid of integrating task- or object- focused activities. Buxton's Telepresence challenge remains; integrating these approaches requires new techniques for managing and traversing between objects and people remotely. There are some hints of this in areas where groupware is moving 'off the screen', for example in tabletop computing research.
- Studies of Science and Technology (STS) and related work on the social shaping of technologies within CSCW offers very detailed comment on the organisation of scientific practice, but very little of the order of findings that could be used to support designing for the work of scientists. Long term studies of science and research are typically not oriented towards producing support technology or design results; furthermore studies of distributed research practice in CSCW are few and lack detail.

Perhaps it is time to reinvigorate the challenge of supporting distributed research so strongly pursued a decade ago. It is certainly the case that new technologies, techniques and interface designs are at least as interesting to science praxis and research methods as the new networking infrastructures which have received so much funding under the banners of Cyberinfrastructure and e-Science.