UNIFIED ACTIVITY AS A PARADIGM FOR SUPPORTING COLLABORATION

Thomas Moran
IBM Distinguished Engineer,
Almaden Research Center, San Jose, CA
<tpmoran@us.ibm.com>

We use the term “Business Activity” to encompass not only formally-specified in business processes, but also the situational, semi-organized, on-the-ground work that people do together. The former are “run” by workflow-driven business applications and the latter are supported by standard collaboration tools. Systems deal with tools and artifacts; activities are mostly tacit, being only partially represented by ad hoc, localized, and specialized constructs. We argue that the full range of business activity should be supported in business platforms by an explicit construct we call “Unified Activity,” which will enable a new degree of business integration, easier collaboration, capture of business practice, and more effective business process evolution. The goal of Unified Activity is to create a unified representation for Business Activities, both informal and formal, that supports the aggregation of resources to support the activities, interaction with formal business process workflows, and the creation and evolution of activity patterns. This talk will discuss our efforts to define Unified Activity as an integration focus for IBM software platforms, principally Lotus Workplace. We will describe the representation and supporting architecture, show the user experience in various client applications, and discuss the research challenges for impacting business practices.

TOM MORAN was one of the pioneers establishing the field of human-computer interaction (HCI) within computer science. He was Principal Scientist and manager of the User Interface and the Collaborative Systems Areas at Xerox PARC (1974-2001) and was founding Director of Xerox EuroPARC in Cambridge, England (1986-90). He is now a Distinguished Engineer at IBM. He founded the influential journal Human-Computer Interaction in 1984 and continues as its Editor. At IBM, he is leading a multi-lab research program on Unified Activity Management with the Lotus division.