

Assessment of inSORS IG2 Platform considering the evolving landscape of collaboration technologies

Collaboration has many dimensions: synchronous or asynchronous; co-location or separation; talk and/or visual; small groups or large; familiar faces and voices or total strangers; languages and customs; covering a range of activities from simple to extremely complex. All these issues play into effective collaboration; and, technologies to support collaborative activities, and processes have to reflect them; as well as, the reality that interactions, participants, and requirements constantly change with each collaboration.

Improved collaboration delivers significant productivity and effectiveness gains to enterprises, and communities; because we spend so much time today in “level-setting,” context explanation amongst team members, and ensuring that everyone starts and stays with the same version of the work, and working documents. We also stand to gain tremendously from better leverage of our most experienced specialists – who all waste a lot of time today waiting for the small window of contribution where they are truly essential participants.

Many technologies support some form of collaboration: Telephone Conferencing, ISDN Video Conferencing, E Mail, VOIP, IP Video Conferencing, Data sharing (e.g., Webex), Microsoft/Groove, IM/Chat, to name a few. The number of products and mediums available to people that need to collaborate creates both many options, as well as, a lot confusion.

There is no one size fits all answer – but as in other aspects of business and personal automation, we generally do not have the time or money to assemble and constantly re-assemble disparate parts. Best of breed answers sound good on paper – but unless they have underlying capabilities in common, are increasingly too complex and fragile (this is what doomed the extensive experimentation with ISDN-based videoconferencing). Enterprises and communities need to move beyond thinking about collaborative technologies as a loose collection of “products” and to start looking at them as a convenient, reliable, always available platform.

So what defines a good collaborative technology platform? My view is that for a collaboration technology to be worthwhile it must be both “fit for purpose;” and, “readily available.” By this I mean:

Fit to Purpose: A platform should provide the necessary toolset to enable each participant to effectively contribute to a multitude of group work activities in many different ways, and be able to connect varying groups of participants (having varying communication mediums), from meeting to meeting. This requires:

- ⇒ **Completeness of the collaboration platform (for the known requirements of the work activities).** Does the platform provide the voice, video, data sharing, presence, chat, and file/whiteboard sharing capabilities required for work activities to be effective? Are collaborations recordable? Can the platform

- interoperate with participants who don't have the complete platform, or are off-network?, and,
- ⇒ **Ability for each participant to contribute.** Does the platform provide the opportunity for each member of the group to participate and contribute to the extent appropriate? Can participants independently control/manage their experience? Can a multitude of differing client endpoints, and communication mediums participate without dumbing down the entire group?

Readily available: A collaboration platform must be readily available “anytime” and “anywhere” in order for users to adopt it to support their collaboration needs. This requires:

- ⇒ **It has to work without effort** – or at least be less effort to use than not to use. We are all busy enough already. Tools that add work won't get used no matter how well they operate;
- ⇒ **It has to be a part of the working environment** – not something external to it. The more I have to leave my digital workplace to use a collaborative tool, the less likely I am to bother. – And, this implies that I may have to redesign work to make the collaborative aspects more “natural” without changing things so much that I can no longer get any work done;
- ⇒ **Be available “whenever and wherever” participants need to collaborate** – the tools have to be available and useable by each participant round the clock. And they have to be able to participate from wherever they happen to be, at the time of the activity.
- ⇒ **It has to be easy to learn, use and manage**, we are all busy, remember. If I don't use it nearly all the time right from the start, I won't get very good at it – so it can't have a steep learning curve. And complexity raises support costs, impacting cost and return on investment;
- ⇒ **It has to be very reliable.** You don't come to depend on things you can't depend on; and, most of all;
- ⇒ **It has to be as nearly ubiquitous as possible.** It won't become a habit if it can't be used most anywhere you might need it, is flexible enough to support the majority of your collaboration activities, and can reach those you want to collaborate with. Ubiquity must involve current infrastructure – both corporate and public.

Review of inSORS IG2: I reviewed the inSORS IG2 platform for the following work group purposes: 1 – work that is complex, real-time, involving dispersed, multi-participant group activities; and, 2 - in comparison to other commonly known, currently available collaboration products. I found that inSORS IG2 provides the best combination of:

- ⇒ **“Completeness of toolset;”**
- ⇒ **“Ability for each participant to contribute;”** and,
- ⇒ **Availability when and where needed.**

Given that IG2 meets users most complex work requirements, it is only natural for it to be adopted and used for less complex activities as well.

The following chart in Exhibit 1 hereto summarizes the results of my product comparisons. I designated the tools that are primarily telephony based in red circles, the tools that are primarily data collaboration centric in yellow circles (additionally, I combined the web collaboration into a single grouping I call “the data category”); the tools that are primarily personal computing applications in blue circles; and, the tools the represent platforms in green circles (additionally, I combined the video conferencing product sets into a single grouping I call “the Video conferencing category”).

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Exhibit 1
Functional coverage for support of collaborative work for dispersed multi-participant groups

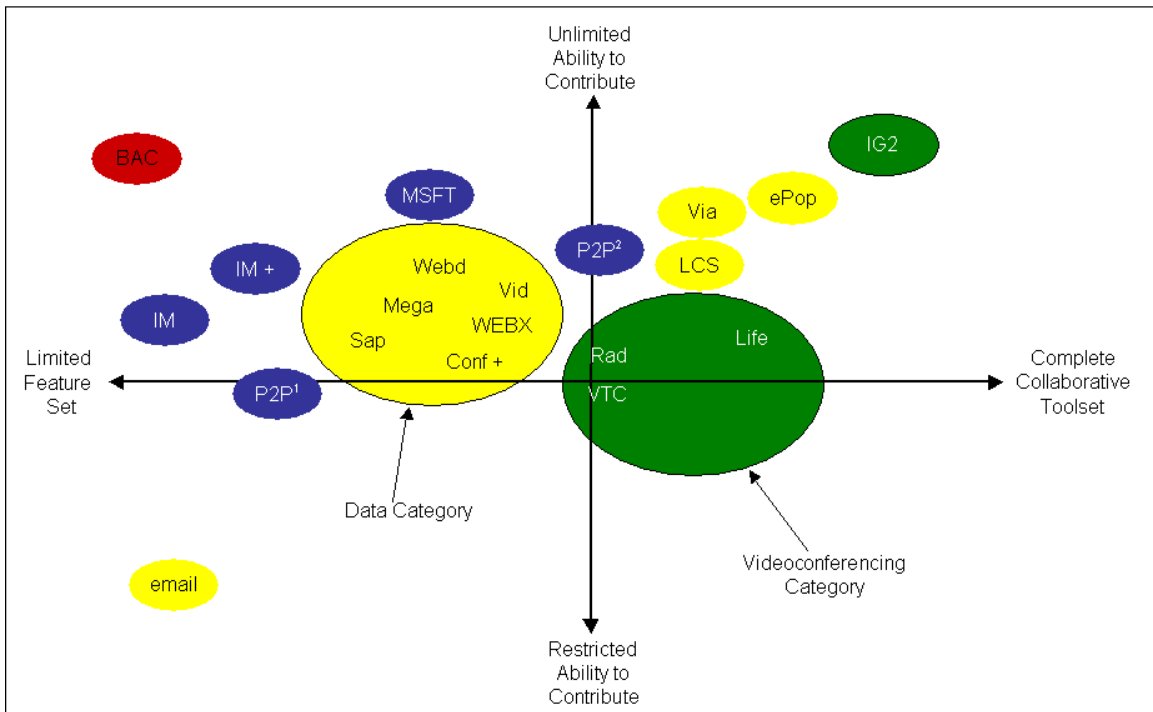


Exhibit 2

Code	Company(s) / Platform	Color Category
BAC Catg.	Bridged Audio Conference Category	
IM	Instant Messaging	
IM+	Instant messaging + multimedia	
P2P1	First generation peer to peer VOIP (Skype 1.0)	
P2P2	Second generation peer to peer VOIP (Skype 2.0, Festoon)	
Vid	Vidatel	
Mega	Megameeting	
Sap	Spontania	
Conf+	Conference Plus	
Via	Via3	
MSFT	Microsoft/Groove	
ePOP	EPOP	
VIDEO Catg.	Video Conferencing Category:	
VTC	Polycomm	
VTC	Tandburg	
LIF	Lifesize	
VTC	Aethra	
VTC	Sony	
RAD	Radvision	
DATA Catg.	Data Collaboration Category:	
WEBX	Webex (with bridged audio)	
WEBD	Web Dialogues	
LCS	Microsoft Live Communications Server (with bridged audio)	
EMAIL	E Mail	

KEY	
Primarily Telephony Based Application	
Primarily Personal Computing Application	
Primarily Data Centric Application	
Collaboration Platforms	