



Collaboration in today's global business environment is being highlighted by management experts and financial analysts as critical to innovation and the creation of new business models. Successful collaborations that were created outside the traditional business world, such as Wikipedia® and open-source development, are being held up as models for enterprises as they meet the challenges of a connected world involving customers, partners, and competitors. These models can help enable enterprises to be more flexible and creative and more responsive to customer needs in the connected world. Research into new organizational structures and the technologies that facilitate change provides the foundation for implementing future business transformations.

IBM and IBM Lotus®-branded products for collaboration support—Lotus Notes®, Domino®, Workplace™ and WebSphere® Portal—have always been leading-edge products. Starting in the days when Lotus products shifted from personal productivity to team support, Lotus Development and the IBM Research Division have had a close relationship, whose focus was to apply research insights to product development. The benefits have been reciprocal, as the employment of Lotus' industry-leading groupware products has provided some of the most interesting field sites for researchers examining the impact of technology on work practices. In recent years, this partnership has led to a new level of understanding of how enterprises operate and to a product strategy that is evolving from team support to enterprise productivity enhancement. Key to that transformation is the concept of activity-centered collaboration, which is highlighted in this special issue. Activity-centered collaboration is a way to support everyday work that benefits individuals, teams, and entire organizations, and which will scale up by integrating local processes with formal distributed business processes.

The Business Collaboration theme of this issue of the *IBM Systems Journal* is timely. In addition to offering a sample from a range of projects, this issue provides a comprehensive overview of activity-centered collaboration just as customers are starting to use and evaluate the first products based on this concept. The work presented here is the result of collaboration at several levels. Some of the papers are co-authored by groups that cut across the research and product lines. Some of the work is interdisciplinary; on the research side, the contributions are from both computer scientists and social scientists; in both organizations, strategic designers have shaped the vision and tested it with customers. We hope you will share our enthusiasm, regardless of your point of view and background.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Irene Greif".

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Rhodin".

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