

## ***The Past, Present and Future of Human Communication and Technology Research***

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### **Challenge One:**

Can communication technologies really promote collaboration? Collaboration has become a buzz word in society in general and particularly in the world of communication and information technologies (CIT). However, collaboration seems to have been reduced to the lowest common denominator, teamwork, in most current conceptions. Teamwork is important, but it is not exactly the Watson-Crick type of creative, potentially innovative collaboration that is implicitly promised by “new collaboration technologies.” How can we facilitate more creative, effective collaborations? Many of the Web 2.0 technologies introduce possibilities for collaboration that were unheard of until recently. Wikis, for instance, have been perhaps the best known new collaboration tool and projects such as Wikipedia are touted as brave new collaborations. However, the value of the Wikipedia project has been questioned and the openness of the collaboration afforded by Wikis has been challenged. While technologies such as Wikis can promote collaboration, they do not determine or guarantee it. The human side of the equation is particularly important to whether technologies are used collaboratively or not. Some human tendencies tend to break down collaboration and a key question is whether CIT can be designed to counteract these tendencies. And if they are successful in counteracting these tendencies, just as group decision support systems were at counteracting counterproductive tendencies in group communication, what is to keep them from going the same route as GDSSs, which have had problems with adoption and effective use?

### **Challenge Two:**

What are the implications for communication of the rapidly increasing integration of CITs? Integration and convergence are two main themes of the development of CITs over the past twenty years. Ongoing development in middleware, web services, multimodal search engines and other integration technologies has led to the ability to connect different types of data in unprecedented ways. Until recently, this integration was hindered by the fact that massive amounts of data were not easily manageable, but advances in datamining, textmining, terabyte data storage, crawlers, and other technologies have made finding data and associations among them far easier. To some this raises the spectre of the panopticon, with the FBI combing phone calls and using textmining to surveil the populace. To others it raises opportunities to learn about consumer preferences or the public's interests. Communicative aspects of integrative technologies have not been explored much. What are the

implications for communication of being able to integrate multiple media? Of being able to capture shards of public opinion from text bases? Of combining MySpace and Everquest blogs? And what is the potential of these integrative technologies for communication research?

### ***Author Biography***

Marshall Scott Poole (Ph.D University of Wisconsin-Madison) is Professor of Speech Communication and Senior Research Scientist at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. His research interests include group and organizational communication, information systems, collaboration technologies, organizational innovation, and theory construction. He is the author of over 100 articles and book chapters. Scott has co-authored or edited ten books including *Communication and Group Decision-Making*, *Theories of Small Groups: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, *Organizational Change and Innovation Processes: Theory and Methods for Research*, and *The Handbook of Organizational Change and Innovation*. Scott has been named a Fellow of the International Communication Association and a Distinguished Scholar of the National Communication Association.