

Case study

Hitachi Group achieves an integrated collaboration environment with 200,000 users Groupmax Collaboration

Hitachi Group

Hitachi, Ltd. has kicked off its implementation of Groupmax Collaboration as a company-wide integrated collaboration environment for around 200,000 Hitachi Group employees. By enabling communication beyond the traditional framework of departments and offices, secure information sharing, and a work style independent of time and place, Hitachi has reaped the rewards of TCO optimization through platform integration, in addition to the ability to meet the needs of its customers by facilitating decision-making and creating new insight.

With future plans to link to real-time communication technologies such as IP telephony and videoconferencing, Hitachi aims to develop a world-class corporate collaboration environment, and in the process, to revolutionize the work styles of all Hitachi Group employees.

Platform to enable cross-functional collaboration

These days, the ability to take full advantage of existing knowledge and thereby facilitate decision-making is directly tied to a company's competitive advantage. As such, many companies are starting to make efforts towards building processes to implement flexible collaboration and information sharing that transcends organizational frameworks.

Meanwhile, compliance and security initiatives following the introduction of privacy-protection legislation in April of 2005 and support for ubiquitous work styles regardless of time and place are becoming important topics.

To meet these new business needs, the importance of an IT platform to facilitate conversion to a "cross-functional organization" that seamlessly links individuals, outside of existing organizational hierarchies, as well as to centrally and securely manage the resulting wide array of knowledge gathered, is becoming increasingly clear.

Hitachi's collaboration portal, Groupmax Collaboration, is based on the highly reliable Collaborative E-business Platform Cosminexus, and provides functionality to realize the vision of a cross-functional organization built around the idea of community.

Here, community means a gathering of problem-oriented people, swapping and sharing information and knowledge, to work towards a common goal.

With Groupmax Collaboration, members can form a community at will, assembling from different organizations and offices, and using functionality, such as mail, electronic

forums, and file sharing, provided in a common workplace created for each community. This allows previously scattered information and know-how to be shared in real-time, improving the organization's overall competencies and increasing its business opportunities.

But even with tools intended to maximize an organization's potential, phrases like "collaboration transcending organizations" and "global information sharing" can be but a pipe dream if scalability and operational issues get in the way.

This is why Hitachi, Ltd. has started actual Groupmax Collaboration operation with its employees, one of the largest user pools in the world; to solidify impressive scalability and secure a variety of functional and operational advantages. This involves running a company-wide integrated collaboration environment used by 200,000 of Hitachi Group's total 340,000 employees.

The "IT Infrastructure One Hitachi Initiative" project: unifying the corporate platform

"The introduction of Groupmax Collaboration is part of the "IT Infrastructure One Hitachi Initiative" project, an effort to restructure the corporate platform of all Hitachi Group members. The primary goal of the IT Infrastructure One Hitachi Initiative project is to make the company-wide infrastructure both robust and secure through control and consolidation, to achieve better service for its customers by making the most of the knowledge existing between groups." These are the words of Hiroto Ise, the main thrust behind the project, and the Senior Engineer

of the Network Management Department, part of the e-Platform Promotion Office of the Information Technology Division.

The Hitachi Group IT platform consists of three parts. The first is the Business Platform, which handles the core competencies of each division, such as Supply Chain Management (SCM) and Digital Engineering (DE). Next is the Management Platform, which is a horizontal, company-wide system for financial affairs, human resources, and resource planning. Finally, the Corporate Platform is responsible for the corporate IT platform, including group-wide authentication and network platforms, as well as telephony and server integration. Groupmax Collaboration is being used as a new "collaboration platform" for this Corporate Platform.

"Even until now, we've used groupware with mail, schedulers, and bulletin boards," continues Ise. "But since the infrastructure of each division was not unified, the way in which we shared information for cross-organizational projects and contacted those with the right specialist know-how and skills was inadequate. From a security and compliance perspective, by aggregating servers and linking to measures outside of IT Infrastructure One Hitachi Initiative such as authentication platforms, we expect a significant impact on efforts for prevention of leaked information and a reliable audit trail. A company-wide implementation of Groupmax Collaboration is one part of efforts to solve these issues."

Supporting dynamic discussions and knowledge sharing

As the first phase of this project in August

of 2004, Groupmax Collaboration was rolled out to around 40,000 employee users at the headquarters and Information & Telecommunications Systems group. Secure access to this new integrated collaboration platform could be performed not just from the office, but also on the road and at home. And in addition to conventional groupware functionality, the electronic forum and file sharing functions allowed members to actively share information and work together, by freely creating communities beyond those of the organization.

In discussing the results of the rollout, Ise went on to say that "In the first four months, more than 800 horizontally organized communities were created, with more than 2,100 electronic forums. Every day, in each community and on each electronic forum, staff members from various sections conducted lively discussions and shared knowledge, and enjoyed the ease in which they could execute cross-organizational projects and even cultural activities between employees." From an operational perspective, a reduction in TCO was achieved by aggregating the servers providing each service (Figure 1).

Communication beyond borders and infrastructures

Just how are these users actually using this new environment? Hikaru Watanabe, who belongs to the Global Business Planning & Operations Division, part of the Information & Telecommunications Systems, explains the state of the organization before Groupmax Collaboration as follows.

"In my division, we are moving forward with global product sales and operations planning for storage, server, and network devices by linking with domestic offices and overseas companies. Of course, our co-workers are based all over the world, in the United States, Europe, China, and Korea, but since the infrastructures of each office were not unified, the exchange of information was limited to email."

With information based on email, there is a limit to how the data can be accumulated and searched, and the risks involved in sharing information, such as handling confidential files over an open network, are significant. Also, disparate infrastructures prevent multiple members from using electronic forums for discussion. But the introduction of Groupmax Collaboration made all the difference.

"First of all," Watanabe continues, "I was quite surprised that I could now create a

platform for two-way communication, without even thinking about differences in location or time. Since Groupmax Collaboration is a Web-based application, we did not need to install any software on our computers. As long as you could connect to the intranet, you could access the workplace regardless of your environment, and work without paying attention to differences in time zone. This allows me to join a community, and exchange information or share Microsoft® Excel®, PowerPoint®, or image files in real-time with the other community members. I'm confident that now we have an environment that will allow us to do a lot of the things we have been wanting to do."

The community managed by Watanabe's division has something called a "Global Information Sharing Site", where various weekly and monthly reports for Hitachi headquarters sent in from various overseas locations are maintained in a database. Using the meeting minutes creation functionality from Groupmax Collaboration, notes and ideas related to each piece of information are batch registered, to facilitate data searchability and understanding of overall conditions (Figure 2).

"Members with access permissions to the related information can share it securely," Watanabe adds, "allowing us to exchange information in real-time. From here, we plan to share information such as Win & Loss analysis related to individual businesses and IT-related demand patterns in each overseas market."

A simple and intuitive GUI to further raise adoption rates

In addition to this site, Watanabe's division has a bulletin-board community for sharing the orders received, report materials, risk contingency information for each country, seminar and training announcements, business trip reports, and operations restructuring plans that are handled by the division, and a community that allows junior team members to solve problems themselves using a database with FAQs for complicated import/export management operations and operation standards. These efforts are helping to stimulate each

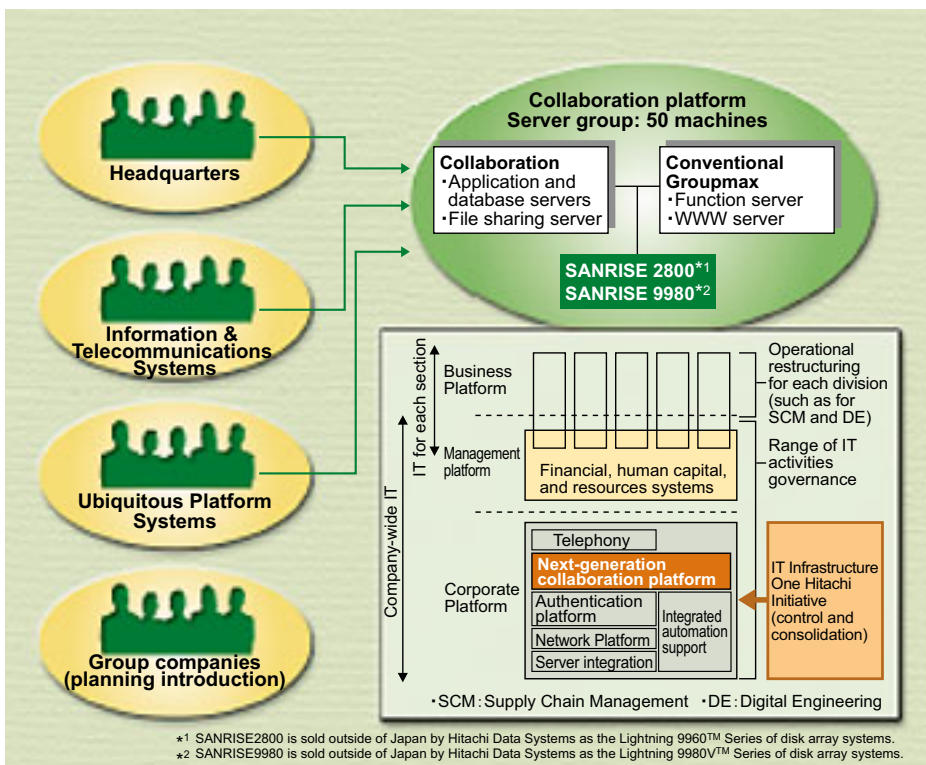


Figure 1: Collaboration platform for 200,000 Hitachi Group employees

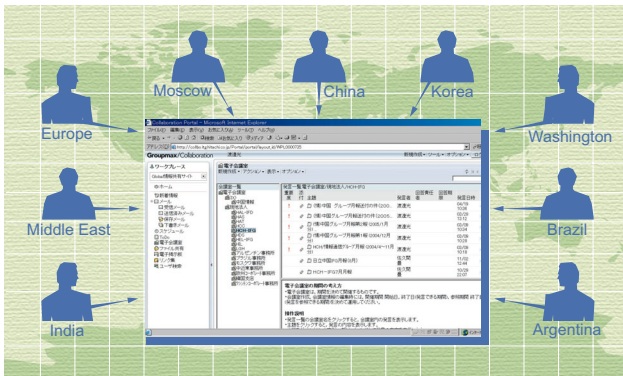


Figure 2: The Global Information Sharing Site of the Global Business Planning & Operations Division

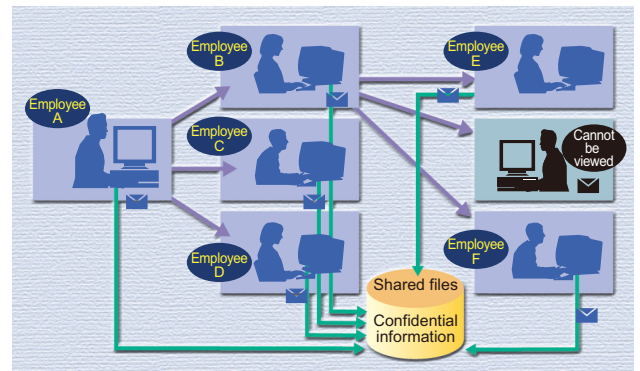


Figure 3: Preventing information leakage from attached files

member to share information, and significantly supporting jump-started communication and business streamlining.

"I didn't expect a Web application to have such a rich GUI," Watanabe adds. While Groupmax Collaboration is a Web application, it achieves the GUI level of a Windows® client. The navigation view on the left of the screen can be used to switch user and community workplaces, facilitating operations by allowing quick access to each kind of portlet (such as email, schedules, and electronic forums) and content needed for operation. Also convenient is the email functionality, which allows filtering based on delivery attributes (such as Unread and Urgent), subject, sender, community name, and more. The simplicity, intuitiveness, and usability of the GUI encourages even more use.

In this division, communication is performed currently between around 140 members, spread out across 9 overseas locations, but the division plans to expand future information sharing to other overseas offices and related divisions. In addition to calling on the participation of its business partners and local staff in each office, the division is aiming to make active use of IP telephony and videoconferencing functionality.

In discussing future plans, Watanabe continues, "Because the value added increases with the number of participants, we'd like to continue by increasing our abilities to send and receive information between divisions, and grow with this environment."

Enhanced security functionality, built in

In addition to the above, Groupmax Collaboration is packed with a variety of functionalities and benefits. Mitsuharu Nagayama, Section Manager in the Network Software, part of the Network Application Software Department of the Software Division, had the following to say.

"With regards to Groupmax Collaboration usage within the Global Business Planning & Operation Division, our first priority is to encourage smooth operations through support for globalization, not only by making it easy to switch language settings and time zones, but also by linking to various kinds of operation information accumulated home and abroad."

"Another important feature is support for real-time communication linked to IP telephony and videoconferencing," Nagayama continues. "By linking with CommuniMax, Hitachi's IP telephony solution, we can allow users to use IP telephony simply by clicking another collaboration user's telephone number from a user search window, or hold a real conference while looking over related materials with another remote user, simply by starting videoconferencing from a schedule. We're aiming to continue enhancements to linkage with this kind of real-time communication, as part of our plans for IT Infrastructure One Hitachi Initiative."

In particular, Nagayama emphasizes the significant advantages Groupmax Collaboration enjoys because of its high overall security level. "Most times personal information is leaked, it is due to either error or malicious intent within an organization.

With Groupmax Collaboration, access can be managed on a community basis, so that access to information is not permitted for members who do not need access. Also, the existence of a community can be hidden. To prevent information leakage due to files attached to emails, attached files can be stored on a secure file share and accessed by URL from the body of an email, so that information never leaves the organization" (Figure 3).

In addition to this kind of proprietary security functionality, Groupmax Collaboration can also link to Hitachi Open Middleware such as Cosminexus, HiRDB, and Job Management Partner 1, as well as to security-related products, to achieve further enhancements to security and compliance support.

With the ability to provide integrated know-how about software, hardware, operation and training, Hitachi's total solution is a trusted ally to corporations that are concerned about security risks and leaked information, and are unsure about how to set up a company-wide information sharing system.

In March of 2005, setup was completed for a directory platform and authentication platform to manage the user information of about 200,000 of Hitachi Group's 340,000 employees. With this, company-wide rollout of Groupmax Collaboration is aimed to ramp up quickly by 2007. The goal is a world-class corporate collaboration environment; and by collecting feedback about various know-how and operation techniques, to perfect the functionality, scalability, and reliability of Groupmax Collaboration.

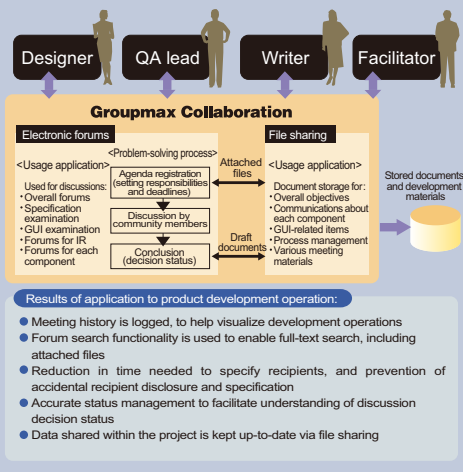
An example of using Groupmax Collaboration within Hitachi

Each division and section in Hitachi is employing its own techniques to facilitate the rollout of Groupmax Collaboration as an integrated collaboration environment, to streamline operations and improve the quality of the services provided to customers. The following introduces several such examples. The techniques and know-how gained here will be incorporated as future enhancements and solutions.

Case study 1

Application to product development operations

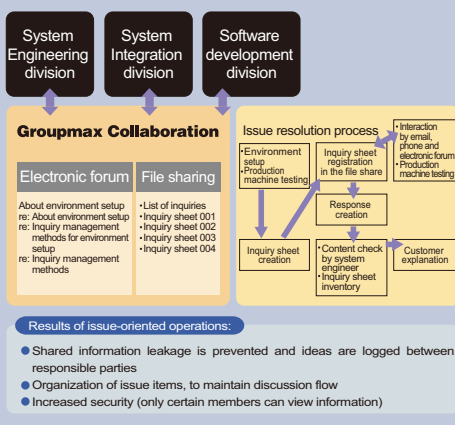
Here, electronic forums have been used for each step in discussion solutions for large-scale software development projects, to reduce the number of meetings, and greatly improve efficiency. Also, meeting minutes are taken to record the process of deciding on a specification, so that the process can be used for similar development down the road.



Case study 2

Application to issue-oriented operations

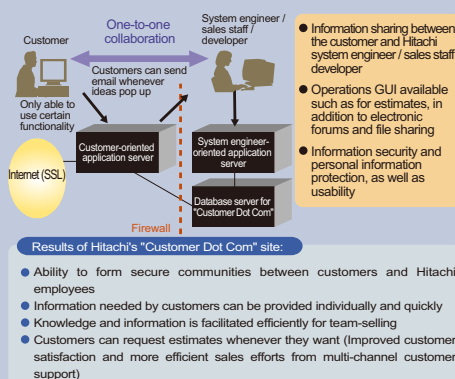
Delivery of an information system is often accompanied by a variety of requirements. While close communication between developers and system engineers is needed to increase the speed and accuracy of related estimates, it is almost impossible for a system engineering division, who handle multiple products from hardware, to hold regular meetings with a given development division. Here, Groupmax Collaboration can be used to start a community for each issue, to facilitate smooth and secure information sharing. This allows estimates to be provided to customers more quickly and accurately.



Case study 3

Application to customer IT solutions

Hitachi is planning to use Groupmax Collaboration to set up "Customer Dot Com", an information-sharing site with hotline functionality for customers with large-scale transaction relationships. The primary feature of this system is to let sales staff and customers contact each other, around the clock. Again, because security is fortified, there is little fear of information leakage.



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Note: The real-time communication products and systems, such as Groupmax Collaboration Real-Time Communication products and the related IP telephony systems and videoconferencing systems, are available only in Japan.

• This article appeared in the June 2005 edition of *Hitac*.
• For details about Groupmax Collaboration, Cosminexus, HiRDB, or Job Management Partner 1, see our website.