CHAPTER 7   **TELECOMMUNICATIONS, THE INTERNET, AND WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY**

CASE 1   **Virtual Collaboration for Lotus Sametime**

VIDEO CASE

SUMMARY   Lotus Sametime is an IBM virtual collaboration environment that is used by firms as a part of their enterprise systems. The objective of these systems is to increase collaboration among remote or mobile work teams while not increasing travel costs and meeting costs. Using video, audio, and interactive software, Lotus Sametime allows groups of people to meet electronically even though they are geographically separated. L=3:33.

URL   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJJWx552lFE

CASE   Lotus Sametime is IBM's telepresence and collaboration environment. Sametime is a part of the IBM/Lotus product offering. It is widely used in large Fortune 500 firms. IBM describes the main features of Sametime as:

- Presence-awareness—when online, your location and contact information, are available to all your contacts—whether you are at your desk, in your home office, or in transit using a mobile phone.
- Security-rich, enterprise-scale instant messaging
- Online meetings with integrated voice (VoIP) and high-quality desktop video
- Out-of-the-box integration with IBM Lotus, IBM WebSphere and Microsoft products
- Open application programming interfaces (APIs) and an extensible client.

Benefits

IBM claims the following benefits for Lotus Sametime:

- *Answer business questions quickly:* Spend less time trying to find people who can answer questions and more time being productive.

- *Speed business processes:* Reduce the time to complete a business process.

- *Cut travel, conferencing and communication costs:* See who is available right now and let the software find them. Use online meetings, Voice over IP (VoIP) and more. Organizations can reduce travel expenses, lower audio- and Web-conferencing service expenses, and dramatically reduce telephony expenses. These cost savings are large enough that Sametime unified communications (UC) implementations typically pay for themselves in under a year.

- *Enable dispersed teams to collaborate:* Speed project completion for teams in different locations, countries, and time zones. Include mobile employees.

- *Hire and keep the best talent:* Evolve a more collaborative culture across teams— around the world or in the same building. Provide better employee work-life balance by extending the ability to work virtually anywhere while ensuring effective management and working environment.

- *Make it easy for people to access UC functions from their desktop apps:* See—right within applications—who is available for collaboration and then communicate in a single click.

- *Provide people choice and flexibility in collaboration to get the job done:* Move seamlessly—via a unified user interface—among text chats, voice and video calls, and online meetings—whatever best fits the situation. With Sametime software, quick text chats can answer simple questions outright or can be escalated to multi-way voice or video chats or an online meeting. Tightly integrated tools in Sametime software make it easy to switch communications and collaboration methods as your conversation evolves.

- *Unify and extend your communications environment:* Gain integrated voice, computer and telephony. Use Sametime software's integrated voice over IP (VoIP) and high-quality desktop video capabilities—or use third-party plug-ins—to integrate with your existing systems. Use optional one-number phone service, softphone and intelligent call management capabilities through an existing telephony infrastructure.

- *Protect your investments in applications, voice and video:* Leverage your current communications and application environment rather than ripping and replacing it. Sametime software supports and integrates with multiple client and server operat-

ing systems, e-mail platforms, directories, telephony, audio conferencing and video conferencing systems. (IBM, *Online meetings with Lotus Sametime software,* 2010)

One of the major attractions of Sametime is its use as a collaboration tool. Sametime online meetings (Web conferencing) allow rich collaboration with team members around the world—inside or outside the enterprise. There are many potential benefits from using online meetings to share documents, applications, and screens. Projects can be completed more quickly when teams don't have to wait for e-mail exchanges or travel to face-to-face meetings. High-quality audio and video capabilities can enhance the collaborative experience, providing context through subtle signals such as body language that would otherwise be missing from a basic Web conference. Organizations can spend less on travel, lower telephony and audio conferencing expenses, and reduce or eliminate expensive fees for hosted web conferencing services.

Virtual Sametime: Avatar Collaborators

In 2009 IBM introduced its virtual version of Sametime. The original (and still available) version of Sametime operates in a standard Windows menu environment. Users can arrange for and plan meetings, invite participants, conduct meetings, take polls, and product documents. The virtual edition described in the case video adds an "immersive environment" where users select avatars to play their roles.

Supplementing the basic edition with a virtual environment offers many potential benefits: friendlier user-interface, ease of use, and the attraction of a contemporary gamelike environment, not to mention the popularity of the James Cameron movie "Avatar." Briefly, avatars are popular and fascinating. Whether or not they contribute to better collaboration in firms is something you will have to decide.

VIDEO CASE QUESTIONS

1. Based on the video and text of the case, list and briefly describe five areas where either version of Sametime may increase employee productivity. What do you think will produce the greatest increase in employee productivity?

2. How does Lotus Sametime support collaboration? What are the additional benefits of the virtual environment?

3. The case mentions "presence awareness." What is presence awareness and of what use is it?

4. What types of communication are integrated within Sametime's digital environment? What type of communication is missing? Does it make a difference?

5. Do you think that virtual collaboration using avatars is more or less effective than traditional methods of collaboration (which include face-to-face, traveling to meetings, telephone conference calls, e-mail, and instant messaging)?