

: What are the main differences between GDSS and Groupware?

Definition questions like this one are common in my email and on the DSSResources.COM Bulletin Board. Emma Gilmartin posted the above question on May 01, 2002 and my response was posted a few days later. I answered a related question in the Ask Dan! column of March 24, 2001 titled "What is a Group Decision Support System?" In this Ask Dan!, I'll try to expand on my previous column.

In general, group decision support systems (GDSS) are interactive, computer-based systems that facilitate solution of semi-structured and unstructured problems by a designated set of decision-makers working together as a group. A GDSS can assist groups, especially groups of managers, in analyzing problem situations and in performing group decision making tasks. GDSS include structured decision tools for tasks like brainstorming, commenting on ideas, and rating and ranking of alternatives (cf., DeSanctis and Gallupe, 1987).

Groupware is any software package designed to support more than one person working on a shared task. Groupware is multiuser software that allows users to access the same data. Also, groupware usually provides a mechanism that helps users coordinate and keep track of on-going projects or decision processes. It helps people work together through computer-supported communication, collaboration, and coordination. The best known "general purpose" groupware products include Lotus Notes, Microsoft Exchange 2000, Novell GroupWise 6, and Microsoft NetMeeting.

Groupware is a much broader category of group support software and tools than the term GDSS. In general, GDSS products are groupware. Not all groupware products are used however for decision support and not all groupware products are equally useful in developing decision support capabilities.

For the past few years, I have encouraged and advocated the use of a new umbrella term -- Communications-Driven DSS. The free DSS Glossary at DSSResources.COM defines a Communications-Driven DSS as a decision support system that uses network and communication technologies to facilitate collaboration and group communication. For a Communications-Driven DSS, communication technologies are central to supporting decision-making. Network and communication technologies provide the dominant functionality used for decision support.

GDSS are in some ways hybrid systems *or integrated systems with multiple subsystems* including an important model component that provide decision support functions and capabilities, yet GDSS can only provide support to the group because of the network and communication technologies. So based on an assessment of what technology provides the "dominant functionality" for decision support, GDSS and many decision support systems built using groupware products are Communications-Driven DSS. *If the model component provides the dominant functionality for a GDSS, then it is a model-driven GDSS.* For some relevant web links, check the page on Communications-Driven DSS at DSSResources.COM.

References

DeSanctis, G., and R. Gallupe, "A Foundation for the Study of Group Decision Support Systems," *Management Science*, May 1987, 33(5).

Power, D. J. "What are group decision support systems and how do they work?", *DSS News*, Vol. 2, No. 7, 03/25/2001.

The above response is based upon Power, D., What are the main differences between GDSS and Groupware? DSS News, Vol. 3, No. 14, July 7, 2002. Material in italics was added.

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Author: Daniel Power

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