Activating the Social Workscape

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Abstract: Most everyday tasks performed on or through computer systems involve multiple people. Documents are written for others and sent to them; email messages arrive from individuals and are sent to groups; web pages are written for others to read, and presentations are created to communicate ideas to others. By contrast, most interactive computer systems are stubbornly and resolutely individual. Even email systems – perhaps the prototypical example of an everyday system that involves multiple people – tend to be constructed as single-user browsers for databases of text objects (messages), conveying little “sense of the other.” One line of research that we are currently pursuing is to monitor, model, and derive information about the temporal and social patterns that characterize people’s interactions with each other, and then incorporate this information into the user experience. Our goal is to invest the user interface with a sense of the social workscape within which it is used and embedded.