No More Teams! Mastering the Dynamics of Creative Collaboration
by Michael Schrage
(Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1995, $14.95, 241 pages)
ISBN 0-385-47603-6
Reviewed by Jill B. Arnold

I thoroughly enjoyed No More Teams! and definitely recommend it. Originally published in hardcover as Shared Minds: The New Technologies of Collaboration (Random House, 1990), Michael Schrage views the retitled work as a “revised, updated, and improved version,” more relevant for managers. He believes that organizations have over-emphasized the use of teams and that teams have become a popular management metaphor that misses what we need to be addressing. “The concept of teams obscures, rather than reveals, the real relationship challenges our organizations face.” These real challenges are how people can cooperate and collaborate to create value that they could not achieve as individuals.

This book offers the reader a primer on collaboration in a manner that is intended to make one a “true believer.” It provides pragmatic how-to suggestions within an academic framework, and includes a historical perspective of the study of human interaction and the evolving emphasis on collaboration. Schrage emphasizes the enabling role of information technology in the collaborative process, and envisions a future full of opportunity, including enormous breakthroughs in human experience and learning.

The higher education community is engaged in a number of initiatives focused on collaboration and collaborative technologies. We are involved in efforts “to transform the academy,” to move toward collaborative learning, to work in partnerships, to be interdisciplinary. We are starting to see the potential for making “one plus one equals three” breakthroughs, as exemplified by the new academic area of interest that brings together the study of information technology, information management, and human interaction. The focus of Schrage’s text is very relevant.

Understanding team dynamics and team approaches has proven very effective in processing information in our organizations. Collaboration skills, technologies, and approaches offer us a chance to create information with others, which will be critical to us in the future.

Reviewed by Jill Arnold is an Associate Director of the Information Technology Division and Director of Corporate and External Relations at the University of Michigan.

The Skilled Facilitator: Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups
by Roger M. Schwarz
(Jossey-Bass, 1994, $19.95, 314 pages)
ISBN 1-55542-638-7
Reviewed by John E. Bucher

Managers of information technology in higher education are regularly called upon to facilitate and mediate within their constituencies, whether the group consists of staff, faculty, administrators, or, more likely, a combination of these. I didn’t recognize the importance of group facilitation when I first became a director of computing. But I have certainly come to appreciate the importance of this skill in all areas of higher education information technology. As IT leaders, we have a required involvement in almost all areas of our campus. We find ourselves called upon daily to help groups reach decisions and plans of action in the use and deployment of technology. Reengineered organizations, flattened hierarchies, matrix or self-managed teams, all demand effective facilitation and guidance.

The Skilled Facilitator, by Roger Schwarz, is designed as a practitioner’s guide to the theory and skills of group facilitation. Although its primary audience appears to be consultants and contractors, its methods can be very valuable to anyone who assists smaller, task-defined groups within larger organizations in defining and solving problems.

The book includes introductory chapters on the definition of facilitation and the role that external facilitators play in organizations. It also provides very important summaries of what are described as “core values” and “core principles” underlying any facilitative approach to increase effectiveness within groups.

Middle chapters on meeting management, dealing with emotion, problem solving, and intervention provide important fundamental information. I found the final section to be most relevant in my role as an IT leader, since it speaks directly about serving as a facilitator in one’s own organization and includes a chapter devoted to becoming and serving as a facilitative leader.

Although some parts of the book are more relevant to contracted consultants, overall I found the book relevant and timely, and believe it will be a valuable reference source for information resources managers and leaders.

Reviewer John E. Bucher is Director of Computing at Oberlin College. He has managed information technology services in small, medium, and large universities and colleges.