



IBM'S WORLDJAM

**How IBM Created a New Standard
in Intracompany Communication**

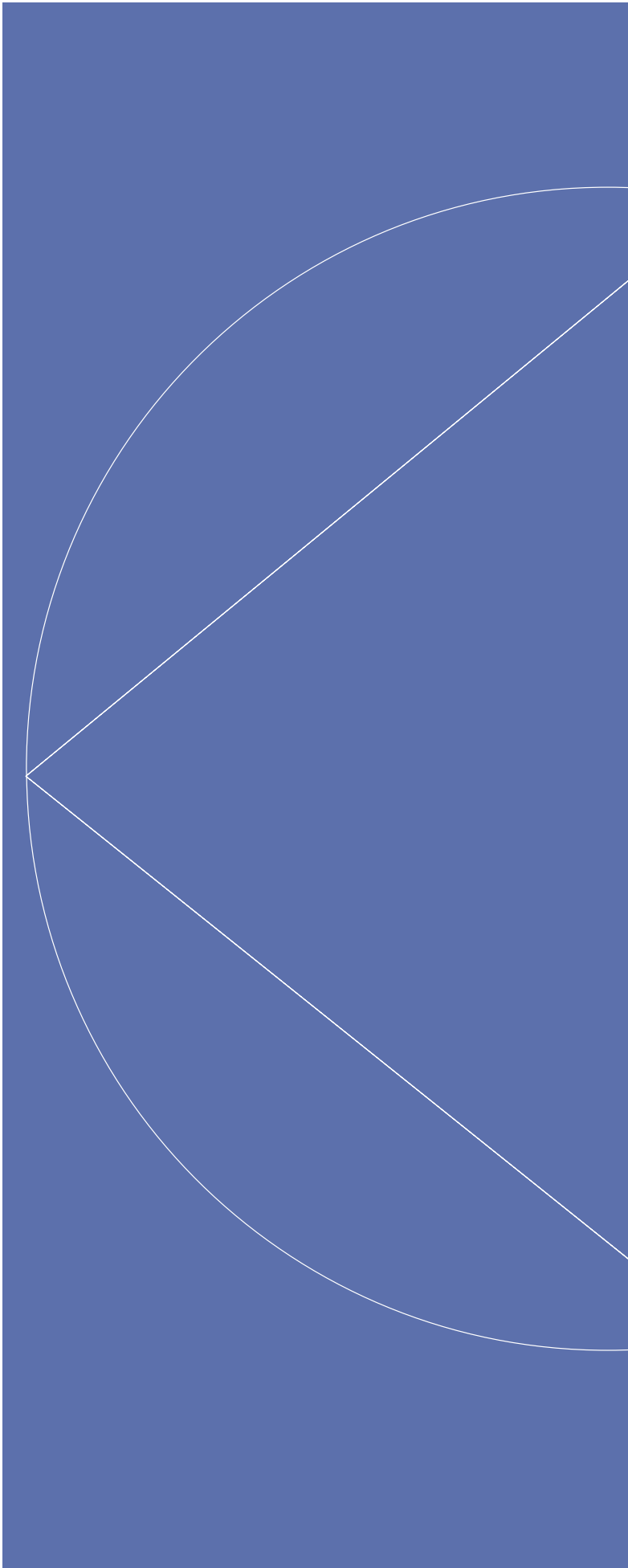
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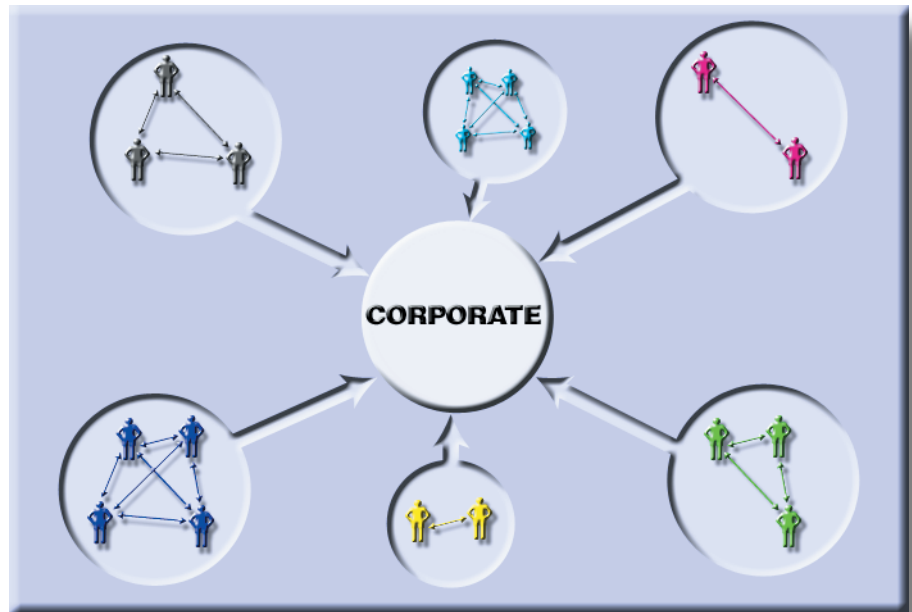
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IBM'S WORLDJAM — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IBM took a bold step when it began WorldJam, a 72-hour online conference, creating an entirely new way of bringing people and ideas together. WorldJam, in fact, was so original that it created a new genre of online events: it was the first Massively Parallel Conference (MPC). BaseX defines an MPC as a massively scaled meeting that, by its very nature, can only take place using computer-mediated communications tools. An MPC creates a many-to-many interactive environment in order to enable a many-to-one gathering of information. The MPC is organized to facilitate discussion among constituents, users or employees on predetermined topics or questions important to the sponsoring organization. It always has a goal or set of goals, explicit or implicit, and is of limited duration.

FIGURE 1: A MASSIVELY PARALLEL CONFERENCE
Many-to-Many Conversations Creating
a Many-to-One Gathering of Information



During times when critical issues arise but travel is a less-preferred option, MPCs bring corporate managers a solution that keeps businesses running. Having an MPC program in place will allow companies to respond quickly to changes in the business and political climates while allowing for an assemblage of large numbers of employees from various disciplines and geographic regions.

WorldJam was the first MPC, and a very successful one at that. At its core was a set of distinct conversations among more than 52,000 IBM employees who discussed ten important, horizontal, cross-company issues in distinct forums. WorldJam contributors were, in effect, building a real-time database of best practices.

IBM'S WORLDJAM — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are various reasons why IBM organized WorldJam, and why MPCs can be of great benefit to other companies. For example, they are effective brainstorming tools and can speed up innovation, offer quicker response times to changes and help introduce new products.

WorldJam was just as successful as its creators, the IBM intranet team, hoped it would be — if not more so. There were six million hits to the Web site, 6,000 messages posted, and 268,000 views of the discussions and messages. The forums spawned a variety of new ideas and encouraged interaction in a way that would not have been possible offline. Most importantly, all of the exchanges were recorded for future use, turning WorldJam into a KM Core Dump: a collection of best practices and ideas accessible by all IBM employees.

But WorldJam was not perfect, and those who plan future MPCs can learn from WorldJam's weaknesses, as IBM did. The software was not fully implemented, conversations were only possible in English, and use of the site was often difficult. In addition, very few participants used the synchronous breakout technology or the various diversions (such as the Thinking Tools) created for the WorldJam project.

MPCs have important implications for everyone. For a company, they can create a resource and database to help increase employees' productivity by making existing knowledge available to all — not just within already-existing communities of practice or interest. The bottom line will also be improved, because travel and phone costs can be reduced, if not eliminated, as offline conferences are replaced by MPCs. Customers may benefit, as they can be included in the brainstorming process and contribute to discussions about improved products and more efficient services. Finally, employees will benefit because they are provided with an opportunity to contribute to a company's strategic planning process. They also may experience a new sense of community, as they have a chance to connect to colleagues they may not have known previously.

MPCs can also be applied outside the corporate world, providing a useful framework for such forums as online town-hall political meetings or debates among researchers around the world. An MPC is at once the product of the trend toward globalism, and a globalizing force. An MPC, like the Internet itself, provides an egalitarian mechanism through which individuals of all ranks can talk with each other, thus decentralizing power within an organization while centralizing the flow of information.

An MPC thus has a paradoxical and transformative effect upon information flow and power-distribution within an organization. For both power and information, an MPC is, on the one hand, radically decentralizing — it opens access and empowers individuals — and centralizing — it turns the result of its interactions into a viewable, analyzable and usable whole. Individuals can contribute, and the organization can take action rapidly based on the result.



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IBM's WorldJam was a massive 72-hour online conference that brought together 52,000 worldwide employees to discuss 10 points key to IBM's internal and external strategies. WorldJam was the first Massively Parallel Conference (MPC), Basex' term for this type of event that allows multiple conversations to run simultaneously, gathering information for the organizing body that would not be capturable through one-on-one interactions or other broadcast systems, such as surveys. MPCs have important implications for everyone. An MPC can be an effective brainstorming tool, can speed up innovation, can offer quicker response times to changes and can help introduce new products. Most importantly, MPCs allow the collection of information that would not otherwise be obtainable - the content of casual conversations between interested parties and other experts.

This paper, a Basex exclusive (Basex was the only analyst firm invited by IBM to attend and report on this event), is a must-read for companies considering massive internal or external communications efforts and vendors looking to support those doing so. 25% of net proceeds on the sales of this report will be donated to the September 11th Fund.

At Basex, our analysts have the exclusive knowledge you need to successfully apply the concepts in this paper to your business. **Basex. What's in IT for you™.**

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