



## Organizational communication and awareness: a novel solution for health informatics

*Anne Adams, Ann Blandford, Dawn Budd and Neil Bailey*

**As organizations grow larger and more distributed, the problems of maintaining corporate awareness and effective communication channels escalate. The clinical domain poses particular challenges to maintaining good corporate communications because users have limited time to access information and often have negative technology perceptions. This article highlights how a screen saver application, initially designed to increase privacy and security, developed into a new communication medium improving corporate communication across the organization. An ethnographic study of the application within a hospital setting, analysed using grounded theory methods, details the iterative and organic development of the design through 'community of practice' involvement. This application and the evolutionary process through which it was developed were found to not only increase awareness of resources, activities and hospital changes but also positively influence users' perceptions of, involvement in and ownership of general IT developments. User involvement also raised the importance, for the designers, of application usability, quality and aesthetics.**

### Keywords

communication, communities of practice, organizational awareness, social issues

### Introduction

As an organization grows and spreads to separate geographic locations, it becomes hard for staff to retain an awareness of community activities, events and resources across that organization. Without organizational awareness, activities are likely to be duplicated or go unnoticed by those who would appreciate them. Joint resources can be left unused,

reducing the likelihood of a collective outlook. Users therefore need support in obtaining a shared understanding of corporate perspectives and establishing productive collaborations across an organization. This is especially true within the clinical domain where the complex, autonomous and hierarchical nature of the medical discipline can isolate users from organizational issues [1].

A range of communication and awareness tools has been used to counteract the growing isolation of users and groups: the telephone, e-mail, video conferencing, shared workspaces, chatrooms and public information boards. Awareness technologies allow distributed workers to be aware of their co-workers' activities and of their potential for collaboration. The applications range from video/audio links and sensors that locate and detect workers' current activities to a range of tools that increase awareness of collaborative activities such as meetings, seminars, shared tasks, etc. However, these tools can simply lead to information overload and overlooked resources, as users lack the time or ability to scan for relevant information or to set up mechanisms (e.g. intelligent agents) to search for them.

Peripheral awareness interfaces provide awareness without interrupting the primary task or requiring a secondary task (i.e. initiating awareness tool) to occur. These applications have been of increasing importance in the literature but, as Cadiz et al. [2] note, there are few success stories where they have been used outside the lab situation. One of the main problems, which applications have sought to overcome, is how to increase users' timely organizational awareness while avoiding needless distractions [3, 4]. Many of these applications deal with the important issues of screen real estate, information searching and information retrieval.

One question that needs to be asked is: should we be looking at information presentation and retrieval or the role of information in users' work? Wenger [5] argues that learning, within any domain, is more than the formal acquisition of knowledge or information: it has a social element and should be a process of participation in *communities of practice*. Recent information seeking research has highlighted the importance of complex interactions between information, technology, work patterns and social contexts [6–8]. Very little research has been done on awareness applications adjusting to the working patterns of the user. Providing information when a user's goal is *not* to find further information but to 'not work' and 'break away' from their current task is the primary requirement addressed by the systems described here.

We discuss the iterative design process, which produced the 'screen saver' and 'traffic lights' applications, and the role of user involvement and communities of practice in this.

In the following section we review relevant awareness research, the context of the clinical domain and the importance of a community of practice approach. Next, we present the organizational context and the iterative design process adopted. This is followed by an ethnographic evaluation of each application, highlighting strengths and limitations. Finally, the implications for further research and development are discussed.

## Background

Organizational and community awareness of activities, resources and perspectives are hard to maintain in any organization. Contextual factors can, however, have a strong influence on users' awareness and use of technology. Social and economic backgrounds,

for example, can impact upon technology expectations and usage patterns [9]. It is, therefore, important to understand the effects that contexts and work practices and patterns have on our awareness and use of information and technology. The relationship between technology, specifically a 'screen saver' awareness application, communities of practice and work patterns within the clinical domain are the focus of this article.

### ***Awareness applications***

Research on awareness and related applications (e.g. active badges, mobile and wearable devices) has considered various kinds of awareness, but has mainly focused on workspace and groupware awareness; for this, video images have been the main data source. Initially, awareness technologies aimed to allow distributed workers to maintain awareness of their co-workers and of their potential for collaboration [10–14]. This field has developed into a far wider variety of applications, awareness definitions and data sources. However, little work has focused on organizational awareness of the kind considered here.

Over recent years new approaches to awareness technologies have developed, including awareness notification systems and peripheral awareness interfaces. These systems seek to develop more peripheral information delivery mechanisms, whereby community awareness can be enhanced. Data sources are far more varied in these applications (e.g. Internet sites, community calendars), but the information content is often time-sensitive and, to some degree, transient. Cadiz et al. [2] make the distinction between peripheral awareness applications on primary displays (users' primary screens), secondary displays (extra or specialized monitors), ambient displays (embedded in users' surrounding environment) and mobile devices. Mobile devices, secondary and ambient displays represent often imaginative uses of technology; however, these often have limited impact within organizations because the initial outlay for the technology is prohibitive.

Applications such as Tickertape [15], Elvin [16], What's Happening [3] and Sideshow [2] remain on the users' primary displays and seek to address the tensions between screen real estate, user distraction and information depth. Other peripheral awareness applications on users' primary displays either blend into the background of current screen images [17] or remain on desktops, hidden by other applications but accessible when required. All these applications require the user to deliberately access the awareness information. The user is required to initiate a change in their working pattern from interaction with their current task to an awareness accessing task. Sideshow [2] provides a user-tailored interrupt application: an alert mechanism can be set up so that a box appears next to the sidebar with information about the alert (e.g. when new e-mail has arrived). Applications that allow personalization are a useful tool. However, users that do not use these tools may still require awareness information but do not wish, or are unable, to spend time setting up and accessing these resources. Ultimately, it is important to understand awareness application usage within the context of users' work patterns.

### ***Clinical domain and communities of practice***

As already mentioned, it is important to identify the work patterns and practices of communities within the organization. A community's culture has a direct impact on community practices that can develop into social norms [18]. Lave and Wenger [19] suggest that learning within any domain is more than a formal acquisition of knowledge

or information: it has a social element, which is often ignored. They suggest that learning should be a process of participation in communities of practice. This participation is at first peripheral, but gradually increases in both engagement and complexity. They argue that the emphasis within learning should be on the whole person and is made up of the agent, activity and world. Wenger [5] extends this idea with a framework in which the two basic streams are *practice* (from collective social norms of practice to accounts of meanings) and *identity* (from impacts of organizational power and social structures to those of personal subjectivity). For awareness systems that support collaboration and information resources within communities of practice, understanding those communities would be beneficial.

Local communities within a corporate structure, although vital to team cohesion and collaborative developments, can isolate groups from the organizational culture and norms [20]. Some domains encourage more discrete communities than others, segregating users through the language, work practices and communication channels used. The clinical domain has a long history of isolated communities through its social structures and varied professions. Isolated communities, made up of many different professions with their own specific social identifiers, can often produce conflicts between those professions within the diverse organizational culture of the hospital [21–23]. Symon et al. [24] identify conflicts within a clinical setting relating to social status and information procedures: higher-status professionals were found to be more concerned with keeping their status as an expert than adhering to formal organizational norms. Organizational awareness, as well as local community awareness, is needed to support common goals and create a clear organizational perspective.

The roles of rhythms of work, work practices and collaborative networks are of great importance for effective awareness. Cicourel [25] points out how team members on medical ward rounds provide contextualizing information to each other. This is confirmed by Reddy and Dourish [6], who found that clinical staff provide the contextual information that cannot usually be provided in a hard copy format. Reddy and Dourish also discuss the implications of work rhythms on cooperative work within the medical domain. In particular, they highlight the importance of cyclic and temporal clinical work patterns, integrating information about not only current actions but also patterns of former activities and expectations about future behaviour. They argue against previous literature that reduces information work to decontextualized access and retrieval problems for the individual.

Technologies that take a decontextualized approach run the risk of clashing with communities of practice and their effective implementation, especially within a domain where contextual, collaborative activities are important. When hospital information systems were first introduced, it was found that the greatest difficulties in deployment lay not with technical issues but with the users, through their reactions to systems introduction and the demands of acquiring new skills [26]. Recent health informatics research also reveals that social and organizational factors can determine the success or failure of healthcare IT developments [1, 27, 28]. Negative reactions to these systems are often due to inappropriate system design and poor implementation. Symon et al. [24] have identified, within a hospital setting, how social structures and work practices can be disrupted by technology implementation. What has not been identified within this domain is how systems that do support and fit with those complex social structures and work practices will be received.

## Method

The development and use of the awareness applications were themes that emerged during a qualitative study of technology use within a provincial hospital. The study took place over a six month period. As well as observational studies and informal meetings, initial interviews and focus groups were conducted with 20 participants across the hospital setting. The participants represented a variety of professions and statuses within the hospital:

- health service managers and administration
- library staff
- technical personnel
- nurses
- doctors and consultants.

An ethnographic approach was taken toward the research whereby the researcher was immersed in the hospital setting via attending meetings, presentations, etc. Further interviews and focus groups addressed information needs and practices, technology support and the impacts of technology on social and organizational norms. Another perspective of the research was to identify barriers and forces for change within the organizational culture. Memo notes and interaction pattern diagrams were taken of informal interactions, and interviews and focus groups were taped (with prior consent) and later transcribed (anonymizing the data).

An in-depth analysis of the qualitative data collected was conducted using the grounded theory method. Grounded theory [29] is an approach to data collection and analysis that combines systematic levels of abstraction into a framework about a phenomenon which is verified and expanded throughout the study. Once the data are collected, they are analysed in a standard grounded theory format (i.e. open, axial and selective coding and identification of process effects). A component of the analysis is to identify user issues which frequently occur or are fundamental to the system. The methodology's flexibility can cope with complex data, and its continual cross-referencing allows for grounding of theory in the data, thus uncovering previously unknown issues. Although this study did not require detailed theories to be developed, the method was used for its rigorous analysis procedures for qualitative data [29].

### *Organizational structure and resources*

The organizational structure of the hospital studied is complex, and undergoing dramatic change. Funding restrictions mean facilities are limited and under-resourced. Technology provision varies greatly; however, the majority of clinicians do have access to a computer, even if that computer is shared [8]. Most of these users have limited computer and searching skills, although abilities can vary quite dramatically. However, all users had a poor awareness of the existence and relevance of digital information resources, both locally and on the Internet. Many clinicians are resistant to technological change because previous applications have hindered rather than supported their working practices [8, 24].

## Results

The findings detailed in this article review both the evolutionary development of the applications and users' perceptions of the resulting systems. The first section presents the development process for the systems detailing the successful user involvement in the process. The next section presents users' perceptions of the resulting applications and fit with users' current working patterns.

### *Application and iterative design process*

In this article, we focus on the design of two awareness applications: 'screen saver' and 'traffic lights'. The evolution of these applications into awareness tools was a result of user and organizational needs. Successful development was largely due to the design team's openness to user involvement. The development drives and reactions to user criticisms highlighted the effectiveness of the design team's flexibility and imagination and, as such, are discussed in detail.

Two major issues were identified as drivers for the development of the screen saver application; these were problems with individual screen saver variations, and passwords. First, individual screen savers were found to relay a disjointed organizational image to both employees and patients. Some inappropriate images were also identified, but policing these had become difficult:

Because you could go round the trust and there would be half-naked George Clooneys and Winnie the Poohs popping up everywhere singing. (screen saver development team)

Individual screen savers were also found to be causing problems with programs, thus increasing IT helpdesk calls.

Second, screen saver passwords were required for security reasons (as sensitive health data were being used) on all screen savers within the organization. However, many users were not using password protection, making data potentially accessible to inappropriate users. Conversely, the use of personal screen saver passwords inhibited effective hot-desking:

If a secretary was off sick or went on annual leave then when somebody came in if they weren't aware that the screen saver was initiated on the machine it kicked in and all their work behind it was lost because the only thing to do with it was to switch the machine off. (screen saver development team)

As a solution to these problems, a corporate screen saver was developed. This linked on use to an individual's password, with an override password so that users could not get locked out. The application was activated when there had been no input for a period of time. Once activated, the screen saver cycled through a set of screens until the input devices were activated again. Originally, the screen saver image was updated when a new user logged on. However, IT developers realized that many computers on the wards were rarely updated, as ward staff never logged off their systems. The screen saver development team therefore adapted the system to look back at the server every hour to update images. This meant that timely information was sent out which would not be deleted and

forgotten. Information continued to appear to remind users of important events (e.g. systems going down), but as it only appeared when the system was inactive it was not seen by the development team as intrusive.

### **Screen saver awareness application**

Initially, the screen saver displayed a helpdesk number and the emblem of the hospital; later the developers added several pictures of the hospital that the program cycled through. User feedback was higher than for any other system in the hospital. Users thought the cycling of screens was too fast and that they were too bright. Users also noted that it was not aesthetically pleasing to view photos of where they worked every day on their computer screens. Developers sought to correct these problems.

To increase application usability, the team put together a staff competition to design the best screen saver. The competition, selection process and prize were coordinated by a hospital working group whose remit was to improve staff working facilities. This was the first time the working group had been involved in any IT development. A selection of screen savers were then chosen and put on the system. However, after a period of time user complaints still arose about these screens, e.g. 'what do I want to look at somebody's holiday snap for and what do I want to look at this and that for' (screen saver development team). It was then decided by the screen saver development team that the resource would become an information board. There was a marked decline in complaints after this point and a dramatic increase in user involvement. Initially the application cycled through IT security advice screens (see Figure 1), e.g. securing personal data, incident reporting, etc.

Complaints from users who missed screens in the cycling process led to the availability of screens via the intranet. This, in turn, led to the development of screen saver images highlighting where further information could be obtained (e.g. via telephone, e-mail, on the intranet).

As distribution increased, more user groups requested that their information be displayed on the system (see Figure 2). Across the hospital, 112 user groups have either been informed or contributed towards the screen saver project. So many user requests were received that the developers decided that no image could be displayed for longer than a month, and requests from external bodies were refused.

The developers also placed guidelines on the intranet for successful/usable screen saver construction (see Table 1).

### **Traffic lights application**

As interest from user groups developed in the screen saver awareness application, there was a request from an administrative department for an 'urgent' screen saver that could interrupt users' activities. As this was not simple to achieve through the current screen saver application program, it was decided that a separate program would be developed to support this need. The 'traffic lights' system sent out a message which was immediately displayed in front of the user's current work. These messages were sent out to every user's computer screen as the content was deemed vital to increase a joint awareness of important organizational issues that were continually changing. Even canteen workers and cleaners were noted as requiring this knowledge to help understand changes in clinicians' working patterns due to the hospital being at its limit.



Figure 1 Privacy screen saver

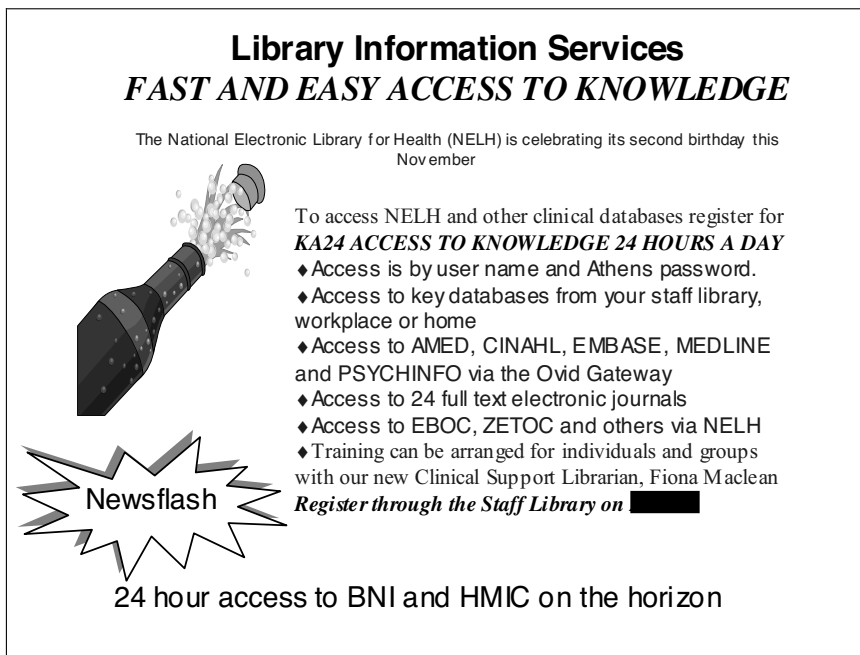
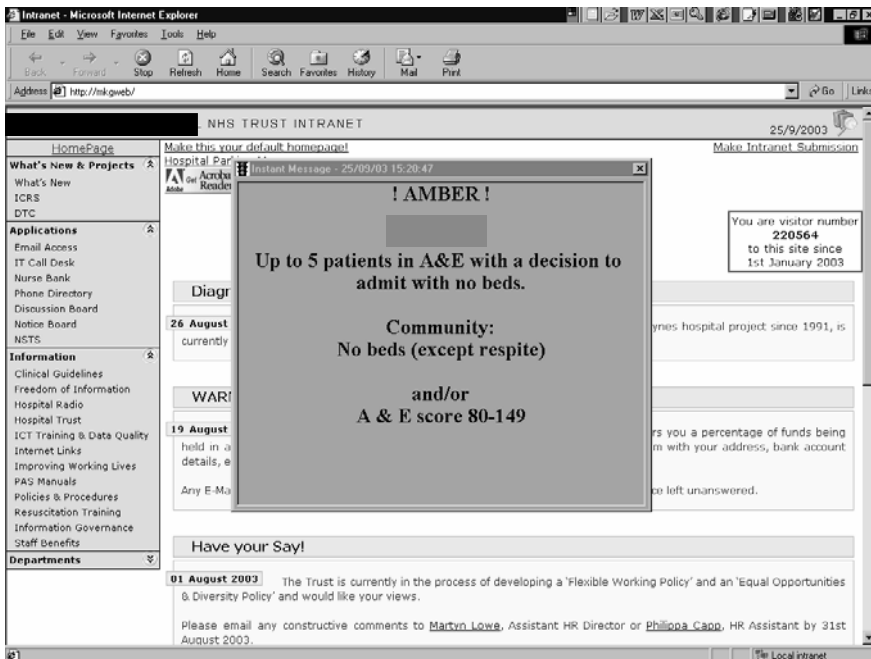


Figure 2 Digital library screen saver



**Table 1** Screen saver guidelines

No.	Screen saver guideline
1	Font should be no smaller than size 18 pt
2	Originator's name must be put in lower right-hand corner
3	Background colour should be used <i>but no light colours</i>
4	Keep it clear and concise
5	Make it interesting
6	The screen saver should be saved in a Word (if saved in Word <i>do not</i> use Wordart), Powerpoint or image file
7	Must be in landscape not portrait
8	When completed it should be sent to ..... for approval
9	Date to commence
10	Date to be withdrawn



**Figure 3** Traffic lights application

As the level of disturbance this message caused was very high, it was vital to restrict the use of this application to very important messages. The system has two purposes:

- 1 daily reports on hospital bed status (see Figure 3)
- 2 urgent messages, e.g. details of an attack on staff

Daily hospital bed status reports took the form of 'green', 'amber', 'red' or 'divert' alerts, indicating the pressure on patient flow through the hospital.

The message remains until the user actively cancels it, thus acknowledging that they have received it.

You can't disregard it, you can't get rid of it until you've read it because you actually have to click it off, which I suppose is really good in the way that when, with the consultant's attack (a physical attack by a patient on a consultant which had occurred recently), we needed to get a message out urgently, with his description, we could do that . . . So it's a way of getting something out there if you want them to know within minutes. (screen saver development team)

### *User perceptions of awareness systems*

Users' perceptions of the systems, as an additional form of communication, were also analysed. It was found that these applications overcame the limitations of other media and increased user communication and awareness across the organization, while minimizing interruptions with user work practices. In the detailed discussion below, many points are illustrated with verbatim extracts from participants who are identified by role, but not as an individual (so, for instance, multiple excerpts from a 'librarian' are not necessarily from the same individual).

### **Limitations of other media**

The results showed that users perceived serious limitations with previous communication and awareness media. Other forms of communication within the hospital, such as paper notices and publications and e-mail, were considered ineffective because of clinicians' time restrictions:

We put things in key news, we put notices up but nobody reads notices. (librarian)

I mean the idea is that everyone will have their own e-mail, but will they have access and will they have time? (administrator)

Issues of information overload and problems of developing organizational practices on how much information to distribute via current e-mail systems were noted:

We used to have an acute e-mail so then you could e-mail everyone in the acute area but so many people got fed up with you know 'I've got a spare car' and 'I've got this'. I mean some of them have so much e-mail and so little time, so that has actually been taken away so that it is only really used for emergency type information now. (librarian)

Many clinicians (particularly those who only had computer access on the ward) were found to simply avoid computers because they did not fit with their current work patterns or because of lack of time to become familiar with their capabilities:

There are also major misunderstandings or failures to grasp what the technology is now capable of, the power of the machinery involved. (consultant)

Most people at the clinical interface when faced with a difficulty or a knowledge lack, a knowledge gap you might call it, don't yet reach for the computer. (consultant)

These issues are common to any large organization, but exacerbated in the hospital situation because of the heavy time pressures, particularly on some clinicians, and the difficulty for many of them to access computers within the course of the working day – whether to access information or to gain basic competency in computer use.

### **Increased communications**

In this working context, many users reported that their awareness of specific issues had greatly increased since messages were being delivered through the screen saver application:

Well my clinical group said something about something that had been put on the screen saver and they'd all seen it because it had been put on the screen saver.  
(IT management)

The cyclic, poster-style delivery of the application was considered to be key in gaining users' attention:

Certainly with things like the screen saver messages in short bursts. (nurse)

Both applications were considered to be powerful by the majority of people who referred to them. High response rates to information advertised were noted by those who had information displayed via the screen saver:

But we've had quite a lot of people e-mail us and phone us and say 'Oh what is this, I'm really interested'. (librarian)

A marked increase in communication from clinicians with the library was directly related to the new communication media as clinicians reported, when they called, that they had heard about the library resources through the screen saver being displayed.

A dramatic increase in communication between users and the IT department was also reported, as well as the instigation of new collaboration between IT and other departments (e.g. human resources). Some user groups, such as the hospital staff working group and the IT department, had rarely communicated with one another until the advent of this new awareness resource.

It was also noted that many working groups, when discussing dissemination or advertising procedures, would specifically state that 'I can feel a screen saver coming on' or 'we need to get a screen saver for that'. This highlights a sense of ownership that users perceived with the system. This also relates to an awareness of belonging to the greater corporate whole with a joint perspective on organizational goals which should not be underestimated.

### **Improved organizational awareness**

While the improved interdepartmental communications were valued, it was the overall change in organizational culture which was noted by most users, as well as an increased awareness of the role of IT and information within the organization:

It's about making sure that we work as a community and that we work well together . . . it is about using IT to make systems work. (management)

I think that the use of information needs to be much better coordinated with an organizational vision of how information should be used. (nurse)

The traffic lights system was cited by many as a controversial yet positive application throughout the hospital. This application was perceived to increase awareness across the hospital trust by keeping people in contact with the organizational status:

People on the management corridor were unaware of anything untoward going on and it can be like a war zone in A&E with like 20 patients waiting. There was no feedback, no feedback loop. (IT/administration)

One person described the traffic lights system as:

a stress barometer for an organization. (management)

Ultimately, this application was seen as supporting collective focus on the consumer (patient), helping staff to work together to improve patient care. However, there were questions about how appropriate this intrusion was for all users, as some felt that knowledge of the organization as a whole was not relevant to them. This tension is one that remains to be resolved. Thus the comments about the traffic lights suggest that this application does not solve all the awareness problems, and further research is required in this area.

### **Fitting with work patterns**

Probably the most important feature of the screen saver is that it fits well with users' work. Both types of computer access (individual office or via a shared machine) were supported in different ways by this application. Observations of office-based meetings (often held with the screen saver operating in the background) showed that they often serendipitously drifted into discussion about the screens. Frequent interruptions (e.g. telephone calls, physical interruptions) left other meeting attendees free to read posters in the office and on the computer screen saver.

The screen saver application was identified as reducing problems of communication and organizational awareness. It was noted that this was particularly due to the passive quality of the application:

The thing that is good about this is even if people don't use the PCs they'll walk past the PCs and see them. (IT manager)

The library department also highlighted the fact that users who do not use PCs regularly are the hardest people to communicate with. However, many of these users responded to their screen saver advert simply because of its passive presence throughout the organization (i.e. on unused screens in wards and offices). The IT developers also noted that this application had had one of the largest user inputs across the organization (i.e. 112 user groups across the hospital).

## Discussion

Current awareness technologies have aimed to support individual users within a local community in obtaining awareness of that community. Awareness interfaces therefore often support awareness within specific, often small, homogeneous communities. Awareness applications also seek to support users' needs by personalizing those applications. Although users gain usable personal interaction with these applications, and are provided with local awareness, they also require more generic information that helps establish an understanding of organizational norms as well as providing particular information. Some awareness applications provide access to information that gives them broader awareness of their organization and its context (e.g. local traffic news, organizational events) [2]. However, in many organizations, there is also a need for a standardized resource that provides all users with a uniform awareness of the organization as a whole to help develop organizationally accepted norms, perceptions and practices. Otherwise, as participants mentioned, certain sections of the organization (e.g. management) are likely to be isolated from the restrictions and limitations that clinicians are dealing with on a daily basis. Although users interviewed for this article may well benefit from a more personalized application for increasing their awareness of their immediate community, they were also found to benefit from an awareness of the larger organization through the applications described (e.g. management understanding why clinicians may be late for a meeting on a 'red' bed alert day).

An important issue highlighted by this research is the role of contextual factors in system design and implementation. Applications that fit with users' working patterns and community practices (i.e. systems adapting to changing working patterns and user group needs) increase the likelihood of acceptance within the communities. Reddy and Dourish [6] highlight the importance of work patterns within the clinical domain and in awareness technology design. Awareness technologies have attempted to fit into users' working patterns by reducing how much they distract users from their primary work tasks. However, users are still very often required to actively install, personalize, search for and interact with these applications. The actions that users take in the physical world to increase community awareness have not been fully understood (e.g. posters, leaflets, questionnaires).

Zhao and Stasko [3] compare these awareness mechanisms with physical world artefacts such as posters and bulletin boards. Peripheral awareness interfaces rely on the distinction that these information resources are peripheral until the user decides to view them. The important design drive for these resources is therefore interface real estate, with decreasing levels of distraction. However, in the case of the poster or bulletin board, the user action is far more passive, with serendipity playing an important role. Often, the user's goal is to break from computer work in order to interact with colleagues, get a beverage or look out of the window. The poster designer's main aim and design drive is to attract attention with key pieces of information and a way to access more information (e.g. phone number, e-mail or web address). Using displays other than the primary workstation enables the sort of interaction facilitated by posters and bulletin boards, but such displays are expensive and, with growing organizations, often leave new groups without screens, and consequently isolated. The simple screen saver application, described here, fits seamlessly with users' work patterns by only activating when users break from their primary tasks. Within the clinical domain this is especially important as clinicians are working under severe time constraints, and their willingness to spend time interacting

with software is limited. Clinicians also often use their offices for meetings with colleagues, and the automatic cyclic activation of this information on their desktops was identified in the study as provoking collaborative discussions around the screens presented. Finally many users' work patterns meant that they were multiple users of a system. This application allowed for the computer when it is not used to be a poster view screen for multiple users in public areas such as 'wards'. However, further research is required in this area to identify the impact of this type of technology on wards for different user groups.

Even the traffic lights alert system, which aggressively interrupts the user's primary task, was considered by most users as a useful tool. However, it was noted that the limited use of this tool for urgent and simple timely awareness feedback was key in its acceptability. A surprising result from the study was a sense of ownership that users felt for the applications, especially as they are centrally managed (e.g. coining terms like 'I feel a screen saver coming on'). Users considered the system's credibility to be closely related to the central management and quality control for the application. Previous research has identified findings similar to this in other domains [20].

Another surprising outcome, related to the screen saver design cycle, was the increased collaboration reported between users, user groups and designers, and an understanding of each other's needs. Users and user groups increased their understanding of and input into IT system development and maintenance. At various stages through the development of the system, user input and discussions ensued which led to further developments of the system. It is interesting to note that this application instigated new collaborations between staff bodies and the IT employees within the organization. Various communities debated issues around the technology and, in turn, debated the boundaries of their organization and the technology within it. The issue of a corporate screen saver evolved a consensual meaning of 'corporate' which best fits with the technology and the communities of practice. Those within management noted that they were now aware of clinicians' constraints (e.g. emergency bed alerts and stretched resources) while different communities now understood changing organizational perspectives on issues such as security and training. The application designers also developed a keen interest in supporting user needs and increasing the perceived quality of applications. Through collaboration with users, the application designers identified a need for screen saver design guidelines, and developed acceptable information classifications for the various dissemination procedures now available to them.

## **Conclusions**

One challenge for information management is to update all users of new resources and features, as well as to provide timely information on changes within an organization. The hospital being studied for this research has found a novel, but highly effective, set of techniques for addressing this difficulty. A simple screen saver application, initially designed to increase privacy and security, has developed into a new communication medium that has improved corporate communication across the organization.

This article highlights how continued user involvement in the iterative design process positively influenced users' perceptions of, involvement in and ownership of the application and further IT developments. User and designer collaborations also increased the

importance, for the designers, of application usability, quality and aesthetics. From a qualitative study of the screen saver and traffic lights designs and implementations within the hospital context and a grounded theory analysis of these data, four important issues emerged: the limitations of other media, increased communications, improved organizational awareness and fitting with work patterns (see results). These issues were identified as frequently occurring with the users or as being of fundamental importance to them. The analysis also highlighted the breadth of information available on the intranet and clinical users' poor awareness and utilization of these resources. It was realized that this application could further be developed as a hospital intranet awareness tool, highlighting what resources are currently available on the intranet.

Reddy and Dourish [6] identify limitations in awareness research with regard to its decontextualizing of tasks into searching and retrieval activities. The results of this study have also highlighted the need to understand users' work practices and the relevance of these to their communities of practice. The screen saver awareness application has become a key part of organizational communication within the hospital studied. Added quality for users is also provided by simply identifying when users are resting from their current primary tasks and may be willing, in a conscious or unconscious manner, to view awareness material. The simple yet elegant usability of this application lies in the user obtaining value without too much conscious input.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under grant RES-335-25-0032. We are also grateful for the help and support of the UK hospital and primary care trust being researched, and of all individual participants.

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**Correspondence to:** Anne Adams

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**Anne Adams**, PhD, Research Fellow  
*UCL (Interaction Centre), University College  
London, Remax House, 31–32 Alfred Place,  
London WC1E 7DP, UK  
E-mail: A.Adams@cs.ucl.ac.uk*

**Ann Blandford**, PhD, Reader  
*UCL (Interaction Centre)  
E-mail: A.Blandford@cs.ucl.ac.uk*

**Dawn Budd**, ICT Security Manager  
*Milton Keynes General Hospital NHS Trust  
E-mail: D.Budd@mkgeneral.nhs.uk*

**Neil Bailey**, Corporate Information  
Systems Development Officer  
*Swansea NHS Trust  
E-mail: Neil.Bailey@swansea-tr.wales.nhs.uk*