Chapter XII

Group Decision Making in Computer–Mediated Communication as Networked Communication:
Understanding the Technology and Implications

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ABSTRACT

Networked communication is proliferating our world. The fact that global information communication technologies (ICTs) are becoming increasingly available is facilitating human computer interaction, which permeates the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in various organizations, groups, and interpersonal contexts. As a result, the issue facing today's organizations is not whether to use global information technologies (GITs) in networked communication, but rather how to use them for effective functioning and as efficient coordination tool; especially how to incorporate GITs into the decision-making process. Consequently, this chapter examines the issues in designing CMC into group interactions and decision-making processes.

INTRODUCTION

The shift toward globalization in organizations necessitates increase reliance on information communication technologies (ICTs). However, the nature of ICTs required is not the stand alone, but rather networked ICTs. The growth in networked ICTs such as e-mail, computer conferencing, desktop conferencing, and videoconferencing emanates from the need for speed in decision making

and the general ability to coordinate activities of geographically dispersed workers, or to facilitate learning beyond certain geographical boundaries. The networked communication process and the accompanying decision-making processes are made possible by the Internet.

BACKGROUND

Many organizations and business executives continue to realize the role of employee participation in the decision-making process and organizational productivity for survival. Thus, organizations continue to develop ways to actively engage their members in teams either in co-located or distributed virtual groups. Networked global information technologies (GITs) especially benefits geographically dispersed groups to engage in decision-making process virtually. However, the literature addressing GITs and computer-mediated communication (CMC) focus on comparative features of the technologies over face-to-face (FtF) or traditional communication media instead of looking at the decision-making process occurring over these media as instances of networked communication. There is a potential benefit in examining decision making as networked communication. This approach allows one to ask questions about what technology to use, or why use a particular technology, and when to use a given communication technology? Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to offer insights about the decision-making process in ICTs by looking at some key factors that must be addressed, while offering some recommendations regarding the effective decision-making process when using GITs. First, however, the next section identifies and discusses factors in networked communication decision making as a way to address issues and problems in the networked communication.

ISSUES, CONTROVERSIES, AND PROBLEMS

Although the group decision-making process is made possible in networked communication, the tendency to succeed or fail hinges on attention to some key issues. For instance, there is a greater need to adapt communication technology and communicative behaviors to accommodate the decision-making process across different geographical boundaries and social contexts (Olaniran, 2004). The decision-making process where group members are located across different geographical boundaries and time zones necessitates the need to attend to culture. Attending to different cultural needs is not only necessary, but also is increasingly essential for an effective decision-making process to occur. It has been suggested, that success in organizations at large has less to do with market forces than it does with the cultures and the values existing within cultures (Alas & Vadi, 2003; Cameron & Quinn, 1999). There are specific instances of the culture factor in networked communication and the decision-making process. A case study identified that the East Asian culture and its social structure showed cultural differences through the suppression of e-mail use when subordinates are interacting with superiors. More specifically, subordinates are reported to refrain from the use of e-mail in communicating with supervisors in a team process (Lee, 2002). Consequently, the East Asian culture exhibits different tendencies from the Western culture when it comes to accounting for power structure. Western culture, however, does not see anything wrong in subordinates' usage of e-mail with superiors. This is not an isolated incident, as a similar difference was found with the Dutch who showed greater preferences for a more structured decision-making process than their American counterparts (Kiser, 1999; Gezo, Oliverson, & Zick, 2000).

Attention to the issue of culture is important in networked communication for two reasons. One, culture preferences may affect the choice of GIT or communication medium for interaction. Two, the need to realize that technology (i.e., networked ICTs) may not necessarily overcome some deeply held traditional beliefs that underlie how individuals communicate.

Culture is also important in networked communication because it interferes with interactions of groups in organizational decision-making pro-

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