

# Chapter XL

## Internet–Based Changes in Organizational Communication

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter presents a descriptive study of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and the change in communication patterns in Swedish sport associations over the period 1994 to 2003. The change is discussed in light of Internet and broadband diffusion. Results show that new channels for communication have been adopted, primarily Web sites and e-mail, but few established channels have been dropped. While there are associations that save time and money and increase the spirit of community using ICT, many organizations experience the increased number of communication channels as a burden since maintaining them takes extra resources but the benefits are not always easy to detect or measure. Certain characteristics common among nonprofit organizations (NPOs) as well as Internet and broadband access have influenced the development of ICT use.*

### INTRODUCTION

The diffusion of Internet and broadband has changed the way we communicate. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Internet was not used at all by the vast majority of Swedes. Since then, the number of people having access to Internet at home has risen dramatically, from 31% in 1998 to 73% in 2003 (Statistics Sweden, 2004a). Although this number has since seemed to reach a plateau at around 80% of the population, the proportion having broadband connections continues to increase. By 2006, more than half of the homes had a broadband connection.

(Statistics Sweden, 2006). About 70% of the adult population use e-mail (Statistics Sweden, 2005a) and 85 % of the companies with more than 10 employees have a Web site (Statistics Sweden, 2005b). The use of modern information and communication technology (ICT) has drawn academic interest, both regarding individuals (e.g., Ritter, Powell, & Middleton, 2004; Nilsson, 2006) and companies (e.g., Cascio, 2000; Davenport & Pearlson, 1998; Westelius & Mårtensson, 2004).

The basis for this study is the changes in communication patterns that occurred in associations connected to the Swedish Sports Confederation

(SSC) from 1994 to 2003. The SSC is a nonprofit organization (NPO) that represents and supports the Swedish sports movement.

There are many reasons for studying NPOs. One is that they concern a large part of the population (Vogel, Amnå, Munck, & Häll, 2003). Another reason is the NPOs' importance to the development of social capital, which in turn is important for both the political and the economical functioning of society (Putnam, 1993). Furthermore, there are, to a certain extent, parallels to developments within organizations in both the private and public sectors, but there are also some highly pronounced characteristics of the NPO which set it apart; both are reasons for studying NPOs (Westelius, 2006).

In addition, studying Swedish organizations is interesting from a broadband diffusion perspective since in an international comparison, Sweden's Internet and broadband penetration is among the highest in the world (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006; Statistics Sweden, 2005a).

At the turn of the millennium, the SSC embarked on a journey of technological change. Riding the wave of enthusiasm for ICT, the SSC aimed at creating a system with the capacity of including more than 20,000 sports associations and their three million members. As a first step in assessing the effects of this project, we studied the extent of spontaneous use of ICT among the associations connected to the SSC to put the change in a context. That first step provided a material highly interesting in its own right (Lundmark & Westelius, 2004). Some of that material is presented here, in English, for the first time.

Although the large-scale, central initiative in the SSC to implement an organization-wide application provided the impetus for our study, this chapter primarily deals with the spontaneous use of ICT, mainly e-mail and Web sites, which form the context in which that initiative took place. Spontaneous use in this context means that it is not part of, or initiated by, the central SSC project. The effects of the central initiative on the technology use by associations were generally limited up to 2003, but considerable change in communication patterns took place during the period 1994-2003.

Thus, from a central change initiative perspective, the sport associations have mainly started using modern ICT spontaneously.

This study investigates the use of different communication channels by Swedish sport associations in communicating with members, coaches/leaders, and central administration. The study presents how communication took place in 1994 and how it took place 2003, including the whole range of communication alternatives, that is, from face-to-face contact to broadband and narrowband alternatives. The changes that occurred in the period 1994-2003 are discussed in the light of Internet and, particularly, broadband diffusion.

We analyze the patterns of communication and the choices of information channels through the lens of information richness theory (IRT) (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and by using the metaphor of intertwining suggested by Robey, Schwaig, and Jin (2003).

## **BACKGROUND AND FRAME OF REFERENCE**

In this section, we present the SSC and certain characteristics that make the organization and its affiliated associations an interesting object of study. Thereafter we present the changes in the Swedish society with regard to ICT and ICT infrastructure during the time from 1994 to 2006. Finally we present the theory we use to analyze our empirical material.

### **The Swedish Sports Confederation: A Non-Profit Organization**

The SSC is an umbrella organization for the Swedish sports movement. It has 68 (in 2003 it was 67) member organizations, so called Special Sports Federations (SSF), each representing a sport or group of sports. Each SSF has member associations, which in turn have individual people as members. Thus, the SSC is an organization of organizations of organizations of people which in total includes one third of the Swedish population.

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