



Chapter XVII

Organizational Time Culture and Electronic Media

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Abstract

This chapter explains the electronic media diffusion process within organizations and provides a guideline to implement electronic media within organizations. The concept of Hall's (1976) time dimension culture, monochronic and polychronic, and two dimensions of media speed, production and interaction speed, are used to explain the media diffusion process within organizations. It suggests that the diffusion process and expected benefit of electronic media are significantly different, depending on national culture, organizational culture, and the characteristics of that medium. Therefore, careful examination and understanding of organizational time culture and the characteristics of media should be ahead of making a decision on electronic media adoption and implementation.

Introduction

Today's individuals in organizations frequently have access to new electronic media, such as short messaging service (SMS), mobile e-mail, and instant messaging (IM), in addition to stationary e-mail and more traditional communication media, such as telephone, memos, and face-to-face meetings. One of the noticeable changes in today's organizational communication pattern is that electronic media have supplanted traditional forms of communication media and have become common tools in organizations with their new capabilities, such as synchronous communication and storage and retrieval of communication (Carlson & George, 2004; Carlson & Davis, 1998). With these new capabilities, electronic media not only have improved communication quality within organizations but also have allowed communication that would not be possible using traditional media (Markus, 1994).

With the rapid deployment of new electronic media in the workplace and a wide array of choices, today's organizations and individuals often face a series of decisions about which medium to adopt and use in communicating with internal and external communication partners. Such decisions have shown a profound impact on individual and organizational performance and often have changed the organizational processes and structures (Straub & Karahanna, 1998). Thus, implementing an appropriate communication tool is an important mission for many organizations and has encouraged these organizations to introduce emerging electronic media as expeditiously as possible. However, while organizations generally introduce emerging media to improve effectiveness or productivity, the results are not always straightforward or beneficial at the individual or organizational levels.

Like in many other information systems (IS) studies, national culture articulated by Hofstede (1980) has provided an important foundation in explaining different performance and diffusion levels of electronic media. For example, in his cross-cultural study between the U.S. and Japan, Straub (1994) concluded that due to the characteristics of the written Japanese language and other national culture factors such as uncertainty avoidance, Japanese workers prefer to use fax machines rather than e-mail, whereas this preference was not noted in the U.S. However, even though Japanese cultures and languages have not changed much in the last 10 years, the usage rate of stationary and mobile e-mail in Japan far exceeds that of the United States (Kearney, 2004).

This trend simply implies that national culture heavily based on text-oriented culture cannot explain different electronic media diffusion and performance in different organizations effectively and that some other important factors are missing. Thus, by using the concept of Hall's (1976) time dimension culture—monochronic and polychronic—and two dimensions of media speed—production and interaction speed—this chapter explains the electronic media diffusion process within organizations and provides a guideline to implement electronic media within organizations.

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