



Chapter XI

Matching Facilitator Style and Agenda Structure in Group Support Systems: Effects on Participant Satisfaction and Group Output Quality

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ABSTRACT

A 2x2 factorial controlled experiment was conducted to examine the effects of agenda structure and facilitator style on participant satisfaction and output quality in meetings employing group support systems (GSS). Participants were assigned to one of four conditions: (1) relationship style/relationship agenda; (2) task style/task agenda; (3) task style/relationship agenda; and (4) relationship style/task agenda. As expected, satisfaction with the agenda, process, and outcomes was higher in the matched style/agenda conditions (1) and (2). Surprisingly, satisfaction with facilitation

and task was higher in the relationship style conditions (1) and (4). Two expert raters were used to judge the quality of group outputs. As predicted, groups in the matched conditions produced higher quality outputs than groups in the mismatched conditions. Implications of the study for practice and future research are provided. This study is part of an ongoing program of research into the effectiveness of GSS as a tool for conducting meetings and other forms of group activity.

INTRODUCTION

Group decision making plays a prominent role in today's work organizations. According to one recent study, roughly 11 million meetings occur in the United States each day, representing more than 100 million hours of effort (Hanke, 1998). Widespread use of meetings persists despite evidence that they often are perceived as unsatisfying and unproductive (Clawson & Bostrom, 1996; Hackman & Kaplan, 1974; Monge, McSween & Wyer, 1989).

In an effort to conduct more efficient and effective meetings, managers are exploring the benefits of using a computerized group support system (GSS). GSS technology provides an electronic context for communication, brainstorming, problem solving, negotiation, and decision making. Advantages of this approach include: (1) the capacity for anonymous inputs by group members; (2) the simultaneous gathering of member inputs; (3) the efficient rank-ordering of items and/or voting by group members; (4) the ability to generate and distribute verbatim records of session activities and outcomes; and (5) the ability to link together group members who are at different locations (Clawson, Bostrom & Anson, 1993).

GSS is used by organizations at the highest levels of industry, government, and the military, including: Agilent Technologies, Eastman Chemical, Ernst & Young, GTE, Nokia, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, the Department of Education, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Federal Reserve Bank, the World Bank, and the United States Army, Navy, and Air Force (Customer Success Stories, 2002). According to one recent estimate, approximately 5,000 face-to-face electronic meeting rooms exist worldwide, enabling more than two million people to participate in face-to-face GSS meetings during the past twelve years (Briggs, 2002). As such, the GSS paradigm remains a viable option in a larger set of approaches to computer-mediated communication, group processes, and decision-making (Baltes, Dickson, Sherman, Bauer & LaGanke, 2002). Our goal in this article is to contribute to our understanding of the GSS option by exploring one of the next logical steps in GSS research.

Benbasat and Lim's (1993) meta-analysis of 29 studies found that GSS produced some benefits (greater participation, higher quality decisions) but

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