

Implications of New Communication Technology: Do New Communication Media Cause the Organization to Change?

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Abstract— Organizational change is an enduring and complicated phenomenon of study. Organizational theorists believe that human behavior entails interaction and interpretation. For example, employees not only react to their environment; they also act upon it. This study explores how computer-mediated communication is changing the way people work and states how it is playing a central role in the transformation of organizations.

Index Terms— Communication Processes, Communication Technology, Organizational Innovation, Organizational Change, Productivity and Efficiency

1 INTRODUCTION

Communication technologies bring together the capabilities of computer and computer media, but they also connect people with other people and with their different activities. Whether and how people communicate is critical to an organization. How individuals perceive and use the new media to accomplish organizational tasks is integral to the effect they ultimately have. "Communication occurs in social context. Perceptions, attitudes, and subsequent use of communication techniques are in part co-constructed within the social context. For example, how employees chose to use new communication media to exchange their messages could differ considerably from management's original intent. IBM employees used their company's internet message system to create GRIPNET, to express their complaints about management practices and policies." (Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire, 1984). This study focuses on the implications of new communication technology, especially the media; and the potential for changes in organizations.

2 Eliminating Obstacles of Space and Time Boundaries

Computer-mediated communication eliminates the obstacles of space and time boundaries. For example, with the new computer-mediated technology, workers may have potential access to anyone, anywhere in the organization. It can cross traditional hierarchical and departmental barriers. Literally, it has the potential to shape organizational norms, behaviors, and options. Thus, implications of computer-mediated communication systems should be of vital interest for researchers in organizational communication.

of Creative Technology, Bangladesh

2.1 Changing the Human and Communication

Processes of an Organization

How do computer-mediated communication systems are implemented, managed, and used have the potential to change the human and communication processes of an organization. For example, the media such as e-mail, can easily cross traditional hierarchical and departmental boundaries, changes the processes and intervening effects can fundamentally alter an organization. In fact, today's organizations differ considerably from earlier ones, due to advancements in communication technology. Since the new communication technology is used for communication and communication involves how people interact, computer-based communication is clearly critical to an organization.

Despite the technological differences that exist between organizations they can be defined, according to Bernard, (1938), as "a system of consciously coordinated activities or forces of two or more persons." (p. 73). Communication is used to "coordinate activities" in an organization. Communication in any form is clearly central to the process of organizing. Bernard also says, "In an extensive theory of organization, communication would occupy a central place, because the structure, extensiveness, and the scope of organizations are almost entirely determined by communications techniques." (p. 90).

It makes sense then, to say that with transformation of the organization's human and organizational communication processes there is potential for organizations to be transformed. Fulk and Steinfield (1990) state that, "Effective communication is, in fact, at the very core of goals driving the implementation of information technologies in organizations." (p. 8). Thus, new communication technologies can be viewed as additional

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tools that will strengthen an organization's and workers' ability, to communicate "effectively".

2.2 Provide Challenges and Opportunities

New communication technologies provide novel challenges and opportunities for those studying or working in an organization. They present a wide array of alternatives as well as a way to augment, complement, or interact with traditional communication media found in organizations. Hence, these multiple alternatives create potential for the transformation of communication processes that occur within organizations. Sproull and Kiesler (1991) suggest, communication technology is an important issue today both from a pragmatic perspective, and from a theoretical perspective. New communication technologies have what they refer to as first-and second-level effects. First-level effects, refer to the planned technical gains (i.e., increased productivity and efficiency), whereas second-level effects deal with innovation and unanticipated social consequences that are typically long-term changes. Thus, focusing on long-term second-level effects should be considered along with first-level effects when new communication technologies are evaluated.

Sproull and Kiesler (1991) also say that second-level effects come about because new communication technology lead people to pay attention to different things, have contact with different people, and depend on one another differently. (p. 4). By "pay attention to different things" mean that people spend their time differently, and what they think of as "important" changes. People develop new patterns and abilities in how and what they can do for each other. Kiesler (1986) earlier suggested that we tend to exaggerate the immediate changes, the significance of transient issues, and we underestimate the social effects. (p. 47). Here we can clearly see the significance for the organization of both short-and long-term consequences.

3 CONCLUSION

This study suggests that for the people who work in organizations, and their use of new communication technology, a potential exists for unanticipated and often unplanned organizational change. This is because there are long-term social issues to consider, beyond the first-level pragmatic perspective, that are directly related to the communication processes and practices in organizations. "Organizations are more than assemblages of things, they are social entities, and media use occurs in a web of social relationships ... social context effects must be considered." (Fulk et al., 1987, p. 546). Finally, an understanding of any new communication technology should include the employees' use and perception of it. There is no other better alternative to understand or make sense of its deployment in the organization. "To a great extent, success depends on many factors. One must consider how employees' interactions, perceptions, and attitudes about the new technology, in addition to what the technology itself can do, affect its use." (Johnson & Rice, 1987).

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