Chapter 4
Organizational Communication: Assessment of Videoconferencing as a Medium for Meetings in the Workplace

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ABSTRACT

Significant research has focused on e-mail, face-to-face (FTF), and other asynchronous mediated communication as the communication media of choice within organizations. Modern organizations, however, have other unconventional tools at their disposal. While the economy of scale has made videoconferencing an affordable medium of choice because it precludes travel and is accessible on demand, the suitability of the videoconferencing for organizational meetings is scarce in the literature. As such, this paper explores and presents an account of videoconferencing use in a governmental organization and address implications for meetings and general communication process.

INTRODUCTION

The trend toward globalization and the growing concern over travel security has caused an increase in videoconferencing technology usage. Videoconferencing is a communication medium that allows real-time and visual interactivity among users separated by distance. While significant research has focused on e-mail, face-to-face (FTF), and other asynchronous mediated communication as the communication media of choice in organizations (e.g., Berry, 2006), modern organizations have other tools at their disposal. Research has focused on e-mail instead of videoconferencing due to its convenience and commonplace in most settings (Berry, 2006; Simon, 2006). Even when

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videoconferencing is studied, attention has primarily been given to its selection based on travel costs and efforts to promote adoption (Fitchard, 2003; Palmquist & Mahan, 2003; Panteli & Dawson, 2001; Wegge, 2006). That is, economy of scale has made videoconferencing an affordable medium of choice because it precludes travel and is accessible on demand. According to Orubeondo (2001), trying economic times lead organizations to focus on strategies that accomplish more tasks with fewer resources while keeping quality customer relations high. Benefits and limitations of using videoconferencing in organizations, however, have not been fully studied.

The overarching question guiding this study, thus, is “why should organizations care about using or adopting videoconferencing?” The question is important for three reasons:

1. Learning about some of the challenges and benefits offered by the technology, one can adapt the medium to the needs of different organizations
2. Findings from this research can be used to offer specific guidelines regarding successful implementation and use of videoconferences
3. Addressing communication issues such as the appropriateness of different videoconferencing protocols (e.g., point-to-point to single location vs. multi-point to multiple sites, or both, fixed, and portable units), managers and business communication scholars can determine how best to utilize the technology in applied settings and for theoretical development.

Although this particular study looks at videoconferencing in a government setting, each of these issues transcends government organizations and can apply to most public and private organizations interested in adopting videoconferencing communication strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to answer the question of why an organization might use videoconferencing. The increased need for speed in the global economy provides good incentive. Specifically, the demand for collaboration and the ability to communicate visually with people who are geographically dispersed represents a major reason for using videoconferencing (Bekkering & Shim, 2006; Wegge, 2006). Such a tool can assuage distance challenges to communication, and it is considered a highly valuable tool when the communication requires audio and visual cues. In order to align both audio and video cues, videoconferencing has to function either over a network environment (i.e., internet protocol or IP) or in an integrated services digital network (i.e., ISDN) of telephone lines. These two environments allow videoconferencing to operate at the industry standard rate of 30 frames per second, which is the rate at which both video and audio occurs without a lag in time. However, the decision to incorporate videoconferencing into an organization’s use is complex and should be approached with care.

Potential benefits and organizational implications of videoconferencing systems extend beyond mere cost cutting and decreased time spent in meetings (Agius & Angelides, 1997; Bekkering & Shim, 2006; Panteli & Dawson, 2001). The technology provides organizations the opportunity to engage in key day-to-day activities, including information gathering and dissemination, training, brainstorming, interviews, distance collaboration, and distance learning (Bekkering & Shim, 2006; Fetterman, 1996; Moridani, 2007; Raby, 2001; Wegge, 2006).

Organizations deploying video technology have experienced different results depending on existing relationships with participants (Stuart, 1998). Some studies have found videoconferencing system to be as effective as FTF interactions, and video conferencing systems to be more effective than audio only systems (e.g., Abel, 1990,
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