Monitoring and Controlling E-Mail Systems: A Cross Case Analysis

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ABSTRACT

As the criticality of e-mail for electronic business activity increases, ad hoc e-mail implementation, prolonged management neglect, and user abuse of e-mail systems have generated negative effects. However, management’s ability to rectify problems with e-mail systems is hindered by our understanding of its organizational use. Research on e-mail systems is often dated and based on quantitative methodologies that cannot explain the interaction between various controls in organizational settings. Updating our understanding of the organizational aspects of e-mail systems utilizing qualitative methods is necessary. This paper presents a multiple case study investigation of e-mail system monitoring and control. The study examines the interaction between key elements of e-mail control identified by previous researchers and considers the role of such controls at various implementation phases. The findings reveal the effectiveness of e-mail committees, training, policies, and sustained awareness when combined with e-mail monitoring, and concludes by identifying key formal, informal, and technical controls.

Keywords: case study; electronic mail; formal, informal, and technical controls; information systems abuse; monitoring and control; negative effects

INTRODUCTION

Electronic commerce applications place additional security risks on organizations because of their extensive electronic interaction with other entities (De & Mathew, 1999). As organizations struggle to derive value from information technologies (Agarwal, 2001), particularly in periods of reduced IT budgets (PWC, 2002), organizations waste money buying technology, if they don’t
create the human infrastructure, policies, and procedures to curb abuses (Hancock, 1999). In particular, increasing reports of e-mail systems abuse and the proliferation of e-mail-born viruses (Attaran, 2000; PWC, 2002) are of concern.

E-mail systems traditionally have been initiated by IT departments without being part of a business-led strategy. Nevertheless, e-mail has evolved over time to become more of a corporate-wide service (Jackson et al., 2000). The strategic importance of e-mail systems increases as they evolve (Van den Hooff, 1997), but the benefits of e-mail do not accrue automatically (Ruggeri et al., 2000). It is imperative that organizations formulate a coordinated and comprehensive response to e-mail system management (Sipior & Ward, 2002). In particular, organizations should anticipate the potentially harmful effects of e-mail systems and seek to prevent them from occurring (Van den Hooff, 1997). However, organizations lack analytical tools to examine their existing practices and to assist in reasserting e-mail systems for corporate rather than for individual purposes (Ruggeri et al., 2000).

The appropriate design, management, and application of any communication system depends to a great extent upon appropriate ongoing research of those systems from technical, organizational and social perspectives (Rice, 1990). Although the unsatisfactory understanding of the impacts of communication media provided by quantitative research has long been recognized (Rogers, 1986), the majority of the research produced over the past two decades on e-mail systems research utilizes quantitative methods to examine the social and technical concerns of e-mail systems. The need for organizationally based research has been highlighted by researchers such as Fulk and Desanctis (1995) and Rudy (1996) in calling for situational studies that recount varying organizational environments in which electronic communications systems are used. Nevertheless, laboratory-like experiments (Cappel, 1995; Culnan & Markus, 1987; Fulk et al., 1990; Mantovani, 1994) and mass surveys (AMA, 2000; Hoffman et al., 2003; Schulman, 2001) dominate the literature on e-mail studies. As a result, there has been relatively little published advice on how to take an organizational view of e-mail systems (Ruggeri et al., 2000).

This paper presents the results of multiple case studies that investigate how organizations monitor and control their e-mail systems. The next section examines the theoretical grounding for the study. This is followed by a discussion of the research method and a presentation of the research findings. The paper concludes by identifying key factors for effectively monitoring and controlling e-mail use.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Research (Ruggeri et al., 2000) has shown that many organizations fail to consider the full implications of implementing e-mail systems and often leave employees to establish the system’s purpose and use. Indeed, the motivating factors for implementing e-mail systems rarely are communicated; thus, it is difficult to expect employees to use e-mail effectively.
The Influence of Corporate Social Media on Firm Level Strategic Decision Making: A Preliminary Exploration
www.igi-global.com/article/influence-corporate-social-media-firm/75458?camid=4v1a