Chapter IX

Is Organizational e-Democracy Inevitable? The Impact of Information Technologies on Communication Effectiveness*

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Abstract

In this chapter, we consider the relationships between social identity and e-democracy in organizations that exist in the constantly changing global business and technological environment. We also consider the inevitability of organizational e-democracy in organizations undertaking information technology (IT) changes, the technology at the base of e-democracy. Through an examination of employees’ experiences of change, we
investigate their perceptions of changes in effective communication during major organizational change implementation in a hospital context. While the changes were far reaching, we mainly focus on the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT). We use an empirical examination of an Australian public hospital’s IT change experience as the backdrop to assess the accuracy of the statement that there is an improvement in the autonomy within organizations as a result of IT changes. We discuss our findings in light of the implications that arise for HR practitioners.

Introduction

In this chapter, we consider the relationships between effective communication, social identity, and e-democracy in organizations that exist in the constantly changing global business and technological environment. We also consider the inevitability of organizational e-democracy in organizations undertaking information technology (IT) changes, the technology at the base of e-democracy. Through an examination of employees’ experiences of change, we investigate their perceptions of changes in effective communication during major organizational change implementation in a hospital context. While the changes were far reaching, we mainly focus on the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT).

We define e-democracy as the technological advances in communication media that provide employees with more information and more direct access to other employees (supervisory and subordinate levels) than previously existed. These changes to communication channels provide organizational connections and lead to e-democracy practices that seek to improve the autonomy of organizational members. Thus there is a freeing of information to help erase or ease organizational boundaries, which changes the relationship between executive and middle management parties.

The chapter uses an empirical examination of an Australian public hospital’s IT change experience as the backdrop to assess the accuracy of the statement that there is an improvement in the autonomy within organizations as a result of IT changes. We assert that while hospitals are a very specific type of organization, they represent a typical hierarchical organization that uses the same human
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