Tools for Long-Distance Meetings

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Overview

- Challenges
- Strategies
- Factors Affecting Tool Effectiveness
- Three technology options:
  - Video teleconferencing
  - White boards
  - Discussion boards
- Comparison of technology options
Challenges

- Without regular face-to-face contact, teams may:
  - Lack trust, identity, sense of community, and commitment
  - Have role uncertainty
  - Have less frequent communication and updating
- Work across time zones
- Different working styles
  - Speed of email or message response
  - Willingness to respond on nights and weekends
- May lose benefits of nonverbal communication

Fisher, 2008
Strategies

- Have a clear purpose with roles clearly delineated
- Have a clear meeting agenda that is provided beforehand, send out meeting minutes within two days
- Have group “rules” for email communication and voice messages
  - Email: include subject line, short messages, sign email, not used for urgent messages, prioritize by “Action Required” or “FYI”
  - Voicemail: Less than 10 seconds, only use urgent feature when required, check messages daily, not used for emotionally charged messages
- Establish agreed upon forms of communication

See Fisher, 2008 for more details
Factors Influencing Tool Effectiveness

- **Social Presence**: “the degree of realness or salience that the technology provides to those involved in the interaction”
  - **Synchronous**: Real time or live interaction increases social presence
  - **Asynchronous**: Different time interaction decreases social presence
  - **Audio/Visual**: When members can see and hear each other, social presence is increased

Bradley, 2008
Factors Influencing Tool Effectiveness

- **Media Richness**: Richness is “immediate feedback, transmission of multiple cues, multiplicity of channels, personalization of the message, language variety, the ability to synthesize divergent views, and allows diversity of input”

Bradley, 2008
Technological Tools

Video Teleconferencing

Pros:
- High social presence (visual and audio)
- Multiple cues and channels of communication
- Synchronous
- High media richness
- Most similar to face-to-face meetings
- Best for high degree of collaboration and complex tasks.
Technological Tools

Video Teleconferencing

Cons:
- Must have access to technology
- Fees
- Technical difficulties with coordinating multiple sites
- Communication delays
- Faulty microphones
- Time zones are problematic for business hours.
Technological Tools

Electronic White Boarding

Pros:
- Digitizes information and provides an electronic record of work
- Eliminates need for hand recording ideas illustrated on a traditional white board.
- Can enhance meeting by transmitting images as drawn to appear on others’ monitors
- Audio exchanges may accompany the whiteboard images
- Shares real time sketches
- Ideal for brainstorming

Bradley, 2008
Technological Tools

Electronic White Boarding

Cons:
- Complex technology
- Need software and license
- Audio or visual of team members is not the default function
Technological Tools

Discussion Boards

Pros:

- Provides a record of idea development that preserves history and can be referred back to later
- Effective for brainstorming, feedback, gathering opinions, discussing best practices, and daily reporting
- Supports asynchronous communication

Bradley, 2008
Technological Tools

Discussion Boards

Cons:

■ Need software and license
■ No audio or visual of team members
■ May be overwhelming for larger groups to read multiple threads
## Comparison of Technology Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Synchronous</th>
<th>Asynchronous</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teleconferencing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>$50-$200+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macromedia Breeze (Whiteboard)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Must have license</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Management Systems (Blackboard, WebCT, Angel) for Discussion Boards</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Must have license</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Options**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Synchronous</th>
<th>Asynchronous</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web-ex: MeetMeNow</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>$39-49/month</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Optional</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email or Instant Messaging</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Usually Free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendation

- Use the simplest technology required based on task complexity:
  - **Low complexity**: sharing information, sharing viewpoints and ideas, brainstorming, planning activities, recognizing efforts of others, and socializing
  - **Appropriate tools**: email, voicemail, instant messaging, team bulletin boards, wikis, web sites

Gupta, Bradley, & Yeoh, 2008
Recommendation

- Use the simplest technology required based on task complexity:
  - **High complexity**: building consensus, product development, co-authoring manuscripts, solving problems, making decisions
  - **Appropriate tools**: Videoconference, white boarding, GoogleDocs, Skype

Gupta, Bradley, & Yeoh, 2008
References


All chapters found in: