Productive Management Communication: Online and Face-to-face

This study examined employee’ perceptions about the types of information management could productively communicate through electronic communication to augment face-to-face contact with employees. The benefits of effective face-to-face communication between managers and staff are widely appreciated; however, the costs associated with this mode of communication require organizations to make decisions about when scare resources should be allocated for face-to-face communication and when the alternative, less-costly resource of electronic communication could be substituted. The study determined that employees perceived Human Resource information that is private (confidential), personal or sensitive as critical to receive through face-to-face contact. Employees perceived that information not deemed confidential—meeting times, training times, policy changes, system problems, and information with numerous details—were just as productive and some even critical to receive through electronic mail. Training and development implications are discussed.
Productive Management Communication: Online versus Face-to-face

Communication channels and technology are changing at a pace that is difficult to anticipate or maintain. Media choice is not the simple, intuitively obvious process it may appear to be at first glance. The choice of communication channels (or media) used by an organization is often dependent upon technology, customer and workforce characteristics, diversity and expectations and globalization of labor and customer markets, economies and information (Axley, 2000). Strategic Communications Management (Melcrum Publishing, 2006) recently queried their Communicators’ Network about virtual trends likely to influence the field of corporate communication over the next 10 years. Rosie Halfhead, from Dragon, discussed the recreation of the communication landscape: “The way people communicate now is heavily influenced by types of technologies available, which are quite simply re-creating the communication landscape. I think this is exciting as it will help to democratize business communication and finally get us away from the traditional top-down models of cascade and control” (p. 10-11). Crawshaw, from Main Street Marketing, addressed the importance of management training in staff communications: “In the next five to ten years, internal communication will shoot past the pack to become a PR discipline in its own right. Bosses will take formal and mandatory training in staff communications on university, MBA and other courses” (p.11).

The ability to work and communicate in a virtual world allows companies to eliminate the restrictive boundaries of time, economics, space and geography to mobilize a virtual workforce. Innovative technologies provide information on demand, hold reservoirs of shared knowledge, and enable real-time communication to occur globally (McAteer, 1994). In examining information dissemination in organizations, identifying types of messages to be
Productive Management Communication

conveyed, the organizational culture, cohorts involved in the processes, and effective communication channels with which messages are conveyed are critical.

Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals, as stewards of training for organizations (Ruona, 2000; Ruona & Swanson, 1998; Swanson, 1996), are charged with the responsibility to provide effective workforce training and development program interventions that support information dissemination through individual, group, and organizational learning and performance (Gilley & Maycunich, 2000; Ruona, 2000; Swanson & Holton, 2001). These training and development program interventions play an important role in building both human and social capital for competitive advantage (Fairbairn, 2005; Rao & Dewar, 2005; Sartian, 2005). HRD professionals are called to explore online communication in order to help organizations develop appropriate policies and intervention strategies for its use, to help managers and employees develop communication skills to ensure that their messages are received as planned, and to ensure that the organization utilizes the full potential that the Internet offers as a communication medium.

Often times e-mail messages are one-way communication—a directive, a request, good news, bad news, new products or services, current and future events—with the enormous potential to create misunderstandings and even conflictual situations (Friedman & Currall, 2002; Senauke, 2002). But in the spirit of a learning organization, this can be the beginning of productive dialogue and understanding. And through understanding there is a reduction in uncertainty, which can enhance productivity (Wareham, 2002).

When effective organizational communication systems are available for transmitting various types of information, communication networks have the ability to stretch from office to office, building to building, state to state and ultimately, across the globe. Organizations must
constantly evaluate the effectiveness of the communication modes utilized for various types of information as they deal with the realization that while certain modes can provide real time responses, the sense of distance with technology-mediated communication is ever present and presents a handicap in terms of practice, learning, and knowledge-sharing (Brown & Duguid, 2000).

Employers should address the issue of how their employees are impacted by the way information is provided to them as technology challenges businesses to keep up with innovations (Talton, 2001). Managers need to know how the communication mode affects the message and should act to ensure all communication is effective no matter the mode utilized. Although a few studies have addressed the impact of technology on communication from a management perspective (see Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987; Lengel & Daft, 1988 for early examples), the present study examined the impact of technology on communication from the employees’ perspective.

The purpose of this study was to determine employees’ perception about the types of information management could productively communicate with them through electronic communication to augment face-to-face contact with employees. The study addressed two research questions: What type of information is critical for employees to receive from management through face-to-face contact? What type of information is critical for employees to receive from management through electronic mail?

**Literature Review**

This section reviews the impact of technology on organizational communication in recent years. The present study defines communication as the way in which knowledge is delivered,
shared, and interpreted. Information dissemination is defined as the relay and spreading of that knowledge.

Organizational communication used to be a top-down, one-way channel, with only those in authority having the resources to not only produce, but also disseminate formal information (Holtz, 2006). Communication was a face-to-face, synchronous process that was limited by time and space (Clampitt, 2005). Technology and the development of the Internet and Intranet in recent years have arguably made the greatest impact on communication channels/media (Axley, 2000; Brock & Zhou, 2005; Clampitt, 2005; De Vries, Reinout; Goman, 2004; Holtz, 2006; Oliver & Green, 2004; Sinickas, 2002; Whitworth & Riccomini, 2005). Electronic communication innovations for transmitting types of information such as e-mail, video-conferencing, instant messaging and mobile phones affect the way daily tasks are carried out in the highly competitive world of business with e-mail one of the most common computer-based communication tools used.

The ability to develop, integrate and use an effective organizational communication system is at the core of effective organizations (Ulrich, 1997). Organizations have a variety of systems in place to move information from one location to another—media management, meeting management, public relation departments, and Human Resource systems—with technology providing new methods to remove barriers of space, economics, distance, and time; however, employees asked about the adequacy of communication within their organization responded that communication is inadequate, with too little information provided (Ulrich, 1997).

Although research has indicated that managers prefer face-to-face communications for interpersonal relationships at work (Markus, 1994), other studies contraindicate the need for face-to-face communications in development of interpersonal relationships and found that e-mail
may reduce the hierarchical effects of management/employee relations (Gimenez, 2002). The use of e-mail as a fundamental communication tool for business is evident. It is used for messages, to schedule meetings and disseminate their minutes, to manage teams and provide them with a communication forum, and to allow people to problem solve (across oceans and time zones if necessary). The benefits of e-mail are myriad including economy, convenience, directness, informality, speed of transmission to the next office or across the planet, ability to correspond to several people or groups of people at one time, transmission of large documents that can be easily edited and returned through use of e-mail’s attachment feature, and the sheer savings of eliminating paper documents, with inherent costs associated with purchasing, creating, distributing, and storing (Senauke, 2002; Talton, 2001).

The costs associated with utilizing e-mail for business reasons however, may be somewhat nebulous. Friedman and Currall (2002) argue that e-mail can also generate disputes and is responsible for escalation in conflict that may have been avoided altogether if people had met face-to-face instead (see also Maruca, 2000; Senauke, 2000). E-mail’s beneficial directness, speed and informality leads to less caution and care with word choice that may inadvertently imply aggression, creating a reaction that may lead to conflict (Senauke, 2002). Improper use of e-mail may cause a breech in privacy, create harassment or discrimination that may result in litigation (Adams, Scheuing, & Feeley, 2000) or simply create a burden of unwanted e-mail or viruses in one’s inbox.

Whitworth and Riccomini (2005) determined that employee’s two most preferred channels for credible communication are their immediate manager and the company intranet. The most used channels, in reality however, were outside sources or the “grapevine,” which are less credible. The findings confirmed that despite rapid technological change and the new
communication capabilities that are available, it is still critical for managers to be key players in the internal communication process. Whitworth and Riccomini concluded that managerial communication effectiveness had a direct relation on employee job performance.

Sinickas (2002) stresses that choosing the right mix of channels for a specific combination of message delivery and audience is a process that should combine the professional expertise of a communicator with audience research. While technology has drastically changed the landscape of corporate communication, the increasing diversity (e.g., ethnicity and culture, gender and age) of the workforce with varying communication needs has further increased the complexity of determining the right mix of communication channels.

For example, the multi-generational workforce audience includes Traditionalists (born 1901-1945) who still prefer hand written and personal communication. Generation X and Millennials (born 1965-1980 and 1980-present, respectively), on the other hand, seem to be equally satisfied with electronic mail, instant messaging or checking in on a Blackberry (Hicks & Hicks, 1999). Tannen’s (1995) earlier work determined that male and female audiences differ in their conversational techniques and perhaps differ in ways of interpreting conversation as well. The cultural variability of communication behaviors and modalities, which has long been recognized (see, for example, the early work of Hall, 1968; Hofstede, 1980; also Ashkanasy, Wilderom, & Peterson, 2000; Gannon & Associates (2001), also necessitates the need to examine the cultural ethnicity of the audience.

Meetings conducted face-to-face between managers and employees enable social context cues to be present, which have shown to build trust among employees and managers in various studies (Scott, 2000). This trust is a critical area in organizational management. One study found that 47 percent of interviewed employees viewed the absence of employee trust as a major
problem in the work force (Wright, 1996). Inherently, e-mail is an insecure medium where the potential for human error allows for significant security risks on the organizational level and on a more personal level for employees. Misdirecting a message is easily done, which poses immediate danger to privacy; other risks to privacy are clear and present due to the pervasiveness of computer crime (Talton, 2001).

While face-to-face contact provides the most personal and immediate way of transacting business, costs associated with face-to-face communication necessitate the need for organizations to determine when to use this resource and when an alternative choice of a more economical resource such as electronic communication can be substituted (O'Mara, 1999). The need for face-to-face communication may be questioned because of scarce resources necessary to maintain face-to-face communication.

The next section outlines the methodology used in the present study to examine employees’ perceptions about the types of information management could productively communicate through electronic communication to augment face-to-face contact with employees.

Methodology

Participants

This case study utilized purposeful sampling to identify twenty-four employees whose communication with higher management was through face-to-face interaction as well as through e-mail. Using a “typical sampling” strategy which highlights what is normal or average (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994), participants were sought who held professional positions, reported to higher management located within the same office facility as the participants, and had been in their current positions for at least six months. The general work
responsibilities of the participants entailed facilitating branch sales activities and providing exceptional customer service, and recognizing and meeting customer needs by proactively selling and cross-selling bank products and services. Work responsibilities also included handling daily operational issues, meeting consumer lending needs, being aware of and taking security precautions at all times, and generating new consumer and business customer business.

Participants were initially contacted by e-mail requesting their voluntary participation followed by a phone call. The sample size supports information richness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the saturation of data or redundancy (Patton, 1990). Redundancy occurs when subsequent responses to questions do not provide additional insights. An open-ended structured interview was conducted with each of the twenty-four participants who maintain similar job functions within the company; a major U.S. bank with over 600 branches spread over seven states. The organization relies heavily on electronic communication due to the vast physical space between branches and headquarters and the immediate need for information to be forwarded to those locations. The investigator who conducted the interviews for the pilot study (and the actual study) was a coworker of the participants and was familiar with the bank’s organizational culture and standard operating procedures.

Trustworthiness of Data

The open-ended structured interviews emphasized personal constructs of participants to establish authenticity and trustworthiness through the nature and format of the questions asked, followed by content analysis techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Interview questions were designed to exhaust the range of participant perceptions about the variables being examined to decrease the likelihood of overlooking significant chunks of a domain (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Spradley, 1979, 1980). The questions asked avoided
“referential meaning” by asking for “use through contrast, similarity, uniqueness, and the ideal in an effort to exhaust a domain” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Spradley, 1979, 1980).

A pilot study was conducted with office workers from the same target population as the participants in the study to determine content validity and appropriateness of the interview questions. Two refinements were made to the questions to strengthen the interview process. The sequencing for one of the questions asked was changed and a probe was added to one of the questions for better clarity. As part of the pilot study, the office workers also shared with the investigator their personal constructs for the word “productive” which was a crucial word used in the interview questions. Workers defined “productive” as “producing”; “completing a job or task in a productive manner”; “to move forward”; “doing your job in a competent, efficient and accurate manner”; “to effectively use time and resources that are available to complete a desired task in the shortest time possible”; “to do quality work in a timely manner”; “generating work in a successful and timely way”; and “completing a task in an efficient amount of time.” Prior to the official interview, each participant in the interviewer’s presence reviewed these constructs for accuracy to ensure a shared meaning of language. Participants agreed that the descriptions accurately conveyed the meaning of “productive.”

Data Collection Procedures

Structured interviews were conducted with each participant over a thirty to sixty minute interval. The interviews were conducted in a private conference room with only the participant and interviewer present. Responses were recorded verbatim so that the language and conceptualizations of those involved were preserved (Spradley, 1979, 1980). The six interview questions covered a range of topics about work information (addressing situations and circumstances) that management can effectively communicate through e-mail to augment face-
to-face interaction with workers. Three of these questions are presented here to illustrate the nature and format of the questions used in this study: What type of information is as productive to receive by e-mail as face-to-face contact with management? What type of information is not as productive to receive by e-mail as face-to-face contact with management? What type of information is absolutely critical to receive through face-to-face contact?

Data Analysis

The investigators first conducted domain analyses employing content analysis procedures (see Spradley, 1979). These analyses involved sorting through interview responses and identifying patterns, categories, or themes. A tabular worksheet was developed that displayed semantic relationships. A domain is a set of categories organized on the basis of a single semantic relationship (for example, $X$ is a kind of $Y$; $X$ is a way to do $Y$). Possible cover terms and included terms (that is, items and attributes) that appropriately fit the semantic relationships were searched for in the data. Making systematic use of this kind of worksheet helps to uncover domains embedded in the interview responses (Spradley, 1979).

For example, included terms dealing with sensitive, confidential matters were grouped under the same cover term: “type of information that is absolutely critical to receive from management through face-to-face contact.” Each item and attribute included under this cover term fit the semantic relationship $X$ (for example, personal issues) is a type of $Y$ (information that is absolutely critical to receive from management through face-to-face contact). A system of cultural meanings was uncovered that these participants use to denote and connote work information that management can effectively communicate through e-mail to augment face-to-face interaction with workers.
Two investigators independently analyzed the data with each item and attribute represented in some domain category. Minimal discrepancies were noted between the two analyses when they were compared. Participants reviewed domain categories and tentative assertions for accuracy with positive feedback. Peers examined the tentative interpretations as well and gave constructive comments. Conducting member checks and peer examination in this manner helps to strengthen authenticity and trustworthiness of findings (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998).

After content analysis, cumulative frequencies for similar types of items and attributes were calculated to determine how often similar types were elicited. This allowed the investigators to determine included terms elicited most frequently and to gain a better understanding about the distribution of beliefs across domain categories. Linking the qualitative data (textual) with the quantitative data (frequencies) enables confirmation and corroboration of both through triangulation (Rossman & Wilson, 1991), and helps investigators “see the general drift of the data more easily and rapidly by looking at distributions” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 253).

Results

E-mail in Lieu of Face-to-Face Contact

Elicited responses indicated that the bank employees receive a vast amount of information from managers. One-hundred percent of the responses indicated that all the information communicated from management was as productive to receive by e-mail as through face-to-face contact. It is important to note that the information participants received from management through e-mail dealt with operational issues, project updates, security (safety) concerns, and sales information. No responses were elicited about confidential or sensitive
information being communicated by e-mail from management. The following verbatim responses reflect common descriptions given by participants for information that is as productive to receive by e-mail as through face-to-face contact with management: “All of it is good through e-mail. I get e-mails on operational issues; meetings; training; teller referrals; and Branch alerts come through e-mails, too.” “Definitely meeting information; update information (scorecard).” “All of it– absolutely. I get e-mails on product champions updates; information on conference calls. I get e-mails on scorecard numbers, project updates. I also get informal e-mails from my boss just asking ‘How are you doing?’” “All of it.” “All of it is productive through e-mail.” “It is the best way to get all of this information. I get e-mails on meetings and their times; early morning system hits. I get sales tips; operational issues; branch alerts; general updates. I get information on policy stuff.”

**Critical Face-to-Face Contact**

Human Resource confidential issues including annual reviews, discipline, and promotions elicited the most frequent response from participants when asked to identify critical work situations requiring face-to-face communication. The following verbatim responses reflect common descriptions given by participants for critical work situations requiring face-to-face communication: “I want face-to-face when it comes to Human Resources issues. Quarterly goals need to be talked about together. Personal stuff or if I’ve done something wrong. Also stuff like a pat on the back.” “I never want confidential information on e-mail about me personally or customers. Anything of a personal nature.” “That is easy, definitely discipline concerns or actions I want face-to-face. HR issues.” “I want to actually talk to someone about personnel issues. My review.” “I want my review done in person. I don’t ever want to discuss my performance through e-mail.” “If I am getting fired.” “Really the only thing that sticks out is
performance issues – good or bad.” “If there were legal concerns.” “I don’t want to get sensitive information through e-mail.” “I don’t ever want to discuss my performance through e-mail. Highly personal stuff.”

Table 1 reports the cumulative frequencies computed for critical work situations that require face-to-face communication. As simple frequencies classifying nominal level data, no inferences can be made at this time about the strength of association of the weighting of importance for these work situations. Another research instrument is needed to specifically address these factors to that inferences can be made based upon more powerful statistics.

Table 1

*Frequency Count for Critical Work Situations Requiring Face-to-Face Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain category</th>
<th>Item and attribute grouping</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical work situations requiring face-to-face contact from management</td>
<td>Human Resource confidential issues (reviews, promotions, discipline, legal concerns) Problems that are too complicated or need to see in order to handle Interaction with management Branch information (Scorecard/sales) Complaints problems Customer information Robbery</td>
<td>42 2 5 5 4 2 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical E-mail Contact

Certain critical work situations require e-mail communication for employees such as occasions when management must get information to employees and face-to-face communication is not possible or needed. Security (safety) information from headquarters needs to get to every branch and would take days for someone to personally deliver the message. Corporate headquarters houses large sums of information that must be communicated to employees in order for them to perform their jobs. The responses revealed that information not perceived as confidential—meeting times, training times, policy changes, system problems, and things with numerous details—were just as productive and even critical to receive quickly.

Participants identified two main situations where it is critical for them to receive electronic mail from managers: security (safety) issues, and policy and product changes. The following verbatim responses reflect common descriptions given by participants for critical work situations requiring e-mail communication: “Branch alerts. Alerts are really the only critical thing we have to have a heads up on security stuff.” “Alerts and updates are critical to get in e-mail. “Scorecard results are needed on e-mail. Anything that you handle immediately or needs my attention soon.” “Early morning system hits are important to get to ASAP. System issues have to be through e-mail because we can’t wait for someone to tell us stuff in person – it would be too late.” “Policy changes are the only critical thing. Changes that are immediate.” “Product changes are critical. Special product promotions and product updates.” “Changes that are immediate.” “Alerts are critical. We (sic) received ASAP. “Alerts and updates are critical.”

Table 2 reports the cumulative frequencies computed for critical work situations requiring e-mail from managers. As stated earlier, no inferences can be made at this time about the strength of association or the relative weighting of importance for these work situations.
Table 2

*Frequency Count for Critical Work Situations Requiring E-mail*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain category</th>
<th>Item and attribute grouping</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical work situations requiring e-mail from management</td>
<td>Security (safety) issues</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Branch information</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personnel issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions and things that need immediate attention</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>System problems/issues</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy and product changes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agendas/meeting/training/contest information</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Things that need to be documented</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information when there are lots of details</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final section discusses the findings and implications for training and development in this study.

**Findings and Implications**

The findings revealed types of information that employees perceived as most productive to receive from management through face-to-face communication and when e-mail can effectively augment face-to-face interaction. Employees in this study perceived private information that is personal, sensitive or confidential as critical to receive in a face-to-face format. Employees perceived that information not deemed confidential—meeting times, training times, policy changes, system problems, and information with numerous details—was just as productive and some even critical to receive through e-mail.
Etzioni and Etzioni (1999) argue that comparing face-to-face or e-mail communication stops far short of where research should be conducted; rather, research should examine a hybrid system that utilizes multiple forms of communication. As we have found in this study, employees have clear preferences for types of information conveyed through face-to-face methods and for types of information conveyed through electronic formats.

The findings determined that the organization in this study utilized the use of e-mail and face-to-face communication appropriately. When asked about the types of e-mail received from managers, employees reported they did not receive any confidential information in an electronic mail format. Employees were very clear that face-to-face communication was critical when issues dealt with confidential matters considered private. The results supported the need for privacy as it relates to human resource issues, personal or confidential information and performance reviews, and was consistent with privacy literature on perceived workplace privacy needs (Kupritz, 2000).

Research over the past 30 years indicates that privacy is an important concern for employees that should not be overlooked when addressing the needs of an organization (Braeger, Bauman, Heerwagen, & Ruland, 2000; Brill, Margulis, Konar, & BOSTI, 1984, 1985; Brill, Weideman, & BOSTI Associates, 2001; Brookes & Kaplan, 1972; Kupritz, 2000, 2001, 2003; Sundstrom, Burt, & Kamp, 1980). SHRM (Society for Human Resources Management) reported that 33% of employers admitted to surreptitiously reading their employee’s e-mails (Hellman, 1999), which contributes to employee fears that privacy in the workplace will become a distant memory (Adams et al., 2000). Indeed, comprehensive guidelines for privacy issues have not been developed and laws regarding inadvertent disclosure of confidential information are confusing (Talton, 2001).
With regard to communication, the findings indicated that face-to-face contact allowed for questions, feedback and interpreting contextual cues that enable employees to find meaning in the message. It was not surprising that employees wanted to find meaning in a message being sent from their manager, especially at times when feedback on performance or other sensitive information was being shared. Organizations must carefully evaluate when face-to-face communication is desired and when other modes of communication could be equally effective.

E-mail communication was not only acceptable for employees in this study but also imperative where time-sensitive communication was critical, such as for security alerts that must be provided as soon as possible for all employees. E-mail messages provided virtually instantaneous access to information. E-mail messages were also acceptable when no contextual meaning was to be gathered from a message such as, “The staff meeting is on Tuesday at 2 pm.” Such a message would not enhance trust or credibility, nor was it personal or confidential.

The organization appears to have synthesized the use of both modes of communication effectively noting the needs and use for both forms. Employees responded that very specific times existed when face-to-face communication was the only mode of communication that would be productive. Managers did not send confidential information through e-mail, but rather handled such matters with face-to-face communication. Employees responded there were equally as many times that e-mail was the only mode of communication that would be productive.

In today’s workforce where technology innovations are apparently the way for organizations to maintain a competitive advantage in most industries, the effective use of face-to-face communication and the knowledge management that goes with the use of this mode may actually be the key to success. Employees in this study, spread out over a large geographic region
including several states, were able to maintain acceptable standards of communication from location to location through use of technological innovations.

Since the opportunity for disastrous disputes is heightened by the use of e-mail, training and development efforts can also help management and employees recognize the inherent danger involved when negotiations are handled through e-mail. Maruca (2000) determined that negotiations using e-mail are more likely to move into a confrontation situation; people who use e-mail to negotiate are much more likely to appear rigid and rude, and less willing to compromise than those who negotiate face-to-face.

Where time and geography are a factor, HRD professionals can help facilitate resolutions by making employees and managers aware of the potential for escalating conflict when e-mail is the communication mode, by providing them with tools with which to manage their reactions, and helping them understand where and how pitfalls may be avoided.

O’Mara (1999) argued that electronic communication, transmitted in seconds, should be used effectively to augment face-to-face contact which will be treated as a precious resource in the near future. Organizations are becoming increasingly more modular and virtual, with joint ventures, strategic partnerships and outsourcing made more prevalent by technology. The overall results of these changes are increased resources, greater efficiency, and faster time to market (Scott, 2000). Assumptions about how to use technology to transmit information, however, need to be challenged so that technology is value-adding (McAteer, 1994).

Marquardt and Sofo (1999) proposed three major challenges facing HRD professionals as they attempt to help their organizations move into the global economy: tensions created by cultural, politics, and distance which significantly affect all aspects of the organization. Cultural tensions surface when many cultures try to reach common understanding and resolve differences
that prohibit or impede organizational effectiveness. Political tensions exponentially grow as multiple governments impose their particular political agendas on the market place. The tensions created by distance are exaggerated by the inability to communicate face-to-face and the disconnection created by distance (Marquardt & Sofo, 1999).

As electronic communication is the primary medium by which the organization moves into the global economy, each of these tensions manifests itself in, and is exacerbated by the use of electronic communication. HRD professionals must be cognizant of these tensions and knowledgeable concerning intervention strategies with which to deal with them to support corporate ability to successfully navigate in the global economy.

As a case study, the findings in the present investigation cannot be generalized to all training and development situations, organizations or office settings. The details gained from this initial study warrant further study to examine the critical need for both face-to-face and e-mail communication with managers in similar and different settings. It may be that organizations similar in size and disbursement may value face-to-face communication as productive in similar situations or it may reveal different needs for face-to-face communications with managers. Future studies should also examine the myriad of issues surrounding employees’ desire for privacy and workplace requirements for security and freedom from litigation concerning inappropriate communication.

Since Tanner’s (1995) work found that women and men differ in conversational techniques and perhaps in ways of interpreting conversation, differences in interpretation may affect performance. Gender differences in interpretation of both face-to-face and e-mail communication could be studied for possible impact in the workplace. Workforce diversity effects are also to be expected; communication behaviors and communication modalities should
be examined through the lens of diversity (e.g., gender, age, and ethnicity). Such research would
benefit HRD professionals as they aid management in the development of workplace cultures
where employees feel valued, trusted, and can develop trust for their employers.

The present findings suggest that organizations could realize more tangible gains in
management and employee performance by investing in intervention training strategies that
develop individual, group and organizational learning about the most effective communication
channels in various settings. The return on investment of capital expenditures for these training
efforts should encompass training evaluation models that go beyond training and include the
array of contextual issues (e.g., level of management support, workplace design attributes, and
available technology and resources) that may impact training transfer back on the job. See, for
example, the systemic evaluation models proposed by Holton (1996) and Russ-Eft (1995).
Indeed, Phillips (1997) points out, “while level 3 evaluations such as frequency and use of skills
are important to gauge the success of the program’s application, it still does not guarantee that
there will be a positive impact in the organization” (p. 43).

Training evaluation models should also address potential organizational constraints and
opportunities for using the most effective communication modes as part of their action planning
so that trainees can return to work with a realistic and workable action plan. Instructional design
models have long stressed that transfer is more likely to occur when learning conditions
approximate the application environment (Clark & Voogel, 1985; Laker, 1990; see also Kupritz,
2002).

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