Communication Technologies at Work: Organisational Cultures and Employee Narratives

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Thesis abstract

This thesis provides an extensive analysis of new communication technologies (NCTs), which includes email technology, the Internet, intranets, NetMeeting, video-conferencing and audio-conferencing, within an organisational context. These technologies have become ubiquitous in organisational life and work. The implementation, integration and application of NCTs in this setting have both innovative possibilities and negative consequences. Consequently, we need to understand the implications of these technologies on organisational cultures and structures. This is achieved throughout this thesis by focusing upon the context of technology implementation, the transformation of communication and information lines through and within the organisation, and the changing social networks and interactions.

'Communication Technologies at Work' will explain and critically explore the effects of NCTs whilst developing an understanding of the implications for its employment in the work and the training settings of an organisation. It is based upon the ethnographic study of a hi-tech organisation and draws upon the narratives of the organisational members collected through in-depth interviewing. Further data was collected utilising observational and survey methods. The research methodology of this study is distinctive because NCTs were used as methodological tools for carrying out the observations and distributing the surveys.

Although a traditional methodological stance was adopted the study will further develop this tradition. It will analyse the relationship between NCTs and organisational cultural responses, by studying and deconstructing the personal narratives of organisational employees. This study offers an original understanding of NCTs through the narratives of the organisational members and this forms the basis for its substantive contribution to existing research in this subject area. The importance of the narrated experiences of organisational employees negotiating the introduction of NCTs will be emphasised throughout and will be used to create the framework for the analysis.

This thesis will conclude that organisational cultures have been 'technologised' through the application of NCTs. This is characterised by 'the ethos of technology enthusiasts' and 'the ethos of technology sceptics'. These positive and sceptical subcultures are embedded in the dominant organisational culture. Furthermore, this study will demonstrate that organisational communication and information flows have been altered, extended and interrupted with the advent of NCTs in the work setting. Finally, the discussion of the role of these technologies in the work and training settings of the case study organisation suggest that the consequences of their implementation and use vary in these different contexts.