

On Inter-Organizational EC Collaboration

The impact of Inter-Cultural Communication Apprehension

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Abstract

Inter-cultural communication apprehension is one of the major factors that may influence the processes of the inter-organization collaboration in electronic commerce. It is an obstruction, prohibiting inter-organization collaboration in different ways. If we can manage the inter-cultural communication apprehension properly, we may be able to bring organizations of different cultures together for successful completion of EC collaborative works. This paper summarizes previous works on inter-cultural communication apprehension and identifies three potential factors that could influence inter-cultural communication apprehension: cultural climate, technology environment and communication leadership. Also, this paper proposes a research framework and several hypotheses for future testing.

1. Introduction

As Electronic Commerce (EC) becomes popular, more organizations extend their collaboration processes on the web from group level to intra-organization as well as inter-organization levels. Such collaborations include a diversity of activities such as supply chain collaboration, outsourcing-related activities, EC strategic planning logistics and demand forecast. Mechanisms for the collaboration process and structure that bring groups and organizations together have become popular topics in current EC research. Westley and Vredenburg (1997) summarize previous works on inter-organization collaboration and suggest that certain factors such as technology, leadership, or culture influence the processes of the inter-organization collaboration. Figure 1 illustrates the factors that may influence successful completion of collaborative work. Further investigation of Westley and Vredenburg's ideas may be useful for researchers to understand the dynamics of inter-organizational EC collaboration.

Experimental and field study research regarding the use of groupware to support groups of people working together in different locations have been going on for more than a decade (e.g., see Alavi et al., 1997; Tung and Turban, 1998; Vogel et al., 1999). Originally, experiments were intended to investigate the effectiveness of different group support technologies on the process of people working together. It is only since 1997 that pioneering efforts were reported in connecting these experiments to electronic commerce (Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1998; Jarvenpaa et al., 1998; Masetti and Lobert-Jones, 1997-98; Walden and Turban, 1998; 2000). Recently attention has been given to cultural aspects relating to inter-organizational collaboration in electronic commerce (e.g., Cole and O'Keefe, 2000).

In an attempt to examine the effects of group support technologies on EC collaboration, we conducted several rounds of experiments involving students and real world companies in Finland (Abo Akademi University), California (California State University Long Beach) and Hong Kong (City University of Hong Kong) (see Walden and Turban, 1998). The research model and hypotheses described in this paper are based in part on the data collected in the fourth phase of the continuous collaboration between faculty, students and companies in the three countries (see Walden and Turban, 2000).

The objectives of the fourth phase of the exploratory research were to investigate the effectiveness of hands-on involvement in learning about global EC as perceived by the participating students, assess the methodology and procedures of this cross-cultural corporation planning project, and assess the effectiveness of several group support tools. In addition, we were interested in finding if significant differences in students' perception regarding the experiments exist, based on the country where they are studying. Assuming that the cultural profiles of the students in the different continents are different (e.g., see Hofstede, 1991), we wanted to find out if such differences still exist, and if participation in a collaborative project would cause a change in cultural profiles.