Building a Group Decision Support Laboratory

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Abstract

The author describes the planning, development, and implementation of a GDS laboratory in a new, technologically-advanced engineering, computer science, and IS building. Based on GDS and other collaborative workgroup research, together with needs assimilated from executives and managers of the business community, we set three objectives for the GDS laboratory. These objectives are: 1) to maximize the flexibility of the environment for group decisions and related uses, 2) to maximize the power of the environment to enhance group decisions (including technological and non-technological features), and 3) to provide the ability to continuously improve and evolve the environment as dictated by empirical and theoretical research findings. The resulting laboratory is a vehicle for group decision research and activities.

1. Introduction

As evidenced in the IS literature, meetings conducted in Group Decision Support (GDS) environments can produce significant, positive results [17]. Most GDS proponents would agree that productive meetings need not be facilitated, need not be technologically enabled, and need not take place in a special meeting environment. However, practical applications and research suggest that, under the right circumstances, GDS and other adaptations can significantly add to the productivity and the satisfaction of meeting participants [3, 4, 12].

Based on their research interests and industry involvement, the Information Systems faculty at a Midwestern university were asked to propose and justify more than a dozen research and teaching laboratories in a new, technologically advanced building. Following the proposal and justification project phases, the University granted the IS faculty approval to build a GDS laboratory in the new building. This paper describes the creation of that GDS laboratory.

2. Background information for GDS lab design

2.1. Group Meetings

Group meetings are a critical element of organizational management and communications [8]. Although they are time-consuming and often unproductive, group meetings have existed for millennia; an ample supply of appropriately-outfitted meeting rooms is an important part of any office environment [11]. Groups gather for a variety of reasons. They attend to make decisions, hear presentations, discuss issues, develop plans and strategies, lecture, train, and many other purposes [12, 13]. Group activities include a range of meeting processes that include deliberation, negotiation, consensus building, decision making, generating of alternatives, problem solving, and planning [16]. Group meeting rooms are used for the breadth of research, teaching, business or administrative applications [1, 3]. Participants may include a widely diverse set of individuals, including executives, managers, professionals, educators, students, community groups, and a variety of visitors.

2.2. Strategic Management and group meetings

Executives and other managers frequently participate in meetings, especially when involved in Strategic Management (SM). SM, regarded as a critical corporate tool since the early 1980s, is a process for formulating the strategy and overseeing its implementation [3]. SM is often performed by groups of managers, from the senior management level through the middle levels of the organization [11]. The use of information technology...