



TEACHING YOUNG DOGS OLD TRICKS: IDEAS FOR LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA TO IMPROVE ORGANIZATIONAL NEWCOMER SOCIALIZATION AND HIERARCHICAL INFORMATION FLOW

Amy J. Haas

Master's Final Project / UC Berkeley School of Information / December 2010



Why this topic?

MY BACKGROUND



make the connection



cross connect

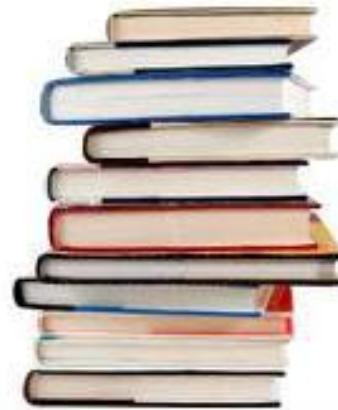
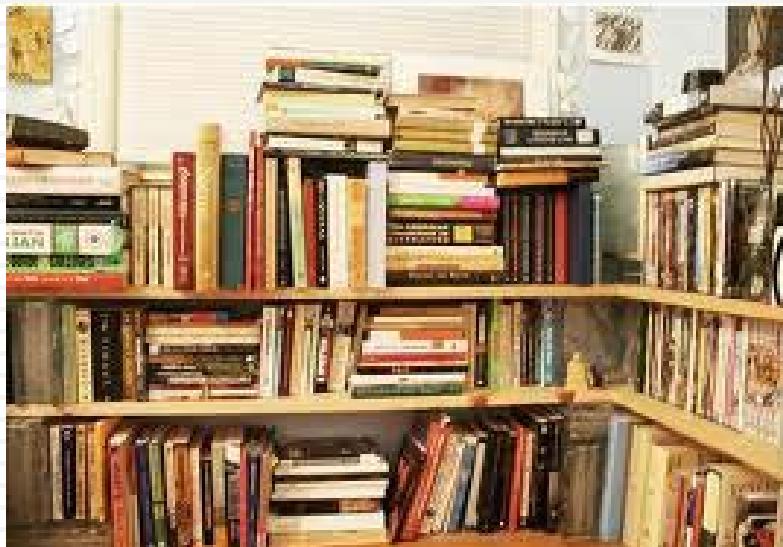
A COASTIE @ CAL



Literature Review

Task-Focused CMC

Social-Focused CMC



CMC IN ORGANIZATIONS

- Email – yes, of course!
- Wikis, forums, and blogs – becoming more widely used for collaboration.
- Chat/IM – finally becoming acceptable for use in the enterprise.
- Social media – NSFW!

Social Media to the Rescue!

Problem:

Employee attrition and frustration caused by feeling disconnected from the information flow, politics and career opportunities within large organizations.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

DEFINING KEY TERMS

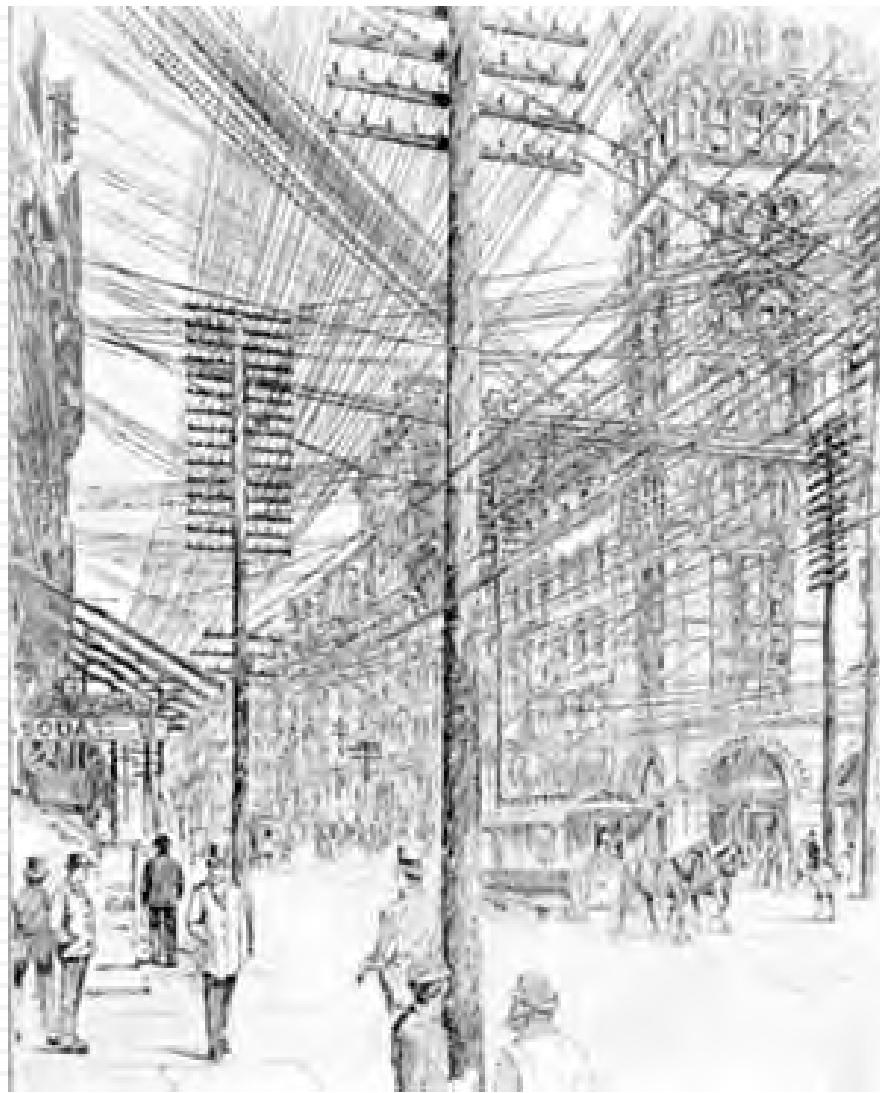
Mechanistic vs. Organic Organizations

MECHANISTIC ORGANIZATIONS	ORGANIC ORGANIZATIONS
<p><i>Usually hierarchical and bureaucratic in nature, characterized by:</i></p>	<p><i>Also called open organizations, are organizational structures characterized by:</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">Centralization of authority,Formalization of procedures and practices; andSpecialization of functions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Flatness: all communications and interactions are horizontal,Low specialization: knowledge resides wherever it is most useful; andDecentralization: mainly formal and informal participation used for decision making

Organizational Norms & Socialization

- **Newcomers:** Employees with < 6 months in an organization. Usually young, junior personnel w/little work experience.
- **Seasoned Employees:** Employees w/several years at the organization. Usually senior personnel w/extensive work experience.
- **Organizational Norms:** The written or unwritten (implicit and explicit) rules that govern the way people interact in the organization.
- **Socialization:** Employees meeting other employees to develop connections within the organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION



CMC-Augmented Hierarchies

- CMC technologies, in particular, can benefit organizations by improving the speed and quality of information transmission and decision-making, and supporting the more rapid and accurate identification of problems and opportunities.

(*Scott, 1998*)

Why are CEOs/CIOs afraid of social media?

- *Face-to-face communication is the “gold standard” in business because other forms of communication are impersonal and lack “social presence.”*
- *Horizontal communication flattens hierarchies, creating a “level playing field” & a more egalitarian, democratic environment.*
- *If senior managers are too accessible to junior personnel, it weakens the chain of command.*
- *Encouraging relational communication reduces workplace productivity.*

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

ANALYSIS

Assumption #1

Face-to-face communication is the “gold standard” in business.

Counter Arguments:

- ❑ CMC tools make communication “hyperpersonal” (*Walther, 1996*).
- ❑ The “less is more” effect (*Norton, Frost, & Ariely, 2007*).
- ❑ CMC fosters increased participation & opinion expression (*Ho & McLeod, 2008*).
- ❑ CMC facilitates the faster and more efficient completion of unambiguous tasks (*Dennis & Valacich, 1999*).

Assumption #2

Horizontal communication flattens hierarchies.

Counter Arguments:

- A lack of anonymity in organizational CMC negates this effect. CMC use actually strengthens the existing social roles found within hierarchies rather than flattening them (*Cho & Lee, 2008; Mantovani, 1994; Nelson, 2000; Peña, Walther, & Hancock, 2007; Postmes, Spears, & Martin, 1998*).
- CMC can facilitate the communication needed to cultivate and maintain social roles, especially in geographically disperse organizations (*Cho & Lee, 2008; Mantovani, 1994; Peña, Walther, & Hancock, 2007*).

Assumption #3

If senior managers are too accessible, it weakens the chain of command.

Counter Arguments:

- Accessible leaders gain referent power, strengthening their positional power (*French & Raven, 1960*).
- CMC tools also make mentoring easier; thereby strengthening individuals' commitment to their organization and their own identity within it (*Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004*).

Assumption #4

Encouraging relational communication reduces workplace productivity.

Counter Arguments:

- Successful collaboration requires flexibility and social interaction; CMC usage has a significant positive effect on knowledge sharing (*Tsai, 2002*).
- Employees retain their organizational identity and positional status, and therefore, retain their positive expectations about the actions of others and accountability for abuse, even in an online setting.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1

Focus on creating online communities.

Through the use of communities:

- Employees (particularly, newcomers) can gain a better understanding of which conversations are appropriate to join and what content is relevant to review.
- Online communities help newcomers learn the implicit norms of socialization within the organization to better interact with people, learn the context of discussions, and discern the proper channels to communicate with others.

Recommendation #2

Capitalize on Asynchronicity.

Not surprisingly:

- Many people experience boredom during conference room meetings and formal classroom training sessions.
- Organizations should focus on capitalizing on the key benefits afforded by the asynchronous aspects of CMC (i.e. flexibility for work hours and collaboration between geographically disperse units, etc.)

Recommendation #3

Incorporate Game Dynamics into CMC.

Game dynamics motivating real-life behavior:

- Airline frequent flyer miles, hotel reward programs, discount club cards, casino comps, etc, all designed to get people to spend their time or money on things and in places they would not otherwise if they were not earning “points” or status recognition.

- Organizations should not discount the power of points-based motivation, especially when compounded by the peer pressure effects of social networking.

Recommendation #4

Learn from the mistakes of others.

Pitfalls to avoid:

- Failure to establish specific goals for a new technology.
- Not communicating the goals to users or explain specific reasons for introducing a new technology will cause users to struggle to adapt to the change.
- “Google Buzz” case study (Feb 2010)

CONCLUSION



QUESTIONS?

Thanks!