
COMPARISON OF ELECTRONIC MAIL WITH OTHER MODES OF COMMUNICATION AMONG COLLEGE LECTURERS

Sunita Rani

School of Computing and Information Technology,
Bandar Baru Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, West Malaysia
(sunita@intimal.edu.my)

14695

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of global telecommunication networks, and in particular the Internet, has placed emphasis on the electronic mail as a mode of communication, entertainment, educational tool, and personal correspondence medium. Emphasis should be given in colleges to understand the nature of its use and its implementation among lecturers since they are directly involved in the transmission of teaching and learning within the college. In order to assess the implementation of e-mail in INTI College Malaysia, a survey was done to seek lecturers' responses to its use and to compare its use in comparison to other modes of human communication. Results showed that the majority (52.6 to 79.4 %, from the five Schools) of lecturers reported that e-mails were an effective and efficient means of communication. Respondents expressed satisfaction with the e-mail system, as 55.1 % reported that e-mails increased their work productivity. E-mail was the most popular mode, followed by telephone and face-to face (FTF) communication. Other modes of human communication include written memos, group meetings, letters, voice mail on the hand-phones or desk phones, newsletters, teleconferencing and facsimile transmission. Only 40.6% of lecturers agreed that e-mail was replacing FTF communication. Overall, 59.3 % of lecturers agreed or strongly agreed that people tend to receive immediate feedback in meetings compared with using e-mails. The majority (77.3%) of lecturers agreed that certain messages should be given verbally, not by e-mail.

INTRODUCTION

The use of e-mail started with ARPAnet (as an Internet precursor) in 1963, and in the United States in 1970. E-mail in the beginning was thought of as a means for exchanging information within small and select groups. Its use has been extended to millions all over the world. Electronic mail is the most utilised service in Internet. Since 1970, it has been implemented as a practical mode for academic and personal communication. In 1990, e-mail was recognised as the standard means of communication because of the popularity and ubiquity over traditional modes of communication (Heredro *et al.*, 2000).

E-mail is one of the most successful computer applications, and there are millions of e-mail users world-wide who often spend significant proportions of their work time using e-mail. The success and popularity of e-mail has led to a high daily volume of e-mails being sent and received (Whittaker and Sidner, 2000). Research suggests that email has contributed to the growth of organisations by allowing people in different geographical areas to communicate across time and space. It has also led to the emergence of on-line communities by supporting asynchronous communication. E-mail has been the subject of many studies, including pioneering early work that focused on the social and communicative aspects of e-mail, compared with face-to-face (FTF) communication. Nevertheless, there is little systematic data on its usage and utility as a workplace technology.

E-mail has also been used as an official means of communication (Fox, 1996). Indeed, it

has been shown that the usage of e-mail increased inter-organisational communications (Romn and Rifkin, 1996). From an organisational perspective, the implementation of e-mail improves relationships from the top level to the lower level of management. Hazen, *et al.* (1999) discovered that the usage of e-mail has increased while the usage of all other modes of human communications, such as face-to-face, meetings, telephone conversations, memos and other conventional media has decreased.

The adoption of e-mail also solves the logistical problems of collecting information from distant employees. Zack (1994) concluded that e-mail also increased inter-organisational effectiveness by accelerating information flow, since it is extremely fast in comparison to inter-office mail, courier services or post mail. Sillince (1998) reported an increase in overall efficiency in performing new business functions by using e-mail. E-mail can be stored in external memory for future retrieval, searching, editing and forwarding to others (Glausciusz and Yates-Mercer, 1990).

A number of writings have focused on the profile of e-mail, and classify its usage into three areas: task, social and broadcasting (Kettinger and Grover, 1997). In its social use, e-mail is used to encourage higher participation in interesting activities, create and maintain personal contacts and seek new jobs. Users can request information from a community of inter-organisational e-mail users. E-mail communications are also dedicated towards accomplishing group work, such as disseminating information, obtaining feedback, problem-solving and coordination. Users can request information from a community of e-mail users.

Glausiusz and Yates-Mercer (1990) reported that the usage of e-mail increases quality by allowing the diversity of opinions to be presented and considered. Results from one experiment showed that when e-mail users were isolated

from one another, they produced more original ideas than face-to-face (FTF) groups, and the ideas were of higher quality.

Much of the literature on the role of e-mail among lecturers shows that lecturers did not really know the existence of controls in the content of e-mails. Issues of control have been important themes in predicting e-mail effects on organisations (Garton and Wellman, 1995). Analysis shows the potential conflict between the management's desire to maintain control over organisations and the attributes of e-mail that extend traditional communication patterns.

This paper describes a survey carried out among lecturers at INTI College Malaysia, with the view of comparing e-mail with various modes of communication, such as telephone, facsimile, teleconferencing, memo, group meetings, voice mail, letters, face-to-face communication and newsletters. The study has the following objectives:

1. To investigate the effectiveness and efficiency gained by lecturers when using e-mail compared with other modes of communication;
2. To assess lecturers' response to using e-mails and analyse their expectations on using e-mails;
3. To compare the use of e-mails with other modes of human communications;
4. To record the advantages of using e-mails;
5. To study the substitution of face-to-face communication by e-mails;
6. To study the substitution of meetings by e-mails;
7. To study the substitution of telephone communications by e-mails; and
8. To study the problems faced by lecturers when using e-mails.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Questionnaire form

A questionnaire was designed to enable the