**ICS 132: Organizational Information Systems**

**Organizational Communication**

### Overview
- Communication and decision making
  - Information systems support decision making
    - Information access
    - Information sharing
    - Coordination
- Communication and genre
- Communication and organisational structures

### Mintzberg on Managers
- Managers don’t spend much of their time “making decisions”
- They spend their time talking to people:
  - To understand the problems they’re having
  - To get ideas from people
  - Figure out if people are doing the right things
  - Encouraging people to do good work
  - Helping people sort out problems

### What Does Communication Do?
- Various functions
  - Sharing information – “all on the same page”
  - Getting information from place to place
  - What’s happening over there?
  - Remember, responsive to environment
  - Building trust
- Communication supports decision-making
  - Three phases
    - Preparation
    - Informing
    - Monitoring

### Communication in Organizations
- The traditional view
  - Communication and work are separate activities
  - Communication transfers information so that work can be done
- The 132 view
  - Communication and work are interwoven
    - Sometimes, communicating IS the work
  - Sometimes, the work is conducted THROUGH communication
  - Communication isn’t just about information
    - It’s also the exercise of power and control
    - It’s also situated in a historical context

### Aspects of Communication
- Many different forms and styles
  - Different technologies, different settings
  - From email to staff meetings
- Characteristics
  - Formality
  - Directedness
  - Temporality
  - Richness
  - Persistence
  - Genre
the emergence of the memo

- the form of the memo
  - "to", "from", "subject" headings
  - subheads and lists
  - formal language
  - no greeting or sign-off
- the memo wasn’t always around
  - essentially invented between 1870 and 1920
  - why?

- organisational growth
  - geographical growth
    - everyone doesn’t share a common environment
  - structural growth
    - the emergence of middle tiers of management
- Scientific Management
  - documenting the process
  - regimenting and controlling organisational work
- technology
  - typewriters and filing cabinets

genres of communication

- genre is a social construct
  - it provides a set of expectations
  - it makes actions meaningful and sensible
    - a framework for interpreting what’s going on
  - it supports coordination between participants
  - it emerges from interactions over time
- genre has technical components, too
  - it is tied to the medium of production
    - timeliness
    - distribution

- the committee meeting
- the resume
- the memo
- the presentation
- the conference

- what are:
  - their components?
  - their functions?

using genres

electronic memos?

- email as a medium for electronic memos
  - email shares some properties with memos
    - the formal structure
    - enabling one-to-many communication
  - in the 80s, many organisations introduced email
    - automated vertical communication
      - distributing instructions, reporting results
      - the unexpected outcome...
- the lesson
  - genres as systems of practice
    - not just the information, but the way that it’s used
social networks

- Milgram’s “small world” experiment
  - aka “six degrees of separation”
- “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know”
  - multiple, overlapping groups
  - remember the functional organisation structure?
- the spread of organisational information
  - how does information spread?

from Mackay, 1990

social networks

social networks in software
social networks in software

newer forms

- communication is always evolving
  - different technologies support different genres
- newer forms:
  - desktop videoconferencing
  - corporate intranet
  - enterprise information portal
  - workplace IM

videoconferencing

the failure of videoconferencing

- 1970s videoconferencing failed spectacularly
  - technical reasons
    - interacting with artifacts
    - resolution, field of view, etc
  - cultural reasons
    - why won’t you come to meet me?
    - the formal and informal aspects of meetings

desktop videoconferencing

distance learning

- desktop videoconferencing is quite different
  - 1990s: H.261 over ISDN
    - ISDN is 128kbps data + 16kbps signal
    - QCIF: 176 x 144, 5-10fps
  - 2000s: Internet
    - Quicktime, RealPlayer, streaming video
- what factors make it more successful?
  - a different niche
  - less expensive makes it less formal
  - spontaneity
  - immediate control of technology
  - combined with other forms of communication
- video for distance learning?
  - California Master Plan for Higher Education
  - opportunities
    - extending reach
    - accessing archives of material
  - problems
    - interaction – asking questions, getting answers
    - feedback – hard to gauge how material is going over
distance learning

This is from Sun... interesting work from Microsoft too...

email

- transitions in genres
  - from memos to communication between peers
- a new set of communicational practices
  - e.g. undirected requests for help
- a new set of organizational concerns
  - communities of practice
  - knowledge management
- but still uneasy
  - the bandwidth wars and recreational email

instant messaging

- increasing role of IM in organizations
  - supporting distant coordination
    - presence indicators as well as communicative content
- IM and other forms of communication
  - what does IM replace? telephone? email?
  - the question of "formality"
    - formality is an aspect of practice
    - not a substitute
      - supports informal interaction
      - doesn’t support undirected communication

continuum of communication

- communication media exist in a context
  - research suggests that media don’t substitute
    - new media are additive; communication level increases
- both instrumental and symbolic value
  - the role of formality
  - presence in a business meeting
  - exchanging documents at the IMF
  - the medium is the message

summary

- communication isn’t just bits on the wire
  - communication achieves coordination
  - communication supports decision-making
- communication isn’t just what’s said
  - genres shape and structure our expectations
  - genres provide resources for interpretation
  - communicative forms as systems of meaning
  - instrumental and symbolic value