

HICSS-35
Virtual Work Environment Mini-track

Abstract

To compete effectively today, organizations must identify and rapidly respond to changes in the marketplace. The virtual work environment is increasingly employed by organizations to gain competitive advantage. Managing these different relationships, loyalties, and priorities, in addition to developing new relationships presents a definite challenge in virtual environments. This mini-track focuses on issues related to challenges presented by and effectiveness of virtual work environments.

The first session addresses virtual work environments from an organizational perspective. Balthazard and colleagues investigate how personality factors of individual virtual team members coalesce into team interaction styles. Walther and colleagues examine short-term virtual groups, which often have difficulty making adaptations to systems and other group members. Finally, Watson-Manheim et al. evaluate the use of the word virtual to describe a variety of different work situations. They propose a framework to more precisely classify different work environments and test the framework by analyzing published research articles.

The second session of this mini-track is mostly focused on understanding virtual work environments from a community perspective. The first paper by Blanchard and Markus investigates how virtual communities are established and maintained. This paper asks - does a sense of community similar to that sometimes observed in physical communities also occur in virtual settings? Yoshioka and colleagues explore the challenges of adopting a MOO-based technology to support a virtual working environment spanning several geographically dispersed units of a global organization. Finally, Ahuja and colleagues take a look at virtual work from the workers' perspective, examining whether work-family conflict, stress, and autonomy influence their intention to stay or leave their employer.

The final session focuses on tools and technologies used in virtual work groups. All of the studies focus on distributed teams, and two of the papers actually present studies of communication tools conducted in organizational settings. The first study by Wierba and colleagues explores the adoption of a collaborative tool for a geographically dispersed engineering team. The findings show that the tool was not widely adopted and that workarounds already in use within the team before this new tool was made available were seen as sufficient for distributing information. In the second paper, Watson-Manheim and Belanger present an in-depth study of the effectiveness of communication modes and technologies. Their initial findings from cases conducted in two organizations show a complex set of relationships between communication modes, communication-based work processes, and team effectiveness for individuals who in distributed teams, and who have multiple team memberships. The final paper looks at leadership roles in virtual teams. Findings of the Sarker et al. study suggest that the emergence of leaders in virtual teams is affected by performance, culture, cultural ability, trust, ISD ability, communication ability, and co-location in the initial stages of a project, while performance, culture, and ISD ability explain the emergence of a leader in later stages.