

A Case Study of a Defense Health Agency: The Significance of Group Support Systems:

Chapter 1

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Chapter 1

Organizations have numerous activities that run concurrently, and the synchronization of these activities is necessary to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness, organizational communication being is one of the greatest pillars of success (Crowe et al., 2011). Khare (2011) noted that the productivity of a firm largely depends on the degree of responsiveness within the company structure and specifically its leadership approach. Different decision-making stakeholders want to ensure a higher degree of accuracy on the solutions provided, which is possible through enhancing cohesiveness within the organization (Eweje et al., 2012).

Changes in the principles of efficient organizational communication have been drastic (Gresty, 2013). Recent developments in addressing team ineffectiveness involve using technology to meet the growing needs and responsibilities of organizational members (Lee & Wellman, 2012). The group support system (GSS), which enhance the effectiveness of group meetings by offering electronic communication support, is bound to reinvent modern business communication system.

A GSS is a set of approaches, technology, and software whose primary function lies in using techniques that focus on improving communication and decision making during group meetings (Crowe et al., 2011). Technologists believe that introducing GSS in organizations and especially within group meeting settings can contribute significantly to value management and lead to a new powerful network that can shape ethical and moral values among individuals operating in an organization group (Chen & Kyaw-Phyo, 2012). However, the lack of information on the synapse between GSS approaches and organizational efficiency in terms of value creation, requires an examination thereof.

The development of computer-based group support can provide new opportunities for organizational development and team building (Andres, 2010), for the emphasis on strategic issues will help enhance the sustainable development of an organization. Such knowledge creates further assistance in improving a GSS to ensure efficient measures (DeSanctis et al., 2008).

The lack of efficiency in getting essential messages across among the members of teams, which can be observed during their meetings, affects not only the success of specific projects, but also the plausibility of the team's existence. Failing to create new ways of exploring a specific issue and analyze it as a group, the team is unlikely to succeed in distributing the roles and responsibilities among the members. As a result, the creation of an organized team and, thus, the development of a proper group support system, which will enhance the process of communication among the members, are essential.

It is important to use a consistent operational network within an organization (Kadushin, 2012), which improves the overall structure of an organization and establishes fixed norms, values, and standards of behavior (Vega-Redondo, 2013). There is potential for new methods of interaction, the Internet, emerging technologies, and social media-based group work (Hua & Wellman, 2010). These, alongside the exploding growth experienced in communication, lead to new and innovative ways of collaborating (Yao et al., 2010). Chapter 1 contains the problem, purpose, and method of the proposed qualitative research study. The aim is to explore the consequences of the integration of GSS on the impact of Defense Connect Online as a GSS communication tool.

Background of the Study

The demand for transforming organizations around the world is unrelenting, and U.S. companies are seeking breakthrough using modern technologies. Group support systems create

benefits for some organizations because they introduce significant improvements at different levels of management (Hoffman et al., 2011). Globalized settings have new decision-making models to adjust to virtual environments (Turban et al., 2011), yet the lack of consistency and cohesion in new approaches, particularly, the planning ones, may jeopardize organizations' success (Bakker et al., 2011). Seeing that cooperation among the members of the organization, as well as the efficient and timely transfer of essential information are imperative for carrying out the communication process properly, the significance of GSS for organizations in general and the teams within the latter in particular is crucial to the further development of business communication.

The integration of technology-supported systems into a collaboration model of an organization can facilitate the prediction of performance and productivity outcomes (Eschenbrenner et al., 2008). Collaborative use of technology closely relates to the theory of acceptance and closure theory, which identifies the degree of the interaction between social environment and technology (Brown et al., 2010). According to the notions of social enclosure, "the value of credentials has nothing to do with the productive capacities that have been incorporated, or the trainability indicated by such credentials" (Werfhorst, 2011, p. 524) but is the means through which individuals adjust toward social inclusion and exclusion.

The manner in which humans adjust to technological changes and use the changes positively matters in the professional development of individuals and the growth of companies (Werfhorst, 2011). The development of technologically advanced settings can allow organizational leaders to sustain a competitive advantage over other organizational leaders less concerned with innovation and change (Owens et al., 2011). The role of GSS in the creation of organizational ethics and values is also quite dubious (Estrada, 2011).

A webinar is a workshop form of communication transmitted through websites using videoconferencing software with an ability to produce, receive, and relay some discussed information (McFarlane, 2013), as the platform allows members to interact using different forms of communication techniques, including the use of direct chats, messaging services, voice calls, and direct video teleconferencing services.

Defense Connect Online is a communications platform powered by the Adobe Connect online information and communication platform that provides the U.S. Department of Defense extensive power to communicate. Defense Connect Online supports direct Web conferencing, active chat services, and virtual meetings regardless of the geographical positioning of individuals (Ackermann & Eden, 2011). The platform allows users from multiple locations to collaborate and interact through virtual networks and allows dispersed member groups to interact and participate in meetings.

Another important GSS communication platform is the Video Teleconferencing-Sysco Tandberg (McFarlane, 2013). The Video Teleconferencing-Sysco Tandberg is communication software that relays content-rich information from one person to another mainly through videoconferencing solutions, therefore, making it possible to record data acquired in the course of meetings. The system is a powerful information and communication platform that provides exclusive international videoconferencing solutions and tele-presence solutions in single-source solutions and through collaborative systems (“Cisco-TANDBERG video conferencing,” 2011). The communication tool can support small office rooms to large conference rooms with multiple users.

The GSS communication platforms are particularly important for the aspects such as leadership, team building, effective communication, generating new ideas, informed decision

making, employee engagement, and organizational learning (Huang et al., 2010). Most managers spend a considerable amount of time on meetings rather than the actual tasks and goals to achieve (Crowe et al., 2011). The ratio between real-time development and the discussion process is out of proportions in most organizations nowadays, which means that the significance of action must be emphasized (Bessiere et al., 2009).

Herein the significance of testing the GSS effects on the members of an organizational team lies; since the latter often experience issues with the retrieval, distribution and processing of information, which, in its turn, affects the process of assigning them with specific roles and responsibilities, an enhanced strategy for communicating efficiently needs to be introduced into the realm of team communication.

The Defense Health Agency (DHA) is a U.S. corporation concerned with managing military health care. As part of their reform agendas, leaders of the Military Health System have been increasingly advocating for the integration and use of GSS communication platforms as tools to enhance effective decision making in group meetings. The DHA serves in a heavily structured system where communication is necessary in decision making.

In the course of the study, interviews have been administered to several members of the DHHQ agency. As the interview results displayed in the sample in Appendix E display, the introduction of both personal interviews and the GSS technique affects the process of conflict solution and decision-making in the course of a meeting among the team members in a very positive manner. Not only does the specified approach eliminate the bias that may possibly emerge in the course of communication among the team members, but also allows approaching the conflict under analysis in a constructive manner by identifying the reasonable compromise to make. Prior to carrying out the study, though, one must draw the line between DHA and DHHQ.

While DHA is used to refer to the health agency in general, the DHHQ is utilized to refer to the Defense Health Agency Headquarters. The interviews can be viewed as the second data source, whereas the literature review can be viewed as the third data source.

The broad information system framework of the DHA has been integral in supporting managers and professionals within the Military Health System in making sure that new solutions to health care problems are easily formable. The DHA has a Working Information Systems to Determine Optimal Management (WISDOM) training program for promoting the use of GSS communication platforms such as Defense Connect Online-that helps formulate operational solutions, corporate strategies, and management decisions. For approximately 5 years, the DHA has been using the Defense Connect Online GSS platform.

Problem Statement

Communication allows knowledge sharing in modern organizations, where critical decisions seem to require combined efforts. Most meetings held by organized teams in the DHA setting are not efficient in terms of time and task orientation due to the poor use of the opportunities for efficient interpersonal communication. The premise of traditional meetings, conferences, and projects was face-to-face communication and constant interaction between group members and the presence of all participants facilitates the generation of ideas and develops a powerful framework for further discussion (Andres, 2002). The introduction of technology expands the opportunities for alternative measures in exchanging ideas in case face-to-face meetings are impossible (Richey et al., 2012); herein the importance of the study lies. Therefore, the general problem is that the communication processes between the members of modern organizations are often hampered and, thus, lead to the inefficiency of the decisions

made in the course of communication. In order to attain the specified goals, one will have to employ a combination of a qualitative and a quantitative research.

The population chosen for the study includes HR managers and the DHHQ staff. The key variables, therefore, include the efficacy of the communication process (i.e., the completion of the organizational goals), which is the key dependent variable, and the independent ones, the use of GSS being the key one. The variables will be measured based on the results of the staff performance assessment.

The specific problem is that most meetings held by organized teams in the US business setting lack efficiency in terms of time and task orientation due to the poor use of the opportunities, which the GSS communication tools provide. Within the context of human resource management, meetings tend to take place more regularly, which consumes time and money (Richey et al., 2012). Disagreements, conflicts of interest, divided attention, and squabbles often protract during physical or face-to-face meetings, consequently leading to losing time and cohesion among members. Ineffective teamwork and communication in such cases lead to further wasting the company's time and effort. DeSanctis et al. (2008) noted GSS might not maximize the IT domain of modern innovation organizations such as the DHA.

Literature on modern information systems has shown that, despite common knowledge regarding the efficacy of modern information systems in communication, especially the GSS communication tools, there is an obvious lack of information about its accrual efficiency significance. Hence, the proposed study will involve exploring the wide possibilities of the Defense Connect Online GSS platform, particularly, its optimizing efficiency in organizational meetings, as well as the constraints in its implementation. The study will also involve

investigating GSS's advantages and disadvantages at various directorate levels of the Defense Health Headquarters (DHHQ) in Falls Church, Virginia.

Purpose of the Study

1. An analysis of the communication processes within the context of contemporary organizations has shown that the current approaches lack consistency due to the rapid transfer into the global market. Consequently, the necessity to realign the present-day strategies so that they could comply with the new demands and address new issues is required. A closer look at the goals of modern organizations in the global market displays in a very graphic way that the principles of shared communication must be promoted among the company staff along with the idea of using modern media and information technology. Particularly, the integration of GSS communication, which prevents major misunderstandings from occurring in the process of information transfer in Defense Connect Online, should take the center stage of the present-day organization changes discussion. The impact, which the GSS has on the specified organization in general and the performance of the company on a range of levels in DHHQ, Fall Church, Virginia, must be viewed as the focus of the research. Particularly, the following issues should be interpreted as the basic research purposes:

1. Analysis of the difference in the performance of the group that utilizes a GSS approach and the one that resorts to a different information management and transfer method;
2. The assessment of the GSS approach will lead to the discovery of its effects in reduction of the negative aftermath of the staff meetings and the further enhancement of the employees' performance, therefore, reducing the number of possible conflicts to zero;

3. The integration of the GSS into the operations of the DHHQ organization will help enhance the performance of the DHHQ staff by facilitating a smoother and less contrived information transfer.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in the reevaluation of approaches to holding a meeting, including devices and media platforms for information transmission, the structure of group projects, and the sequence of settled tasks. Group support systems usually develop improved cohesiveness within the organizational group. They also help to create ideas and agendas that are consistent with normal organizational traditions through the decision-making process. Creating an understanding of the efficiency associated with the use of GSS communication systems such as the Defense Connect Online GSS platform that the study results will help create and understanding of the organization's internal processes, which, in its turn, will enable managers to make informed decisions regarding the need to adopt and implement these information systems.

Apart from concentrating on the accrued significance of integrating the Defense Connect Online GSS platform as an efficient communication tool, there is a need to understand the implication of these information systems. Accessibility of GSS might minimize employees' engagement and willingness to participate in online meetings because virtual collaboration can lead to a significant reduction in awareness of the importance of the event (Bose, 2003). The success of virtual collaboration depends on employees' self-control and adherence to ethical principles. It is purposeful to define the major challenges of technology integration, as well as outline how to redevelop leadership, employees' engagement, team building, and organizational learning to meet the requirements of the GSS settings.

As noted by Webne-Behrman (1998), the term *group process* refers to the procedures implemented by members of an organization, who work closely, to come up with viable solutions to common organizational problems. Kim (2006) noted that group processes enable leaders to develop interventional measures that they can apply to change the less desirable attributes showcased by different members of an organization. Organization theory views leadership as the process of directing a group of people, who work together to accomplish set goals and objectives (Cusella, 1984). According to this description, groups play a pivotal role in gearing any organization toward success. Research will set out to further the management processes by promoting a deeper understanding of this theory and the applicability of GSS in an organizational setting.

The concept of GSS is relatively new. Group support systems are a promising vehicle for managing teams more effectively (Wilson et al., 2010). Studying GSS as a way to aid group decision making in organizations is important to organizational researchers for practical and scientific reasons (DeSanctis & Gallupe, 1987; Huber et al., 1993; Wilson et al., 2010). Elfvengreen (2009) noted GSS provide an avenue through which to hold meetings without necessarily wasting valuable time and employees' productivity. A gap exists between the significance of GSS and their applicability in resolving productivity issues that stem from ineffective meetings (Kilgour, 2010).

Much of the published GSS research does not contain the configuration specifics of GSS, such as the exact instructions given to the group; the guidelines, constraints, and rules they worked by; and the step-by-step mechanics of how they proceeded with the work (Briggs et al., 2003; DeSanctis et al., 2008; Santanen, 2005). There is a significant amount of documented literature ~~exists~~ regarding teamwork and group dynamics, yet little information on the effects of

GSS in improving meetings and group efficiency. The proposed study will involve exploring GSS and group dynamics first. The next step will presuppose the analysis of the structure of the GSS and discussing its framework in an organizational context. The study will also - include exploring a GSS's usefulness and the significance of a GSS to an organization by emphasizing its advantages and limitations.

The main focus of this study will be on the role of leaders facilitating meetings and group activities through the integration of GSS in an organizational context.; Specifically, the areas, where this research might help leaders in organizational settings to understand (a) the objective of GSS, (b) how to design meetings to support organizational strategic objectives, (c) how to increase meetings' effectiveness through GSS, and (d) the dynamics of comprehensive GSS and how they promote teamwork, commitment, and motivation among employees, will be studied. Understanding GSS-based communication might serve as a means to improve strategies within business organizations for growth and development. Since GSS trends show growth (Boughzala et al., 2012), it is necessary to understand how to apply this tool effectively. The results of the proposed research could be an indicator of GSS efficacy in business organizations. The responses to the research questions could also serve as a means of understanding the efficiency of GSS in organizations.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study is qualitative; therefore, the study will include a qualitative research approach;. Qualitative research is mainly exploratory in nature. Researchers conduct qualitative research studies to generate data that produce rich, comprehensive illustrations concerning why individuals behave in a specific manner and the way, in which these individuals feel about their behaviors and their environment (Dean, 2013). Seeing that the focus of this study

will be understanding the performance of individuals in relation to their exposure to GSS-based communication tools, it will be important to investigate the individual perceptions and acceptance of the GSS as a tool for communication. Qualitative data might help the researcher gain a better understanding of the individuals' acceptance of this system of communication. Although a quantitative research approach might also provide analyzable results, it will be difficult to use quantitative research methods to gain a detailed picture of the individuals' perspectives.

The researcher will confine the research to a qualitative case study approach, where findings of the entire study will reflect the perceptions and perspectives of various scholars and also those of managers and workers of DHA on the use of GSS communication tools. Case studies are the forms of qualitative research, in which researchers investigate a research problem while concentrating on a particular situation, phenomenon, or person. Case studies as research methods are normally useful when researchers investigate a research phenomenon with a large variety of inherent inquiry factors and relationships, or when no basic laws are present to determine important factors for the research to include. Furthermore, case studies can be either qualitative or quantitative (Yin, 2009). A case study reference is made when the specified case study seems to bear a connection with the research question. An appropriate review of a case study means the use of literature that is deemed trustworthy and has been published recently (Hamel, 1993).

The GSS communication tool under investigation is Defense Connect Online, which does not have predetermined factors and relationships of performance that need specific consideration in research or require an analysis type other than the qualitative one (Yao et al., 2010). A GSS is a versatile tool that organizational leaders can modify and use in undertaking various measures

that require effective communication among organizational members. Case studies are usually specific and have often been important in research, as scholars, who use them are capable of systematically developing comprehensive study models deemed important in describing the patterns of behavior of a research subject. The proposed research will, therefore, be a qualitative case study of the DHA concerning the impact of Defense Connect Online as a GSS communication tool.

The case study approach will involve using the social constructivist paradigm that forms the basis for forming data collection instruments, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting it. Social constructivist paradigms involve investigating the formation of jointly constructed meanings concerning an environment, a research phenomenon, a person, or a research subject. The qualitative case study approach will be useful seeing that it presupposes an analysis of social interactions, whereas an assumption of the social constructivism theory is that humans normally rationalize their worldly experiences by developing a social world model and exploring the way things behave within the social construct.

An exploratory case study approach focusing on the DHA, formerly known as Tricare Management Activity, with headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia, will involve obtaining qualitative and analyzable data. The DHA is a federal defense agency serving the medical needs of commissioned and noncommissioned U.S. military personnel on active duty and reservists, as well as for retired professionals in the United States and worldwide. This organization will be suitable for the exploratory study due to the researcher's proximity and the inclusion of GSS in the communication model used by the organization's staff.

The GSS platform selected in this case study is the group decision room (GDR). This platform creates an environment for meeting with electronic support to enable the constituent

groups or individuals to come up with solutions in a collaborative manner. The research will include questionnaires as a source of collecting primary information from the participants. Open-ended and semi-structured questionnaires are appropriate in the collection of qualitative data among participants because semi-structured questionnaires are not restrictive by definition. Primary information will come from the leaders and employees of the organization. Their respective views regarding the importance of GSS in their interactions with colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors will serve as the basic qualitative data for the analysis. The study will involve exploring GSS as well as group dynamics within an organizational context. The importance and usefulness of the GSS to the organization will be a point of focus of the study, in the course of which the limitations and the strengths of the system are going to be explored. The basis for examining the generated qualitative data will be content analysis of the participants' responses to the different open-ended questions included in the research study. The researcher will then draw conclusions based on the outcome of the qualitative data analysis.

To summarize, the research design is a qualitative case study approach that will involve open-ended questionnaires in data collection and content data analysis as the approach of analyzing the collected qualitative data. The data will be retrieved from the responses of leaders and employees of DHHQ to an open-ended questionnaire, which is the data collection instrument that is used traditionally in the qualitative data acquisition process. According to Dean (2013), the qualitative method of data collection does not restrict participants' answers to definite parameters or variables. The freedom that qualitative data bestow is important in analyzing the subtle aspects of a given phenomenon, such as the significance of GSS in organizations. The questionnaire will probe the participants' perceptions of Defense Connect Online as a common GSS-based communication platform applied in their organization. The outcome of the

questionnaire analysis will inform the researcher's conclusion of how organizational leaders use GSS to improve communication. In addition to the questionnaires, the next data source would be individual interviews. Finally, secondary data analysis to be carried out will include literary works (pertaining to GSS and specific to DHA) of renowned scholars.

Research Questions

1. Does the incorporation of the GSS information management tools allow for a better information transfer process among the members of the DHHQ organization and prevent possible misunderstandings from occurring, and, if it does, in what way?
2. May the implementation of the GSS strategy into the operations of the DHHQ contribute to the reduction in the average number of conflicts occurring between the staff and the managers, as well as among the employees, in the course of meetings and problems discussion?
3. How can the GSS approach be used as a weapon for addressing the negative effects of the meetings and enhancing the productivity of the staff by motivating the latter for personal and professional responsibility and proper use of information?
4. How making the goals of the GSS implementation into the DHHQ operations and, therefore, its further promotion among the staff may be turned into an opportunity for the boosting organizational performance by raising awareness regarding information management among the staff?

Research Design

The exploratory case study will include individual interviews when collecting data from the organization's leaders and questionnaires when collecting data from the employees. The exploratory approach allows researchers to analyze various themes and define their patterns in

relation to the subject and hypotheses under study (Maxwell, 2012). As it has been mentioned above, the study will take the form of a qualitative case study, where the changes in the DHA will be the focus of the research. Dean (2013) contended the qualitative study approach of a case study to be a delicate research design that requires accurate definitions of variables and parameters to avert the occurrence of biases. The proposed study will involve collecting qualitative data and conducting thematic analysis with the help of the advanced software, NVivo.

Individual Interviews

The individual interviews with the leaders (directors, supervisors, etc.) will concern their use of GSS to arrive at organizational decisions. Individual interviews allow the participants to come up with innovative ideas that can be incorporated within the organization. Focus groups are more effective in cases where there is a cross-cultural environment. People, who otherwise get very little opportunity to talk, can express their views freely during individual interviews. One of the best benefits of focus group is that as and when there arises any issue, employees' perspective can be known. On the other hand, face-to-face group discussions where participants voiced individual opinions and arrived at a collective conclusion are often inaccurate when compared to the opinions of individuals when averaged without discussion. Dominant individuals can control the conversation in face-to-face proceedings, and in that way the outcomes. The one who speaks out often will often prevail over the group, even though that individual may not be the most knowledgeable. The individual interviews will encompass the following questions:

1. What is the effect of individual interviews on the staff's performance and overall output?
2. How is a decision reached during an individual interview?

3. How do GSS meetings overcome the spatial and temporal dimensions?
4. How do GSS meetings contribute to group dynamics, commitment, motivation, and trust?

Questionnaires

The employees will receive questionnaires via e-mail that will contain questions on their views and insights of GSS use. The questionnaires will incorporate the following questions:

1. What skills and abilities should employees of DHHQ in Falls Church, Virginia possess in order to adjust to the new e-collaboration tools proposed by the GSS environment?
2. What are the main challenges for employees of DHHQ in adjusting to a computer-based environment?
3. How can dimensions such as leadership, employee engagement, organizational learning, and team building benefit from the introduction of GSS at DHHQ?

Literature that covers all elements related to GSS serves as the third data source required for the case study.

Conceptual Framework

According to organizational theory, a company is a group of individuals connected by specific objectives, missions, and goals (Cusella, 1984). Researchers can also apply this theory to understand the aspects of efficient decision-making and problem-solving processes (Xia & Xu, 2011). The framework also relates to the execution of the organization's tasks, thereby improving the satisfaction of all stakeholders and enhancing productivity. This framework is the study of the organizational processes (Cusella, 1984), which is an important juncture because it provides the point, at which the GDR platform representing GSS factors in. The reason for GDR

to be an important and related tool is that it brings an organization's processes and productive tools together, as outlined by Cusella (1984). Generally, this form of GSS supports the diverse steps involved in solving problems and making decisions, which include brainstorming ideas, structuring ideas, creating consensus, and structuring ideas (Rasheed, 2012). In the specific context of meetings, GSS supports building strategies, managing crises, planning, assessing risks, and evaluating projects. When the aforementioned elements are combined, the complexity of addressing the limitations experienced at the meeting is likely to be less.

To enhance the understanding of how technology can promote organizational welfare, one must bring a special attention to the unified theory of acceptance (Brown et al., 2010). According to the theory in question, management confines the role of GSS to the integration of technology acceptance and group collaboration. As soon as individuals adjust to a new environment, they will be able to understand what steps might help to transfer from a traditional communication model to that one in a virtually based environment. Readiness to change and accept novelties, therefore, is a priority. Appropriate tools and training programs are important for enhancing employees' motivation (Pittinsky, 2009).

Acceptance theories are pertinent to consider for understanding of the stages that employees should undergo to make a successful transition from traditional to a modern way of communication and collaboration. Along with organizational theories, the acceptance theory can allow managers to understand how to fill technological gaps, as well as what potential benefits they can receive from this adoption. The theory of organization, in its turn, defines an organization as a group of people working together in a bid to accomplish certain set objectives and goals (Cusella, 1984). At the same time, one must bear in mind that the personal goals of the employees are the key motivation force to spur their accomplishments according to the Cognitive

Evaluation Theory (Matosic et al., 2014) and Equity Theory (Cappellen et al., 2014). With this description in mind, one may possibly argue that individual interviews are vital for an organization's success. The proposed research might be instrumental in understanding the organizational theory and the applicability of GSS within an organizational setting.

Different scholars have repeatedly researched the implementation of GSS for decision making. The results of this research might contribute to the theoretical field, especially with regard to the inclusion of technology for group decision making. The focus of this study will be on identifying how GSS assist workers and leaders to make decisions based on the perspective of an entire group. The workers and leaders make decisions quickly by consulting numerous research materials. The literature review contains an overview of historical literature based on GSS in relation to the theoretical framework of communication-based decision making.

Definitions

Group support systems (GSS): Group support systems are the support group processes that include brainstorming, voting, and group writing (Yao et al., 2010). Group support systems are information systems that serve to make group meetings more productive and enhance the communication, deliberations, and decision making of groups through electronic support for a variety of meeting activities (Vreede & Muller, 1997). Group support systems such as group decision support systems (GDSS) have significant benefits because they reduce losses. In addition, being interactive tools of IT, they shore up the concerted efforts that are central in the completion of joint tasks (Dennis et al., 1988). Owing to technological evolution, GDSS became GSS during the early 1990s. The evolution happened because collaborative computing expanded beyond the sphere of decision making (Humphreys & Jones, 2006). Through GSS, individuals are able to create innovative concepts, understand and categorize them, as well as assess them

with the help of diverse voting methods. Groups can apply GSS to engage in project assessments, methodological planning, development and evaluation of work flows, group development, and crisis management.

Group decision room (GDR): The GDR consists of support processes and tools that create a virtual meeting room. The idea of the GDR is to bring together the thinking processes of all involved members at the meeting, thus, creating a participative approach aimed at solving complex tasks. This platform works by interplaying between software and hardware in which every participant at a meeting owns a workstation. The main feature of GDR is anonymity, which means that all the participants at the meeting can contribute anonymously. Again, there is a parallel systems of work in which GDR offers contributions in clusters, which means the system can store or collect information under different or similar packages. Finally, the parallel system captures the minutes automatically (Power, 2007).

Assumptions

It is expected that the research results will point at the significance of the GSS approach application. There is no secret that information management is one of the essential elements in the organization's functioning. Hence, the GSS approach will supposedly help redesign the company's information management approach, which, in its turn, is bound to lead to a major boost in the data sharing process and, therefore, the overall performance of the company.

More to the point, the fact that the GSS strategy may help address the conflict issue that occurs after regular meetings is doubtless. At present, a major tension can be observed within the environment in question due to the lack of knowledge of what proper leadership should be and what emotional responses it must trigger in the staff. Herein the necessity to teach the staff handle their negative impressions left after the meeting lies. It is expected that the GSS approach

will allow the staff to give vent to their feelings, therefore, limiting the amount of possible conflicts to zero and enhancing positive attitudes among the staff members, therefore, galvanizing them for delivering more fruitful results.

As it has been stressed above, the company is obviously facing a range of leadership issues, which the lack of staff's motivation is a clear signal of. Hence, the significance of GSS as the tool for improving the leadership strategy rises along with the expectations that the adoption of GSS in the DHHQ organization will allow for designing a better leadership approach. It is also expected that the GSS method as a tool will point at the necessity to incorporate the transformative leadership style and the laissez-faire one. As a result, the rise of personal and professional responsibility along with the increase in the performance of the staff members is presumably going to occur.

It should be noted, though, that the study outcomes may not align with the expected outcomes. Particularly, the influence of the outside factors, as well as the possibility of the null hypothesis proving true should be mentioned.

Scope of the Study

The proposed study will involve exploring the consequences of integrating GSS as a Defense Connect Online tool in various directorate levels of the DHA in Falls Church, Virginia. The study might also provide a better understanding of how a new collaboration setting defined in GDRs can contribute to the productivity and performance of an organizational team. The study will involve evaluating whether the application of GSS can compensate for the challenges of virtual communication. The study will also involve the reassessment of the related concepts such as leadership, organizational learning, and employee engagement to suit new dimensions of success for motivating and increasing job satisfaction among the employees.

The population of the study will include 20 employees of the DHA, formerly known as Tricare Management Activity, with headquarters located in Falls Church, Virginia. The DHA serves more than 9 million active and retired military persons and their family members across the United States and abroad (“Evaluation of the Tricare Program,” 2012). The agency’s office at DHHQ, Falls Church, Virginia, has over 3,000 employees, including active-duty military members, civilians, and contractors. Based on the target population for the current study, a purposive sampling is appropriate, which will involve identifying and selecting qualified participants, who meet certain criteria for the study (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). In order to shortlist the participants, Seidman’s first phase of the three phase qualitative interview was considered. According to this particular phase, interviewees are asked to divulge as much detail as possible about the participants’ past education, experience, training, etc. The interviewees are also asked whether they have any previous experience about the kind of job that they are supposed to do (Fox, 2009). The study will include the confirmed identities of study participants employed in the DHA as a military member, civilian, or contractor.

Upon receipt of the Institutional Research Board’s approval from University of Phoenix, the selected participants will need to meet the following criteria: (a) being over the age of 18, (b) working at DHHQ as a leader or worker, and (c) active participation experience in GSS at the agency. Participants that can articulate ideas should be able to offer a range of opinions on the issues (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). Upon receiving approval, the researcher will schedule the individual interviews at a time that the participants will consider the most convenient and will e-mail the questionnaire to the human resource department for dissemination to the employees. Sampling strategies in qualitative research are numerous (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Polkinghorne (2005) noted a sample size of one to 20 participants for qualitative research is appropriate. For

this study, the sample size will consist of 20 employees at the DHA. Sample participants will represent various disciplines.

Limitations

There is a possibility of an association between group challenges and leadership approaches, which might influence the outcome of GSS meetings. Leaders will always want that the outcome of such meetings should be in their favor. As such, they might adopt various measures to influence the participants. Considering the diverse nature of employees, it becomes imperative for leaders to adopt separate persuading techniques for employees from different parts of the world.

Collecting primary qualitative data from respondents representing government organizations presupposes dealing with a limitation because the specified process is normally a challenge given the amount of the bureaucracy in most of state structures. It is often a major issue for researchers to receive accurate response given the prevailing fear of revealing important data concerning the performance of the government organization. Leaders manipulating subordinates to offer positive responses to questions in studies might invalidate the data or make the data offered by the respondents unreliable. It should be born in mind, therefore, that specific strategies, which will allow for mitigating the effects of leaders' influence on their staff, will need to be adopted. Thus, the credibility of the study will be retained.

In addition to the limitations specified above, the generalizability of the study deserves to be mentioned. Seeing that the scope of the research is limited, it cannot possibly embrace every single workplace scenario and, thus, needs to be generalized substantially.

As the integration of technological systems is a relatively new phenomenon, an estimation of its successful adaptation to the present environment can be ambiguous. The study

of only one organization does not provide a full picture of all challenges. The researcher will delimit the information gathered from the respondents of the individual interviews and the questionnaires to their views, meaning that participants might favorably present the views of their own unit or their personal convictions about the GSS. Individual respondents normally produce self-reported data that are often difficult to verify independently, and the researcher will not generalize the conclusion that may be applicable to the entire population of organizations that adopted GSS.

Qualitative data include primary data self-reported from respondents. Maxwell (2012) noted that a personal bias has a significant influence on the collection of self-reported data, and thus, researchers should take appropriate precautions. Though technology may be used as a scaffolding tool for maintaining order within an organization in cases of personal issues, such problems as selective memory issues are to be incorporated into the study as one of the key factors affecting the expected outcomes. Selective memory bias results from the inability of respondents to remember past experiences exactly. Telescoping memory problems occur when respondents confuse events that occurred at different points of time in the past. Exaggeration problems occur when participants overstate the significance of certain events.

The sampling process is subjective to researchers, and sampling biases are an obvious limitation because they may reduce the validity of the findings. Purposive sampling is prone to selection bias because researchers determine the exclusion and inclusion criteria, which is subjective (Suri, 2011). In this view, extrapolating the findings requires consideration of selection bias or sampling bias.

Delimitations

Despite the contingencies and limitations, the proposed research will involve a systematic evaluation of existing studies dedicated to the analysis of various skills, experiences, and models that are necessary for enhancing the efficiency and reliability of collaboration, organizational learning, and employees' participation (Smith & McKeen, 2011). Yin (2009) argued that case studies, such as single experiments, provide empirical evidence for the reader to derive "analytic generalization" (Yin, 2009, p. 38) from comparing study results within a theoretical framework and not to larger populations. In this respect, specific emphasis should be on the role of information technologies in sustaining and developing new collaboration models.

Summary

This chapter contained an overview of GSS and the ways they may affect the effectiveness of an organization. The chapter also contained the research problem and the methodology for this qualitative research. The significance of the study is to explore and interpret study findings may contribute to the body of knowledge on leadership, interpersonal skills, and the effects on productivity in the workplace. The chapter contained discussions on research method, design appropriateness, appropriateness of a case study to this research study, and the procedures for data collection. Also included in the chapter were a discussion on instrumentation, which consisted of the interview questions for the interviews and the validity and reliability of the questions. The study will involve collecting data through open-ended questions and analyzing them using NVivo software. The researcher will upload transcriptions of the audiotape into NVivo, which is a qualitative software query tool ("Powerful research, simplified," 2012). Using NVivo is helpful in formulating categories to identify themes and explore emerging themes from the narrative text.

Chapter 2 will contain a discussion and a thorough review of the literature on GSS and organizational efficiency. The focus of Chapter 3 will be the methodology selected for the study, including the process of analyzing data. The fourth chapter will include the findings of the study derived from the individual interviews and questionnaires. Also, the chapter will include the results of the research study in the form of common sentences and paragraphs of content analysis results.

The fifth chapter will contain the conclusions and recommendations of the study. These recommendations will emerge from a careful application of the methodological approach described in the third chapter of this research. The objective of the research study led to choosing the qualitative method over the quantitative method. The data for this study will not come from responses to closed-ended questions characteristic of quantitative studies. The sample size for the proposed study will consist of 20 employees of the DHA.

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Appendix A: Interview Transcript

Note: the interview was transcribed by the researcher's assistant.

1. What is the effect of individual interviews on the staff's performance and overall output?

Traditionally, additional motivation tools are required for enhancing the staff performance. People need to realize that their work is recognized in order to increase their input and improve their performance. Therefore, our organization uses interviews as the means to retrieve information concerning the staff satisfaction rates and identify the problems that the staff members encounter in the course of their daily routine.

2. How is a decision reached during an individual interview?

Seeing that interviews often predispose addressing problem issues, such as the conflicts that staff members are prone to having in the workplace, the decision is being reached with the help of applications of efficient conflict solving strategies, as well as different negotiation tools. Particularly, the power of compromising needs to be mentioned as the key to reaching decisions in the course of an individual interview.

3. How do GSS meetings overcome the spatial and temporal dimensions?

Unfortunately, even personal interviews may trigger the outcomes that leave much to be desired in terms of their efficacy and the percentage of useful information retrieved. At this point, GSS meetings deserve to be mentioned. I must admit it has been quite recently that our company [*name of the company taken out of the interview*] resorted to the GSS approach; much to my amazement, the introduction of the specified method allowed for enhancing the overall performance of the employees.

4. How do GSS meetings contribute to group dynamics, commitment, motivation, and trust?

It seems that the GSS approach helps the staff discuss the issues that they indicate in personal interviews as causing conflicts in an open and direct manner. As a result, the premises for conflicts or misunderstandings are removed from the framework of the company's operations in their entirety.

