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As Time Goes By: How Do Groups Change?

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PANEL 12

AS TIME GOES BY: HOW *DO* GROUPS CHANGE?

Panel Chair: Laku Chidambaram, University of Hawaii

Panelists: Robert P. Bostrom, University of Georgia
Gerardine DeSanctis, Duke University
Douglas Vogel, University of Arizona

Groups, like individuals, change over time; patterns of change — referred to as group development models — have been an important area of study for the past five decades. Numerous models of group development have been proposed; however, no consensus exists on what, if any, model of change groups follow. Two competing paradigms — the unitary and the structural — seek to explain group development. Unitary models of group development suggest that all groups go through a certain series of pre-defined stages. Much of the early work in this area subscribed to this view. In the last decade however, researchers have cast doubts on such unitary models of group development. Structural models that recognize the uniqueness of each group — and consequently reject the idea of a single, pre-determined series of stages — have become increasingly popular.

Which paradigm is the “right” one? In other words, *is there a single model of group development that best explains how groups change over time?* The panelists, reflecting the diversity of opinion in the area, will debate this issue and address the contentious question of *why* groups change over time. Reasons suggested by structural models focus on the interactions between structures external and internal to the group, including the growing awareness of impending deadlines, increasing familiarity with group processes, and reciprocal interactions between sociotechnical structures and members’ use and re-use of them. Unitary or sequential models, on the other hand, suggest that group development is caused by the natural progression of time; in other words, time alone causes changes in groups. The panelists, based on their paradigmatic beliefs, will provide differing viewpoints on *what* triggers changes in group behavior and performance over time.

This discussion is expected to provoke issues of concern to group support systems (GSS) researchers including problems in extrapolating the results from the one-time performance of ad hoc groups using groupware in a laboratory to those of ongoing teams in organizations; awareness of how group support technologies can be used to develop groups quickly into high performing teams; and understanding the role of facilitation and training in the use of group support technologies. Whichever model of development one chooses to accept, researchers must recognize that one shot studies of groups cannot compare to the longitudinal examinations of ongoing teams. GSS studies that explicitly incorporate the time dimension into their research design can provide valuable insights to the nature and causes of change in groups.

As corporate hierarchies give way to networked teams, organizations are increasingly relying on information technology to empower these teams. Without an understanding of how ongoing teams function, the IS community cannot effectively support these teams or study their long-term performance and behavior. This panel will provide various perspectives on how and why groups change over time.

PANEL 13

MANAGING IT PROJECTS FOR SUCCESS: REENGINEERING OR BETTER PROJECT MANAGEMENT?

Panel Chair: Mark Keil, Georgia State University

Panelists: Gopal K. Kapur, Center for Project Management
M. Lynne Markus, Claremont Graduate School
James A. Willbern, The Willbern Group

IT projects can fail for any number of reasons and in some cases can result in considerable financial losses for the organizations that undertake them. The strategic importance that IT now plays coupled with the burgeoning costs of developing information systems has raised the stakes associated with project failure. While it is difficult to obtain statistics on the actual frequency of information systems failures, various sources suggest that at least half of all IS projects are not as successful as one would like them to be (Gladden 1982; Lyytinen and Hirschheim 1987). Numerous articles in the popular press seem to provide anecdotal evidence of this (Betts 1992; Kindel 1992; McPartlin 1992; Mehler 1991; Rothfeder 1988). The relatively high prevalence of failures in this field suggests the need to reexamine the way in which projects are managed.

Traditional wisdom holds that many IT failures result from poor project planning and control. Explanations that have been offered include inadequate cost estimation models (Brooks 1975; Kemerer 1987) and failure to manage the risks associated with IS projects (Alter 1980; Ginzberg 1981; McFarlan 1981). More recently, some researchers have suggested the need to look beyond the traditional explanations in explaining the problem and in formulating alternative solutions (Abdel-Hamid and Madnick 1989; Keil and Mixon 1994; Markus and Keil 1994).

This panel will explore a wide range of opinions concerning the underlying causes of what is often labeled "poor project management." The objective will be to raise these issues in a public forum and to discuss the type of research agenda that is needed to produce new knowledge that would be beneficial to both researchers and practitioners. Members of the panel will address the following questions:

- Is the failure problem a serious one? What role does project management really play (is it a symptom or a cause of failure)?
- Are IT projects more difficult to manage than other types of projects? If so, why?
- Are better project management tools the answer or do we need to radically reengineer the development process itself?
- Is the current research on software project management useful to practitioners? If not, what kind of research is needed in this area?

Panel Discussion Format

The panel chair will begin the session with a short introduction laying out the key issues relating to IT failure and the traditional case that has been made for better project management. This introduction will set the stage and serve as motivation for the panel discussion. Each panelist will then be given ten minutes to present a position. After each panelist has presented, the other panelists will be given a brief opportunity to respond if they wish. After all panelists have presented, the audience will be invited to ask questions and to join in the discussion.