

Communication Technology & Work-Life in Contemporary Organizations

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, communication technology has emerged as an integral part of an organization's culture. Technology and various communication devices have integrated the organizational activities in a more refined and complex manner as well. The rapid technological innovations and the emergence of the IT sector have transformed many countries into high-tech economies globally. Innovative entrepreneurs and business organizations are emerging from these technological advancements. Its effect can be seen in contemporary organizations, in terms of employee behavior, work-culture, more flexible work schedules, telecommuting, multigenerational workforce covering baby boomers to millennials. Organizations and employees are not left with any choice but to embrace it. The paper highlights the simultaneous effect of the embracement of communication technology on the personal and professional lives of the employees, work culture, and how organizations are adapting to the change.

Keywords: *Communication technology, autonomy, work-life integration, work-culture.*

Introduction

In the age of technology, no organization can claim to be the same as it was five or ten years ago. To remain stable in the dynamic business environment is one thing, but an organization can-not remain stagnant. The organizations have to adapt according to the demands of the changing environment in which it operates. One of the ever-changing environments is the technological environment. For the past, many years technology is playing a vital role in the operations of any organization, i.e. administrative, management, remaining in touch with the various stakeholders, corporate culture, etc. The pace at which people are getting information through technology is very fast. To survive organizations have to keep up with this rapid change.

The paper focuses on communication technology used in doing the official work by the employees in modern organizations, i.e. laptops, PCs, personal or company's mobile phones, etc. With the increase of workforce diversity and millennials in the organization, there is a drastic change in way of doing work and the organization's culture. Small, medium, or large whatever be the size of an organization, technological advancement has affected the business process and integrated the personal and professional lives of employees.

Objectives and Research Methodology

The objective of the paper is to understand and highlight how the use of communication technologies are affecting employees of modern organizations, in terms of autonomy in doing the work, work-culture, balance of work and life, and what are the organization and employees perspective. The study is descriptive and for the fulfillment of its objective, secondary sources, i.e. literature available on google scholar, various journals, books, and data available on the relevant websites are used.

Literature Review

For the past few year technologies and its effect on work and life, well-being, job satisfaction, productivity was thoroughly researched by the various researchers. As technology is here to stay and it is affecting every aspect of an individual's life. Technology has changed the old concept of work-life balance. According to Greenhaus and others Work-life balance (WLB) is equal engagement and satisfaction in work and family roles (2003). With the change and increase in the knowledge economy, the traditional concept of WLB is also changing. It is no longer restricted to family life only. An individual has various roles to play in his/her life, in the personal and professional capacity. The usage of mobile technologies has integrated both domains either in a complementary or competitive way (Pauleen et al., 2015). Information and communication (ICT) use enhance work flexibility, enabling academics to continue working even after regular working hours (Kotecha et al. 2014). According to knowledge professionals usage of mobile and email etc. ensured greater flexibility, speed & control in doing work, but, intensified work expectations of the employers and reduced the ability of employees to disconnect from work (Mazmanian et al., 2013). Due to the blurring of boundaries between work and life, employees with high integration of work and life reported being more exhausted and having less balanced work-life (Wepfer et al. 2018).

Organizational culture can affect individuals' preference for integration or segmentation of work and life. If an organization's culture promotes the integration of work, then it becomes difficult for the employees to detach and recover from work in non-work hours (Foucreault et al., 2018). ICT's give speed, accuracy, efficiency and often force employees to do extra work in less time, which also results in a change in work-related behavior and leads to stress and burn-out (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). When smartphones are considered intrusion in life, it leads to a less balanced work-life, which is influenced by the organizational culture (Harris, 2014). Some welcome this intrusion as it gives them some sense of autonomy in doing the work. Technology use determines and shapes an individual's perception of flexibility and permeability in WLB (Nam T., 2014). Usage of technology and technology-assisted devices for doing the office related work in non-working hours, create an illusion of doing work at your own pace. Knowledge professionals, i.e.IT professionals, teachers, medical professionals, software engineers, etc., find it difficult to separate their work and non-work activities. Technology has promoted a virtual environment that combines work and personal life, which are seen as separate activities in the physical environment (Chamakiotis et. al., 2014). According to Gazibaric technology is a double-edged sword, it ensures productivity at work, and it also extends work to home (2015).

Increase in Usage of technology-Reasons

Technological innovations are taking place rapidly. Organizations are trying to catch up with the technological changes, by adapting and including them in their business operations, in a more integrated and refined manner. There are certain reasons behind this change:

- In a globalized world, technological innovations are reducing the communication gap. Customer services and feedback are taken by the organizations via online mode, i.e. emails, online surveys, e-newsletters. Financial institutions and banks are providing internet banking services, transfer of funds, making online payments through various applications, and more secure network websites. Online recruitment, interviews are conducted by organizations. Audio-video modes for conducting the meetings, conferences, and crucial decisions are taken through conducting video conferencing.
- Employee data is maintained through various softwares, i.e. human resource information system (HRIS). All the human resource activities are done through the HRIS system, from the planning of human resources to training, cost management, and accounting, etc.
- The population of millennials has increased. In 2020, approximately 23% of the global population can be considered as belonging to the millennials (born between the early 1980s to the mid-1990s). India has one of the largest millennial populations in the world. It is estimated at 426 million, which is approximately 34 percent of the total Indian population. Millennials are considered to be the technology-friendly generation.

- India is one of the fastest-growing IT markets globally. The last few decades have witnessed some top IT companies in India, i.e. TATA Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Wipro, HCL Technologies, etc. becoming the IT leaders in India and around the world. Internet users in India were 493.96 million in March 2018 and according to a study conducted jointly by the Associated Chambers of Commerce (Assocham) and Deloitte, India will have 600 million internet users by 2020. It has the potential to reach an estimated 2 billion connections in India, unlocking revenues of \$11.1 billion by 2022.

The organization, Employees, and Communication Technology

The advancement of technology and communication devices has removed the communication and management hurdles faced by the organizations in operating their business. These technologies help to do business operations in a fully organized way. At the same time it has certain implications in the following areas:

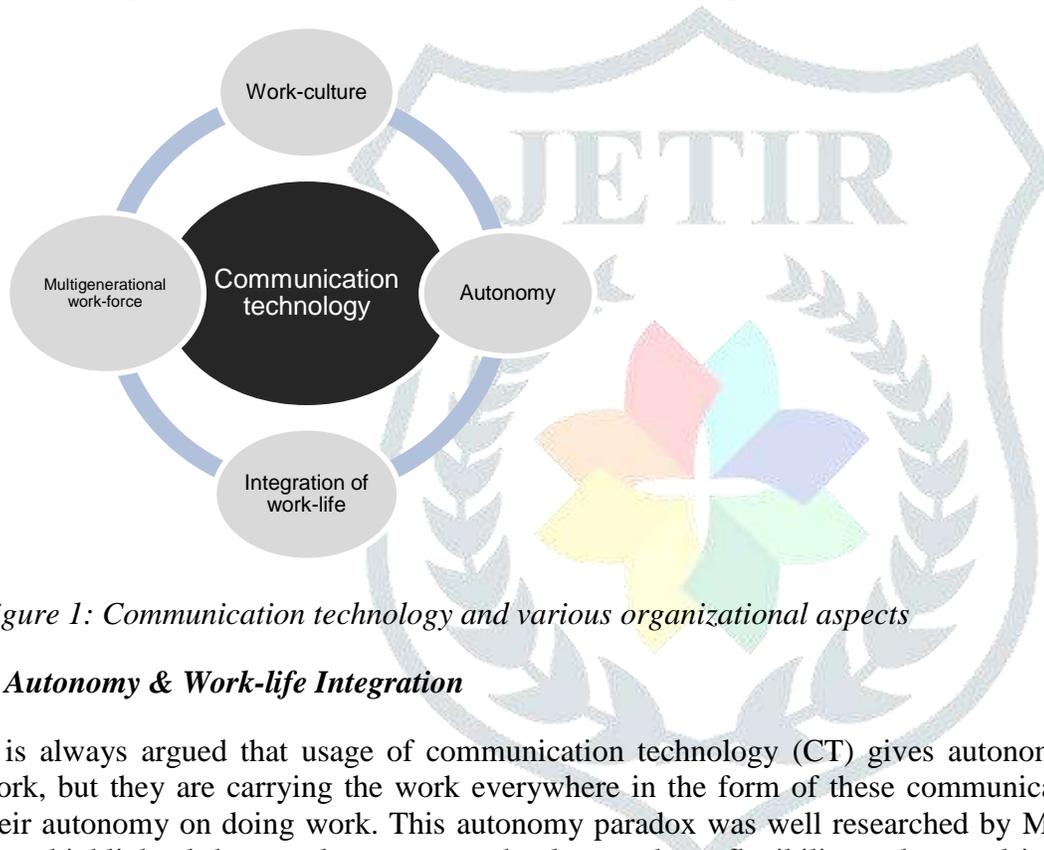


Figure 1: Communication technology and various organizational aspects

1. Autonomy & Work-life Integration

It is always argued that usage of communication technology (CT) gives autonomy to an individual in doing work, but they are carrying the work everywhere in the form of these communication devices hence reducing their autonomy on doing work. This autonomy paradox was well researched by Mazmanian and others (2013). They highlighted that employees use technology to have flexibility and control in doing the work and it gives them a sense of professionalism. But at the same time unknowingly they spend more time doing the work, by blurring the boundaries between work and personal life. CT use give ease, speed, and most important flexibility in doing work. Generally, employees take their unfinished work at home with CT devices. They try to complete the task at the expense of their personal life (Boswell & Buchanan, 2007). They further elaborate that CT use has both a negative and positive side. If employees are facing any conflict with their personal life due to completion of work in a non-work hour then definitely it has a negative effect, as they will feel more stressed due to all-time connectivity with the work. Yet, some found it more convenient as they were able to control the pace of doing the work. In both the case they are devoting more time to work because technology is helping them in doing so (Harris, 2014). Uses of smartphones are an intrusion in personal life and a facilitator as well.

Working for fixed hours in the office is now a thing of the past; if it's not then it is gradually moving in that direction. This is true for knowledge professionals, IT sector employees, teachers, health sector. Various studies have been conducted so far in these fields. The IT sector working professionals were found to have more difficulties in balancing work and family followed by the academic sector and then health sector working women (Delina G. & Raya, 2013). IT sector employees generally use these CT devices to complete their project, teachers

to prepare themselves for the next day's class, and complete their day to day non-academic activities too, health sector employees need to remain in touch with the organization and patients in case of any emergency. More or less these technologies have integrated work and life in such a way that sometimes it becomes hard to separate them. In physical terms or reality, both seem to be separated but technology has brought both the domains virtually together. Usage of smartphones has blurred the line between personal and professional work, working for fixed office hours is seen to be irrelevant in today's scenario (Pauleen, et.al 2015). According to Pauleen and others instead of bringing more balance in work and life, technology has integrated both. It is all about accommodating more work in your personal life rather than balancing.

2. Work Culture

The type of environment of doing work in an organization has a great impact on an individual's personal and professional life. In the modern era, it is called "Corporate culture." This varies from organization to organization, i.e. all-time availability of employees for doing the work, work extending to weekends and holidays, or a flexible schedule to respond to work calls or emails. It all depends on the organization what kind of work culture it wants to promote. It goes a long way in maintaining a balanced work-life for its employees, reducing stress, fatigue, and creating a healthy working environment in the organization (Kossek, 2016). Employees are nowadays checking their work emails, messages, and attending office calls after work hours. Globalization and CT have increased the blurring of boundaries between work and life and vice-versa.

Peer pressure, how colleagues perceive these communication technologies also affect an individual's behavior, and ultimately it shapes the work culture of that organization. If most of the employees are using various communication devices, i.e. smartphones, emails, audio-video modes to do their work, it will affect those who are not using it. They may feel lagging in this competitive environment (Harris, 2014; Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Organizations are promoting the use of laptops, mobile phones, and other communication devices for flexible work and work from home, and is related to various demand made by work. It helps employees to handle their work in and outside their workplace by ensuring smooth functioning and timely information sharing with colleagues. But it also increases interruptions, the unexpected workload for the employees which leads to employee burnout and disengagement with the work (Hoeven et.al, 2016).

3. Organizational & Employee's Perspective of Using Communication Technology

This fast pace of technology advancement is good for the organizations, as they will be having a more cost-effective business operation, better communication with the customers, and strategy formulation. Usage of mobile devices increases an organization's expectations from employees in terms of productivity (Palvia, 2015).

But this may not be true for the employees. To thrive in their career, modern-day employees need to be very cautious while mentioning or creating boundaries between their work and life. They are facing an ever-changing technology at a fast pace. They feel they must check work emails and messages after office hours, respond to work calls, the reason behind this behavior is they are using the organization's mobile devices and data (Palvia, 2015). They show a high level of commitment and willingness towards the organizations. Flexible work hours and freedom to complete the work ends with accommodating more work in their personal lives (Pauleen, et.al 2015). Employees come under more surveillance and control of the organization, as by using company-provided phones, they have to respond to the emails & calls made by their superiors in off-hours (Cavazotte, et.al. 2014). It was further elaborated by Cavazotte and others that these, professionals were aware that, they are using smartphones for more flexibility and freedom at the expense of their time, and they can't do much about this. According to Currie and Eveline (2010), technology usage has resulted in intensification-increased complexity of work and extensification-extension of work to home. Flexible work-life results in intensification of work (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010)

Organizations have to understand that it's not the number of hours worked by the employees but it is the result and performance which can contribute to the organization's success. Organizations must ensure a healthy work environment for their employees. Work-email should not be connected with the employee's phone, wherever possible. However, for knowledge professionals, this seems to be a difficult task.

4. Millennials at work and communication technology

Millennials (generation Y aged between 18 to 40 years) are forming the major portion of the working population in modern organizations. They are considered the change-makers. They are intellectuals, technology-oriented, ambitious, and globally aware individuals (Dannar, 2013). Millennials affect an organization's work culture directly and indirectly. They have seen the technological changes happening in and around the world. It is an integral part of their lives; they have lived and are living with information and communication technologies (Tapscott, 2009). From the change in mobile devices, simple phones to android and GPS enabled mobile-phones, desktop to smart laptops they have integrated all these technological developments in their lives. They have seen these advancements since birth and are more comfortable in multitasking with the help of technology (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). They are more comfortable in using these communication technologies and easily adapt to any technological innovation (Dannar, 2013; Welsh & Brazina, 2010). They are the knowledge creators also, through writing blogs, sharing views on social media, and networking sites (Dannar, 2013; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). It was not more prevalent with generation X.

At an organizational point millennials believe in team-work, they seek and share knowledge, more democratically. They know about their expectations from the employers and organizations. They have a very different approach to technology apart from other generations. They prefer more flexible work, telecommuting, challenging tasks, and better growth opportunities (Šokčević et.al. 2017). They stress more flexibility and employee-oriented work-life policies. Their work-life is not limited only to organization and family, but to friends, social activities, personal growth, etc. in comparison to generation Y, which is limited to a large extent balancing their work and family life only.

Table 1: Implications of communication technologies in contemporary organizations

Communication Technologies- Laptops, Computers, Smartphones, Internet, Blogs, Conference technology, etc.	
Work & Life	Virtual integration of both domains. An individual is psychologically switching between work and life, due to 24*7 connectivity with work
Autonomy	The flexibility of doing work anywhere and anytime but at the expense of personal time (non-working hours).
Work-Culture	Depends on the organization and type of work, i.e. knowledge professionals are more prone to "all-time work-connectivity" type of work -culture
Millennials at work	Millennials seek a more technologically advanced work-culture in comparison to generation X
Organization's perspective	Adapting technological advancements to remain competitive in the globalized world
Employees perspective	Adapting technological advancements for career growth, sense of professionalism, and demand of the work.

This clearly shows that organizations are dealing with a more complex work environment. In the contemporary world, organizations are dealing with a multigenerational workforce, i.e. Generation X, millennials, and generation Z is knocking on its door. Hence, their work-life policies should be multidimensional covering a multigenerational workforce and their interaction with the new-age communication technologies.

Conclusion

Communication technology and technology-assisted work is an integral part of any modern-day organization. While implementing technologies organizations have to be very careful with the short-term and long-term implications of technology usage on its employees and well-being. Organizations create and promote a work culture. Organizations should design their work-life policies according to the diverse work-force they are dealing with. Going through the literature available and recent studies conducted in the field, it is evident that technology brings certain positive and negative aspect with it, i.e. blurring of boundaries between work and life, everywhere and anytime connectivity with work, reduction in hours meant for personal and family life, flexibility, ease of doing work, etc. Organizations must address these issues most proactively. They must provide employees a support system, where they can turn off their work-emails and smartphones in their personal space. They must design their work schedules in a way that minimum distraction and interruptions can be caused by the usage of technology, be at work or home. Balancing work and life has its roots in the type of work-culture promoted by the organizations. A 24*7 work-culture promotes unhealthy work and life balance or in other words imbalance. Organizations with strong work culture are providing a more technology-friendly environment to their multigenerational workforce, ensuring their well-being and job security. Organizations must choose those technologies which are more productive and put less strain on the employee, and make them more efficient.

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