

Sharing Information in virtual teams: messaging in the disintermediation era.

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Information and knowledge are curious entities, in that they are, at once, expensive and difficult to discover or produce, but relatively cheap and easy to duplicate and share (see, e.g. Argyris, 1993; Shapiro and Varian, 1999; Jarvenpaa, 2000; Sproull and Kiesler, 1991). Recent developments of computer-mediated networks have further amplified this paradox in the organizational context. Sharing information is an important economic predictor of organizational success (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Dixon, 2000;). We set out to study information sharing, by simulating organizational processes under conditions that allow close examination of the characteristics of this process

This presentation is an attempt to empirically document the relation between information sharing accomplished via electronic mail and the performance of organizations. We report on an experimental study of the role of electronic mail in the operation of supply chains. A variation of the well known "Beer Game" simulation was computerized and implemented in an internet-based environment, to study the information sharing behavior of teams. The game (<http://hulia.haifa.ac.il>) simulates an organizational production/marketing chain. The players make individual and team decisions. The cost structure is such that players are led to believe that they can succeed. However, they soon discover that the task is not so simple, and requires knowledge management and learning. 76 teams of four players each competed to achieve best net team profit. Results of the simulation permit a detailed examination of e-mail use in an organizational context. Findings indicate the expected significant correlation between e-mail use to share information up the supply chain, and net team profit. In the context of online simulation behavior we find that team members successfully employ electronic mail to attempt disintermediation of the supply chain.