



# ***COMMORG Project***

Organizational Consequences of Email  
Adoption, Introduction and Diffusion

Prof. Lucio Biggiero (Project Coordinator)  
Luiss Guido Carli - Scuola di Management, (Rome, Italy)



# COMMORG Project



- **Partnership:**

- Luiss Guido Carli, Roma (IT)
- Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano (IT)
- University of Manchester (UK)
- University of Surrey (UK)
- University of Amsterdam (NL)
- University of Nijmegen (NL)
- University of Patras (GR)

**[www.commorg.net](http://www.commorg.net)**

- **Duration:** from May 2001 to October 2003

# TWO GOALS

- TESTING MAIN CURRENT APPROACHES: TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM VS. EMERGENT PATTERNS
- WORK WITH EMPIRICAL RATHER THAN LABORATORY DATA
- SUGGESTING MANAGEMENT AND POLICY STRATEGIES OF INTERVENTION



# COMMORG Project



Main Topics:

- **substitution/reinforcement/reconfiguration between traditional media and CMC**
- **trust, norms & identity**
- **participation in decision making**
- **genre repertoire**



---

# Common views on organisational consequences of e-mail adoption

- Organisational democratisation
- Teamwork fostering
- Conflict resolution support
- More efficient/effective communication
- Information overload

# 6 Explaining factors

- task complexity
- self-organisation
- social context
- cultural diversity
- technology use-mediators
- geographical distance

# Methods

- Field work
  - Narrative interviews
  - Survey
  - Mailing list analysis
  - Documentary text analysis
- Longitudinal analyses
- Consistent methodologies and theoretical framework to ensure an effective cross-national comparison

# 2 levels design

- Level 1: Descriptive benchmarking
  - Comparable analysis across countries
  - 4 subsidiaries of a MNC in ICT industry
- Level 2: In-depth case studies (10)
  - Examples of good practice
  - Specific tests of theory and predictions, ethnographic description
  - Variety of organisational settings: public administration, international research team, national research institute

# 4 TYPES OF RESULTS

- INTER-COUNTRY
- INTRA-COUNTRY
- POLICY ISSUES
- THEORETICAL
- **Complex project:**
  - 169 RQ grouped into 40 KI
  - 36 interviews and 623 respondents in Level 1
  - 100 interviews and 600 respondents in Level 2

# Main results

- E-mail features are enacted and context-dependent
- Substitution between traditional media and CMC, all but FtF: often reinforcement: high vs. low communicators regardless of media types
- Positive feedback between e-mail use and almost all psycho-social variables (excepted trust): identification, conflict, commitment, stereotyping and identity building

...

- PDM is affected by information overload, which leads to strategic avoidance
- Perception of overload is a function of the total e-mails received rather than the way in which the e-mails are managed
- E-mail connects distant people who have existing relationships: physical proximity with daily FtF increases the likelihood of e-mail exchange

...

- E-mail use, despite arguments from Technological Imperative, could be a proxy of lack of trust instead of increase of it. E-mail possibility to store and re-use messages actually can be viewed as a good means to avoid opportunistic behaviours
- **Positive feedback between e-mail and PDM**
- **High task complexity or high responsibility increases e-mail use**

• • •

- **Status differences are apparent also in e-mail** communication and especially low- status workers don't perceive any significant difference between e-mail and FtF
- **The strategic use of e-mail is a diffused practice,** not limited to cross-hierarchy communication
- **E-mail is effective means to manage virtual teams**
- PDM depends mostly on contextual factors (and namely leadership styles) rather than on the media
- E-mail can help teleworking
- **Crucial role of technology-use mediators**