

: *What is currently possible with Communications-Driven DSS?*

For more than a week in October 2001, I tried to use Communication and Information Technologies to coordinate my teaching activities and manage DSSResources.COM from various Internet connections in Hong Kong. DSSResources.COM is a "virtual" organization with a lot of outsourced tasks so I thought managing those relations would be an easier task than coordinating my teaching. Both tasks are difficult. I have had both failures and successes.

The 13 hour time difference is a special challenge that I'm still adapting too. It is currently 9:30 p.m. on Sunday evening in Hong Kong and 8:30 a.m. in Cedar Falls, Iowa (home base for DSSResources.COM). I can publish this issue of DSS News from here in Hong Kong or I can route this column back to Cedar Falls for publication in 6-8 hours. The main advantage of publishing it myself using the Web interface at Topica.com is that less coordination will be required.

Task coordination seems to suffer the most with asynchronous communication. Also, somehow I always feel ahead of or behind in the business decision-making process. I have had a few chat sessions with the Cedar Falls group and the chat technology is better for decision support because of the question/answer dialog that is possible. A good chat session seems to resolve more issues than 3 or 4 back and forth emails.

I've also learned that Web-based email is crucial for maintaining contact. I've had some emails to DSSResources.COM summarized and forwarded because the power@dssresources.com account can't be read from a Web client and that "relay" approach has been totally unacceptable.

Also, I have been using the DSSResources.COM Bulletin Board and a course Bulletin Board. A Bulletin Board provides a record of discussions, but it seems agonizingly slow for all but the most complex discussion of issues and decision alternatives. Any spontaneity seems to quickly get lost or defused.

I have even had to resort to an occasional phone call to personalize my long distance discussions and interactions. All in all, the current technologies have not provided me with very satisfying management support.

I was lecturing about using Microsoft NetMeeting for Decision Support in a face-to-face MBA MIS class session here in Hong Kong. I wish I could have told my students the NetMeeting software (especially the video) worked over the Internet. Sadly that is not currently the reality of our networks. Instead, I had to show them screen shots made using a high speed LAN. I have discovered as have many others how much we really need Interactive Video, whiteboards, and screening sharing for effective Global collaboration and decision support.

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