Internet Tools for Global OD Interventions

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The practice of organizational development (OD) increasingly relies on the use of the Internet to create successful interventions. The Internet can be useful in four types of OD interventions: human processes, technostructural/social, human resource management, and strategic.

The Internet and human process interventions

The Internet provides collaboration and communication tools that enhance interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, conflict management, team building, and intergroup relations. At IBM over 4,000 teams work in a Lotus Notes space called TeamRoom. The ability to share information globally and in real time has proved to be the fastest way to guide decision-making processes. IBM has also recognized other advantages such as:

- the ability to share information openly and simultaneously by all members of the team wherever they reside
- an increase in accountability among team members to each other and to the work
- the ability to track and measure results
- access to team memory anytime, anyplace
- the capture of team knowledge and best practices over time.

The Internet in technostructural/social interventions

Technostructural/social interventions deal with issues such as work design and division of labor. Internet-based tools can play a key role in work design for international organizations that use the Web to deliver just-in-time (JIT) training in the format of e-learning modules. Technologies that support JIT training include databases, Internet portals, and content management systems. AT&T uses a Web-based tool called DealMaker to deliver its JIT training. DealMaker makes training available anytime, anywhere and has the following components:

- Blended experiential learning that reinforces face-to-face learning with online activities.
- Online planning and knowledge management tools, such as sales negotiation planning support and best practice information, that help sales representatives anticipate and meet customer needs.
- Users can enter completed sales plans and success stories into the database, shifting the focus from workshop completion to successful use of skills.
- As employees submit success stories and completed plans, sales manager calculate the return-on-investment for each case, thus creating a results-tracking database.

The Internet and HR Management interventions

HR management interventions are those concerned with the integration and performance of people in organizations. Performance management includes goal setting, performance appraisal, and reward systems. In global organizations performance management systems have to be sensitive to cultural issues. Multinational organizations have to be aware of the fact that performance management systems may

not be effective everywhere and a lack of customization may result in the failure of the system.

There is a broad range of performance management tools that can be accessed online. When the online banking and financial services provider Digital Insight Corporation needed a performance management package that would allow it to provide training, performance appraisals, and rewards to employees in five different locations, it used a off-the-shelf tool that could successfully manage the growing number of employees. This Internet-based application features

- automatic generation of text within the review form
- routing of goals, progress notes, and reviews to solicit comments, approvals, and feedback
- a task inbox for sending and receiving input
- automatic notification reminders when tasks are due
- the assignment of weights to competencies and goals
- the addition of an industry-specific competency library
- the use of a multirater feedback module
- content customization for language.

The Internet and strategic interventions

Strategic OD interventions are those used for transforming organizations and include such things as culture change, organizational learning, and knowledge management (KM). To deal with the social and economic problems that started in the 1980s with the closing of manufacturing companies, the Scottish government created a series of policies that would position the country for the 21st century economy. With the merger of the Ministry of Enterprise and Ministry for Lifelong Learning, the Scottish government set lifelong learning as its primary focus and gave rise to partnerships between academia and the private sector to educate the workforce. E-learning was chosen as the most efficient and economical way to get this accomplished because the target audience was adults who would not go to school to get more education or did not have unions or employers who would provide the training needed.

The Internet can be used for integration during international mergers and acquisitions (M&A) to help the new organization form an identity as one company. The Web can play an important role during M&A integration by

- diffusing information through consistent communication
- defining the new culture by providing information about the new values and norms in the organization
- encouraging members to come together virtually to solve issues concerning operational and cultural integration
- providing of a space where employees can voice concerns and get help managing stress
- providing a place where employees can post their questions and concerns and receive answers that can be shared with employees from other parts of the world.

Knowledge management (KM) tools can help organizations keep up with change and improve their performance. KM allows users to share information in order to generate new ideas and increase revenues or decrease expenses, thus improving the organization's ability to adapt to change and opportunities in the market. In a

multinational organization this sharing of lessons learned can give managers in remote locations access not only to information from branches in other countries but also from other companies in the country where they are situated. Executives in different levels of hierarchy in the same organization in different parts of the world can assist each other in real time. Information stored in databases can help employees make educated decisions.

In international settings, KM is particularly important because of the political and economic context in which business takes place. Developments in a foreign country can trigger change within the company and knowing how similar situations were handled in the past can help managers better understand and respond to the change.

Looking ahead
Using the Internet for global OD interventions has three confirmed advantages:
- Economy of infrastructure: Internet tools reduce travel expenses and reduce the amount of time of employees are away from the job due to training
- Flexibility in time and space: Internet tools can be used by employees at any time and in any place, a clear advantage for working adults
- Far reach: Internet tools can operate over long distances and reach widely scattered groups.

Still, there are challenges, such as the constant need for up-to-date data. Organizations also have to consider issues such as the digital divide, skill levels and previous training of employees, and computer and system vulnerabilities and other security issues.

The widespread use of technologies for OD interventions is growing at a fast pace. I see four important developments that will change how the Internet is used for global OD interventions:
- mobile technology (M-technology), which incorporates business applications into cell phones and other mobile devices
- virtual open spaces, which are being used for informal sharing, skills learning, and for fun and entertainment
- virtual hiring, where companies hire employees as telecommuters or virtual workers who come to the office only on occasion or may never take part in face-to-face meetings
- an increase in demand for training of managers, leaders, and supervisors so they can better perform their jobs online.

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