It pays to be coherent!

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According to McGrath (1990), conversational chaos in text-based and simultaneous computer-mediated communication (CMC) leads to poorer synchronization and tuning of group members than in face-to-face groups (FtF). Especially, problem-solution and consensus-finding groups show more difficulties in coordinating evaluations. The resulting lower satisfaction with group decision leads to higher deviations from group decision after discussion. We assume that these negative media effects may be compensated by enhancing communication skills in CMC. Experienced users cope with topical incoherence and impaired turn-taking in CMC by explicit referring and by structuring the conversation with requests.

40 3-person-FtF- and 40 3-person-CMC-groups had to work on a carrier choice dilemma and were instructed to find a group consensus. 10 CMC groups received a training in referring, 10 CMC groups got a training in requesting and 10 CMC groups got a combined training of these compensation strategies. 10 CMC groups served as controls.

Results showed that coherence in CMC is enhanced by all kinds of training. Enhanced coherence led to better coordination and group-well-being. The acceptance of the media, the satisfaction with group decision and thereby the commitment with decision increased. These are desirable consequences when computer conferences in organizations are employed.

Key words: computer mediated communication, communication training, group coordination

McGrath, J. (1990). Time matters in groups. In: Galegher, J., Kraut, R.E. & Egido, C. (Eds.): Intellectual Teamwork. Social and technological foundations of cooperative work. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

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