

An Action Research Perspective of Group Support Systems: How to Improve Meetings in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Group Support Systems (GSS) as a discipline within Information Systems (IS) has matured over the last decade and a half. Early experimental work, conducted for the most part in North America, has given way to field studies that explore how GSS is used in organisational environments in a variety of cultural settings. More recently, interpretative methods have been employed to investigate organisational use of GSS in a number of longitudinal studies. This thesis builds upon previous GSS field research with an Action Research methodology to attempt to improve meetings in Hong Kong.

A literature review evaluates previous research work in GSS, paying special attention to issues of group dynamics and culture which are important in this field. A model that explains how GSS can be used to support meeting processes is developed based on this literature. An instrument to measure several meeting process and outcome constructs is subsequently derived from the model and validated.

This instrument is then used within an Action Research methodology, guiding the researcher in his use of GSS in four cases conducted in three organisations in Hong Kong. Data is collected from the cases through interviews, direct observation and the instrument. Each case is presented in a cyclic manner following, where appropriate, the planning, execution, reflection and lessons learned phases of Action Research for each segment of the case.

In the prepenultimate chapter, Action Research is analysed as a methodology, particular attention being paid to the operationalisation employed, the

data collection methods and the role of the researcher. Substantial revisions are then made to the research framework incorporating knowledge gleaned through the conduct of the cases. At the same time, the research instrument is revalidated. Finally, the research and practice that needs to be undertaken in the future is assessed.

This research and practice, in so far as they involve Action Research, are interdependent, each informing and supporting the other. The role of the researcher/facilitator in this work is both clarified and extended in this thesis, with an improved understanding of the roles and responsibilities appearing as a result. The key contribution of this thesis, irrespective of the framework, instrument development and validation already described, lies in the recognition of the importance of Action Research as a methodology for good practice and good research in organisational contexts.