



A General Implementation Strategy for Video Conferencing

Gaining commitment from top level executives in the organization is the first step in implementing a Video Conferencing System. It is important to get input, at every step, from those in the organization who are responsible for implementing the system. The first step in implementation is to establish the goals and purposes of the proposed system. The second step is to identify company-specific variables that will affect the success of video conferencing. Third, specific research is needed to understand how these variables interact in a given organization. Fourth, the results of these steps should provide the basis for selecting a given system, marketing it internally, and training targeted employees to use it. Fifth, the overall strategy has to be carefully implemented including step-by-step programmatic evaluation.

Step I: Establishing the Goals and Purposes

Those responsible for implementing the teleconferencing function must develop a set of goals:

- All goals should be stated in the language of the company, reflecting its cultural Values.
- A decision to use teleconferencing should be based on real communication needs and not because it would be nice to have this new technology.
- A commitment should be made to evaluate the system regularly based on the goals.
- The decision makers should have some idea of how much they are willing to spend on the system and how soon they want it implemented. Flexible benchmarks should be established and modified based on the results of the remaining four steps.

Step II: Identifying Significant Variables

There are a host of variables that must be taken into account according to past research. Type of task and type of participant are company specific variables, while many of the other variables are not. Three steps are necessary to identify type of task and type of participant.

- A travel analysis is necessary to identify who has the greatest need for teleconferencing.
- Once the likely participants are identified, the types of tasks they usually perform together and how long it takes them to perform the tasks must be catalogued. This will help determine what kind of equipment will be necessary to help the group perform its tasks.
- The likely number of participants at each location must be estimated based on the fact that teleconferencing permits more employees to interact than meetings where only the boss and/or an assistant are permitted to travel.
- Based on this analysis the most likely locations for teleconference meetings and the kinds of equipment required for the meetings can be determined.

Step III: Performing the Pilot Study

To determine how these variables interact in a real teleconference, it is necessary to have the participants meet in simulated or prototypic teleconferences. The following are some suggestions for accomplishing this objective.

- Identifying existing teleconferencing systems that are similar to the one the company will likely implement.
- Examine equipment rental options. Contact equipment vendors who are often willing to demonstrate their products as well as offer lease-with-option-to-buy arrangements.
- Educate the participants about the system and allow them to experiment with it informally before data collection begins.
- Using a representative sample of the targeted participants, run a series of simulated conferences designed to examine how the variables interact. (It is important here to consult with someone who has a firm grasp of behavioral research design.)
- Observe the participants' behavior during the meetings with an eye toward potential problems and the degree to which they complete their tasks successfully. Objective criteria should be developed ahead of time to judge the effectiveness of task completion in terms of quality, timeliness, and member satisfaction with the decision.
- A post-meeting questionnaire should be developed to measure participants' satisfaction with the meeting, perceived cooperativeness of the other members, and perceived likelihood of using the system when implemented.

Step IV: Train Market, and Select

A formal training program must be developed based on the research conducted in Step III. The training program should include:

- an orientation to the system, explaining how it works in non-technical terminology (an audio-visual presentation with handouts would be useful here);
- informal hands-on experiences with the system and group discussions about participants' reactions;
- a simulated run through based on the tasks the participants will likely perform in the formal teleconferences and discussion about problems and suggested remedies.
- An internal-marketing program must be developed to persuade likely participants to use the system. Given employees' typical resistance to change, significant and considerable effort may have to be devoted to this step.
- The company's communication department or function, in conjunction with the principals, should develop an internal marketing plan. The plan should specify what materials and distribution channels will be used.
- Brochures and audio-visual materials should be developed that describe the system and its purposes. A film or video tape describing teleconferencing in general and the company's teleconferencing system in particular, would be an efficient way to spread the word because it could be presented to large groups or individual users.
- The developed messages should reflect likely concerns participants will have over using this new and potentially frightening communication medium. Potential users must be assured that they will not need to become professional actors to use the new medium. The messages should focus on the time savings, productivity increases, and convenience benefits of the new communication tool. Focusing on the travel replacement benefits may not appeal to many middle level managers who look forward to their infrequent business trips.
- A decision must be made about which system should be bought or rented, as well as how it should be networked throughout the company.
- Technical personnel (especially telecommunication engineers) must be consulted as to the merits of each system for the company's current and projected needs. It is important when purchasing or leasing a system to consider long range uses and possible extensions of the system.
- Equipment purchases should take into account how all the components will fit together. For example, it may be unwise to purchase a very expensive codec if

the cameras, monitors, and room design cannot delivery high quality video, graphics, and/or audio.

- Equipment prices and rentals are coming down much like the cost of computers dropped over the years. However, waiting for prices to bottom-out may be unwise when weighed against the immediate long term benefits of implementing a needed system as soon as possible.

Step V: Implementation

Actually installing equipment, designing rooms, purchasing transmission time, and so on, can take consideration time depending on the elaborateness of the system. Consideration should be given to the following in the implementation process.

- Mistakes will likely be made and that is why it is useful to plan for extra time for changes that will be needed in the equipment-transmission-participant configuration. These changes should be budgeted for ahead of time.
- It will be necessary to have a highly qualified engineer or technician trained to deal with equipment and transmission problems available during the start-up phase. The start-up phase can last anywhere from 2 months to 2 years depending on the system's elaborateness.
- Since equipment problems are likely to arise during the initial phases of implementation, be sure equipment vendors have the technical support staff to handle problems with the equipment as they arise.
- Clear lines of communication among all the principals should be established during the implementation process. Frequent progress reports should be delivered to upper management. Frequent meetings between the principals should be held to discuss evaluations of the system's implementation based on human factor as well as technical considerations.

This implementation plan is meant to be a general framework. Each company will have to develop its own plan based on its specific goals for a teleconferencing system. However, most plans should be based on these general considerations.

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