SUPPORTING ANY-TIME, ANY-PLACE TEAM MEETINGS WITH DIGITAL & VIDEO CONFERENCING TECHNOLOGIES

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While Internet has been with us for a few decades, its very impact began to be felt only recently with the advent of the intuitive and easy-to-use vehicle for navigating the world of information – the Worldwide Web technology. The Worldwide Web has recently emerged as a highly successful technology to permit individuals to exchange and share information from around the globe.

Meanwhile, experience with the electronic meeting technology that has evolved along with development efforts at the University of Arizona and other institutions indicates that information technology can play an important role in supporting business meetings. The technology has opened up opportunities to add effective support structure to business decision making in a group context. However, electronic meeting systems are designed for the "same room", "same time" situation, and are not adequate for today's global business environment. As many firms move into a global marketplace and get more geographically dispersed, there is an increaing need to communicate over distance. In this regard, the merger of the electronic meeting system with the Worldwide Web technology seems to be a logically appealing solution to this problem.

The electronic meeting system combined with the Web technology offers rich opportunities to computer-based support of group meetings that call for communication beyond time and location barriers. Yet, a web-based electronic meeting system cannot lend effective support to decision problems that require a high level of coordination among team members or need quick feedback from the members. Face-to-face communication still remains an important part of organizational decision processes. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate into the system the ability to communicate in a face-to-face setting.

Both electronic meeting systems and conferencing systems that have existed by far have focused on either the text only or video only communication. Some problems are effectively addressed via text-based digital communication, whereas others are more suited to video-based verbal communication. We argue that the effectiveness of a business meeting can be augmented by merging text-based with video-based communication capabilties. This kind of technological setup has the potential to combine the creativity enabled by the electronic brainstorming with the coordination permitted by face-to-face communication.

The purpose of this paper is to apply the Worldwide Web and video conferencing technologies to the design of an electronic meeting support system in such a way to merge electronic meeting with video conferencing to augment the effectiveness of team meetings. We first distinguish between digital conferencing and video conferencing, and present a framework for organizatinoal team meetings. Then, we describe the Webmeeting Project in progress at Chung-Ang University Groupware Lab. Based on the discussion, we envision a web-based team support system that is designed to make organizational meetings more fruitful by providing communication support beyond time and location barriers.