Choosing the Right Tools for Your Needs

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≔ **WHAT'S COVERED**

In this lesson, you will learn about how to evaluate various technology tools to determine which one will suit your particular purpose. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Purposes for Technology Use

Technology is rapidly changing the ways we communicate in a variety of contexts, and group communication is no exception. Many organizations use computers and cell phones as a primary way to keep groups connected given their ease of use, low cost, and asynchronous nature.

⚙ **THINK ABOUT IT**

In today's work place, you can use Google Docs, chat online, transfer documents back and forth, and form messages to achieve the group's goals— all without ever having to meet in person. You'll likely find yourself participating in virtual groups with people who have been brought together from a variety of geographical locations.

When groups communicate through email, threads, discussion forums, text messaging, and other asynchronous methods, they lose the ability to provide immediate feedback to other members. Also, using asynchronous communication technologies takes a great deal more time for a group to achieve its goals. In this lesson, as we think of groups and collaboration, we think more of two-way communication and related tools.

Nevertheless, technology is changing the ways we understand groups and participate in them. We have yet to work out all of the new standards for group participation introduced by technology. Used well, technology opens the door for new avenues of working in groups to achieve goals. Used poorly, technology can add to the many frustrations people often experience working in groups and teams.

1a. Meeting Scheduling

Have you ever watched an email addressed to more than five people rapidly fill your email box? Probably.

↗ **EXAMPLE** Imagine one with the subject line, "Can you meet Tuesday at 10? Or when?" This message for internal, external, or a mix of meeting attendees will rapidly fill everyone's email box and possibly use more attendee time in reading and scheduling the meeting than the meeting may actually take.

As we discussed in a previous lesson, software tools like Microsoft Outlook can help you identify times when meeting participants will be available and quickly put those meetings on participants' calendars.

1b. Conversations

Groups may or may not be co-located. Throughout the work day, questions come up that need simple responses and may be somewhat flexible in the time the response is needed. Certainly email remains an excellent tool because large numbers of people may receive the same message, but there are other options.

These tools for quick conversations may be one-on-one tools or group tools (i.e., group text). This software typically provides ways for users to chat in real time, so projects can be completed faster because users don't have to wait for other users to respond by asynchronous means like email. However, you should always check company policy on the use of these tools. There may be issues related to intellectual property, security, and customer relations.

Tools that may suit this need are tools such as or similar to the following:

- Slack
- Google Hangouts
- WebEx
- Microsoft Teams

For longer conversations, many of the above tools also offer video conferencing options. Additionally, most personal computers, tablets, and phones offer users voice, video, and text communication. This leads to richer communications through video conferences.

1c. Project Management

Project management is no longer only for massive construction projects. Many tracking and coordination skills are used in group communication.

These management tools help keep all parties involved in a project on the same page. These tools also reduce the amount of incoming and outgoing communications, since team members have access to the status of each person's work.

Microsoft Project is a project management software product, developed and sold by Microsoft. It is designed to assist a project manager in developing a plan, assigning resources to tasks, tracking progress, managing the budget, and analyzing workloads. The price for this software may set some back, but it is the industry standard.

Here are a few other examples of project management tools:

- BaseCamp
- Trello
- Clubhouse
- Asana
- Teamwork

Keep in mind that each tool has its own quirks, and it may take some trial and error to figure out which works best for your team.

2. Comparing Communication Tools

These choices can seem overwhelming, especially if you're not a technology nerd. In order to get past the panic and make some good decisions, the first thing to do is use your technology skill to ask yourself some questions about what you want to achieve in a particular communication situation.

Consider three general topics:

1. What's the purpose of the communication? What business goal do you need to achieve?
2. Who is your audience/cohort for this communication?
   a. How many people need to be involved?
   b. How do they function as a group?
   c. How comfortable are they with technology?
   d. What technology do you already share?
3. What do you need to show or talk through?
   a. If this were an in-person meeting, would you want a white board? A flipchart? A projector?
   b. Do you have samples to show?
   c. Do you need to demonstrate a product or process?

Since technology can be tricky - especially if you and your team are using a particular platform for the first time - a good general rule is to ask, "What's the simplest technology I can use and still achieve my goals in the most productive manner?"

📋 SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how to select the right technological tools to facilitate business communication and improve your productivity. First, consider the **purpose for technology use**, whether it's to **schedule meetings**, hold **conversations**, or **manage projects**. Different tools exist to meet these needs. When **comparing communication tools**, you also want to think about and analyze your communication context, including your audience, the setting, and your message. Keep in mind the rule to use the simplest technology that can achieve your goal productively.

Best of luck in your learning!

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