

Benefits and Concerns: Employees' Communication
via Instant Messaging in the Workplace

A MASTER'S PROJECT

BY

JEDSADA KAEWMANEE

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication
at Srinakharinwirot University

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AN ABSTRACT

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In today's business, Instant Messaging (IM) plays an effective role in the workplace. It provides spontaneous communication among the employees and their business partners. The purposes of this study aimed to investigate the employees' attitudes towards benefits of IM use in the workplace which are 'real-time communication', 'minimal work interruption', 'team collaboration' and 'presence awareness'. The study also explored the employees' attitudes towards concerns of IM impact on individual's and company's workplace communication. The participants selected by the purposive sampling method were 30 employees at Meditop Co.,Ltd. who used IM on a daily basis. The instrument of this study was a questionnaire. A number of employees' perception revealed that "real-time communication" and 'presence awareness' were concluded as the most important benefits of IM use in the workplace communication. The IM users also pointed out that 'virus transfer' and 'physical problem' were the most serious concern toward their IM use at work.

คุณประโยชน์และข้อกังวลต่อการสื่อสารของพนักงานบริษัท
ผ่านทางระบบสื่อสารข้อความทันทีในสำนักงาน

บทคัดย่อ

ของ

เจษฎา แก้วมณี

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา
ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจเพื่อการสื่อสารนานาชาติ

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ระบบสื่อสารข้อความทันที (Instant Messaging คือ การส่งผ่านข้อความระหว่างบุคคล
ตั้งแต่ 2 คนขึ้นไปโดยระบบอินเทอร์เน็ต ซึ่งในวงการธุรกิจปัจจุบันนี้ ระบบสื่อสารข้อความทันที มี
บทบาทที่สำคัญ ในการส่งเสริมการสื่อสารระหว่างเพื่อนร่วมงานและลูกค้า งานวิจัยครั้งนี้ศึกษา
ความคิดเห็นของพนักงานบริษัททั้งในด้านคุณประโยชน์ที่ได้รับจากการนำช่องทางการสื่อสารแบบ
ทันทีมาใช้ในการทำงาน ซึ่งได้กำหนดคุณประโยชน์หลักที่เกิดจากระบบการสื่อสารนี้ อัน
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ห่วงใยของพนักงานซึ่งอาจเกิดจากการสนทนาผ่านทางระบบสื่อสารแบบทันที

กลุ่มตัวอย่างในการศึกษาค้นคว้าครั้งนี้คือพนักงานบริษัทเมดิทอป จำกัด จำนวน 30 คนซึ่งเป็นผู้
ที่สนทนาผ่านทางระบบสื่อสารแบบทันทีในการทำงาน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการศึกษาคือแบบสอบถาม
ผลที่ได้รับจากการศึกษาในครั้งนี้พนักงานส่วนใหญ่เห็นด้วยเป็นอย่างยิ่งโดยเฉพาะคุณประโยชน์
ของการสื่อสารด้านการสื่อสารอย่างทันทีและความสามารถในการรับรู้สถานะของกลุ่มสนทนา ในขณะที่
ที่พนักงานส่วนใหญ่มีข้อห่วงใยเป็นอย่างมากในเรื่องการส่งผ่านไวรัสคอมพิวเตอร์และผลกระทบ
ด้านสุขภาพของพนักงาน

The Master's Project advisor, Chair of Business English for International Communication and Oral Defense Committee have approved this Master's Project, Benefits and Concerns: Employees' Communication via Instant Messaging in the Workplace by Mr. Jedsada Kaewmanee as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Business English for International Communication of Srinakharinwirot University.

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The Master's Project has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Business English for International Communication of Srinakharinwirot University.

..... Dean of Faculty of Humanities

(Associate Professor Akkara Buntip)

May....., 2010

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Instant Messaging (IM) is real-time communication through the Internet which enables users to receive up-to-date information quickly and efficiently. With these advantages, the number of IM users has increased tremendously in recent years. In the year 2008, IM users reached over 592 million worldwide, whereas in the year 2004 there were just 320 million users (International Data Corporation [IDC], 2008). Additionally, The Radicati Group (2008), a technology research firm, revealed that in the year 2008 over 45.8 billion messages were sent through IM compared to 11.4 billion messages in the year 2004. Due to the attraction of IM, its usage has been spreading across businesses rapidly.

In today's business, employees implement IM worldwide to facilitate their business communication with colleagues and customers. According to Esker (2006), IM enables employees to communicate spontaneously with other respondents and transfer immediate information in different forms such as short-written messages, voice chat, webcams, and pictures. Moreover, Czerwinski, Cutrell, and Horvitz, (2000); Barnes, (2003); Esker, (2006) illustrated the use of real-time communication in business such as delivering and responding messages, exchanging information without organizing or holding meetings or conducting meetings with multi people, connecting long-distance employees, selling and marketing products, keeping in touch with customers, and developing relationships with customers.

Furthermore, the use of IM helps employees reduce their work interruptions.

According to Esker (2006), employees are able to obtain multi-tasks when they implement IM application into their business communications. This researcher presents that while the employees respond to their colleagues and customers, they are able to have discussion with other business partners at the same time. According to Garrete and Danziger (2007), IM is integrated into communications with other electronic devices such as phone and emails. As a result, employees who use IM at work will be less frequently interrupted during their work compared with employees who do not implement IM in their daily communications.

Additionally, IM provides a significant function to increase employees' relationships with colleagues and their customers. According to Schwarz (2007), IM is used as a team collaboration which bridges communications with business partners inside and outside the business organizations. Cho, Trier, and Kim (2005) stated that the employees maintain their working relationships with the colleagues and the customers across various organizational boundaries through IM applications. Schwarz, 2007; Cho, Trier and Kim (2005) illustrated that the employees are able to conduct urgent meetings, exchange information, and discuss in urgent tasks with long distance colleagues and customers through IM applications. Based on these benefits gained from IM, Esker (2006) concluded that companies can reduce expenses from saving employees' traveling, phone calls and fax transmission.

Another supportive function of IM application is presence awareness which provides initiative real-time communications with business partners to be aware of contacts' online availabilities. According to Esker (2006), this function helps the users identify their online

status in various display messages such as “busy, away” and “out to lunch,” so the employees utilize this function to find the most appropriate time to discuss with others. Sachpazidis et al., (2006) who explored the benefit of presence awareness in a medical network environment, revealed one of their findings that doctors, pharmacists and other medical teams, used the presence awareness in contacting and consulting with one and other before giving medical advice to their patients.

As a consequence of these mentioned benefits, IM enables employees to share information and documents in real-time and becomes a significant channel in business communications. However, the use of IM also has some potential concerns involving risks and threats to employees and the security of corporate computers. Firstly, Schwarz (2007) concerned that the employees might use IM in their personal communications rather than for business purposes. Secondly, Ditzler, Stillfield and Wang (2007) revealed that some IM users may feel obligated to respond messages, while they are not ready to communicate. In addition, these employees are easily disturbed when other contacts are noticed in their online status. Lastly, Esker (2006) found that viruses through downloading attached files are seriously concerned because they invade and harm corporate computers and software systems.

Basically researchers and communicators conduct studies on benefits of IM towards businesses. The present study investigates employees' attitudes towards benefits and concerns on the use of IM in business organizations. These IM users, who always communicate through IM applications to spontaneously respond to their colleagues and overseas customers, are at Meditop Co., Ltd., the biggest international trading company in medical instruments and healthcare supplies in Thailand.

With reference to the purposes of this study, the researcher endeavors to determine the value of implementing IM uses in this workplace: real-time communication, minimal work interruption, team collaboration and presence awareness. In addition, the potential concerns of IM towards businesses are also explored because it is important that the executives recognize these concerns. This will lead to properly set a safety policy from misuse and educate their employees.

Objectives of the Study

This study consists of two main objectives as follows:

1. To find out the employees' attitudes towards benefits of IM use in: 'real-time communication', 'minimal work interruption', 'team collaboration' and 'presence awareness' in a workplace.
2. To explore the concerns of IM use which impact on individual's and company's work.

Research Questions

The study focuses on the following questions:

1. In the employees' perception what are the most important benefits of IM use for workplace communication?
2. What are the most serious concerns of IM use at work which impact on individual's and company's work?

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on benefits and potential concerns of using IM in Meditop Co.,Ltd., which is an international trading company of medical instruments and healthcare products in Thailand. The IM communications in this company is on text-based only that the company will not allow the employees to install a software program such as sound card and built-in camera to utilize audio and visual functions.

Participants of this study were purposively selected from 30 Thai employees in different divisions. They were always dealing with overseas customers and Thai colleagues via IM communication. These participants were asked to respond to a set of questionnaire which was distributed in the beginning of September, 2009.

Significance of the Study

This study will give through insight in contributions of IM as workplace communication at Meditop Co.,Ltd. IM communication helps to maintain relationships with customers and other business partners. Implementing this real time communication into the business, the users will gain faster responses and immediate services. Therefore, this communication channel increases the customers' satisfaction which is of a greater importance in business achievement.

This study will also be beneficial to employees and executives in communication management when they employ IM into a business organization. IM provides a lot of benefits towards a business, but there are some concerns which may affect the organization. By understanding these significant benefits and potential concerns, these

business people will be assured of a good practice from appropriate use of this technological communication.

In addition, this research will provide recommendation on how to obtain these mentioned benefits and keep the employees and other users away from inappropriate use in accordance with the safety policy of business communication.

Definition of terms

Definitions of the terms of this study are the following:

Instant Messaging (IM)	A kind of real-time text-based communication to exchange business information with colleagues and customers.
Benefits	Advantages, application, and functions which enable to increase productivity and enhance employees' relationship with other users after the use of IM in the workplace.
Concerns	Risks, threats and problems of misleading in IM use.
Presence Awareness	Online status in the contact lists whether they are available to have discussion, busy or away from the IM program.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews literature in four main areas: the concept of computer-mediated communication (CMC), benefits of instant messaging (IM) towards business communication, concerns of IM use affecting work, implementation of IM in Meditop Co., Ltd., and previous research.

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

Nowadays communication technology plays a significant role to human beings and business communication because its functions help employees receive an immediate response, feels convenient in communication with distant colleagues and save time and costs. This part will explain definitions and uses of CMC in business.

McFarlane and Latorella (2002) defined CMC as a large set of functions e.g. encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages through networked computers. In addition, Barn, (2003); Bargh and McKenna, (2004) explained that CMC helps people enhance interpersonal communication for creating, exchanging, and perceiving information through the networked telecommunications systems. CMC can be divided into two different types which are synchronous and asynchronous communication (Sroull & Kiesler, 1998; Nardi, Whittaker, & Bradner, 2000; McFarlane & Latorella, 2002).

Synchronous communication is defined as real time communication which is mostly found in instant messaging (IM) and online chatting programs (Herbsleb, Atkins, Boyer,

Handel, & Finholt, 2002). Users are able to receive information and respond within a second. While asynchronous communication has a more delayed message system, the receivers have much time to think and reply each message such as email (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004). Even synchronous and asynchronous communications are based on time differences, business organizations adopt both typical communications to increase higher capacity of business communication.

The influence of CMC within the workplace helps the business organizations enhance productivity. Also, these useful applications steadily become one of the important methods for business communication.

Benefits of Instant Messaging (IM) use towards Business Communication

Instant messaging (IM) is a form of synchronous CMC to gain popularity inside and outside the workplaces. The service of IM is provided in different platforms which are based on service provider such as MSN Messenger (Microsoft Corporation), Yahoo Messenger (Yahoo! Corporation), AOL (America Online), and ICQ (Mirabilis). These platforms are convenient to download from their companies' websites, or from free sign-up CD ROMs.

Generally every platform endeavors to share beneficial attributes, for instance, synchronous communication that can be initiated by either party in an exchange; offering form of presence awareness, indicating whether other users are connected to the network and/or are available; providing incoming communication by the form of pop-up windows and audio alerts. As a consequence, IM uses widely appear in the business environment, for

instance, checking other persons' online status, avoiding a waste of time from an e-mail, saving costs on phone, and connecting geographically separate employees.

Based on these worldwide uses, these researchers (Cho, Trier, & Kim, 2005; Garrett & Danziger, 2007; Schwarz, 2007) studied the effective use of IM towards business and divided benefits of IM functions in the workplace: real-time communication, minimal work interruption, team collaboration and presence awareness.

Real Time Communication

The communication occurs in real-time for both the parties involved helps employees to synchronously respond to colleagues and customers. They send private texts, file-sharing, voice and video features, and transfer into their conversations with multiple participants simultaneously to facilitate their own jobs in a second (Muller, Raven, Kogan, Millen & Carey, 2003; Isaacs, Walendowski, Whittaker, Schiano, & Kamm, 2002).

According to these uses, real-time communications are widely implemented in a workplace, for instance, quick questions and clarifications, meetings among co-workers, keeping in touch with colleagues and customers, and having longer and more complex discussions (Handel & Herbsleb, 2002). In addition, IM presents benefits over email, which is a less expeditious way to communicate because the use of IM is generally much shorter, easier to read and less likely to cause misinterpretation than email (Mingail, 2001).

Business owners have expressed an increasing use of IM because this real-time function cuts communication costs (Esker, 2006). The users are not required to spend money for an immediate response and to view attached files when compared to other communication tools such as phones, faxes and video conferencing. Based on these

benefits gained from real-time communication, most companies and business organizations have steadily implemented IM into the business environment.

Minimal Work Interruption

Managing interruption in business environment significantly enhances productivity and facilitates working procedures. A high rate of interruption in the business is obviously a serious issue. Employees have to take longer time to complete tasks with several communication tools (Gillie & Broadbent, 1989) e.g. phone calls and face-to-face conversation. Fortunately, IM is a highly effective communication tool because IM allows IM users to integrate their communication with other tools. This is called "Multi-tasking".

In addition, IM use obtains a function of multi-discussions which would help to break through communication barriers (González & Mark, 2005). Employees are able to communicate with other respondents in different issues on the same screen of IM program. In addition, employees use IM to gather necessary information from business partners to solve a problem or to close a sale while having a phone call with a customer and a colleague (Garrett & Danziger, 2007).

Based on this mentioned benefit, IM is used to manage these obstacles to increase efficient work. Employees incorporate IM into their current tasks to reduce interruption in their work procedures.

Team Collaboration

The use of outsourcing and project teams has increased. As such, people who are in different locations and distant countries would like to get easier contact to less their boundaries communication. According to Muller, Raven, Kogan, Millen, & Carey (2003), IM

is used as a collaboration tool among project teams and colleagues in their business communication such as conducting formal meetings, transferring documents, and responding to quick questions. Muller et al., (2003) revealed that employees in many business organizations used IM as a substantive business purpose for task-based communication and aimed to develop of working relationships.

When implement IM into the business, the employees have different point of view for their IM uses. Isaacs, Walendowski, Whittaker, Schiano, and Kamm (2002) found that the employees used IM for business purposes rather than for socializing. They pointed out two important styles of IM users: most users implement IM for a wide range of collaborative activities and complex tasks, and fewer for simple coordinations.

With significance of collaboration function, Gabarro (1990) stated that spontaneous interactions are more effective than formal interactions in developing working relationships. Moreover, González and Mark (2005) emphasized that integration of IM conversation into business environment enhances business communication among employees, colleagues and customers. Eventually, collaborative benefits reduce the cycle time of communication, troubleshooting scenario, improving employees' collaboration, saving cost on communication and traveling expenses.

Presence Awareness

Presence Awareness, knowing whether the online contact is online or temporarily away from their current tasks, is a crucial function to initiate real-time communication with a business partner. This function is generally provided in every platform of IM software which typically shows a list of friends and colleagues who are online (Czerwinski et al., 2000). By

clicking on a name displayed in a small box on the computer screen, the user types a message that pops onto the recipient's screen in seconds.

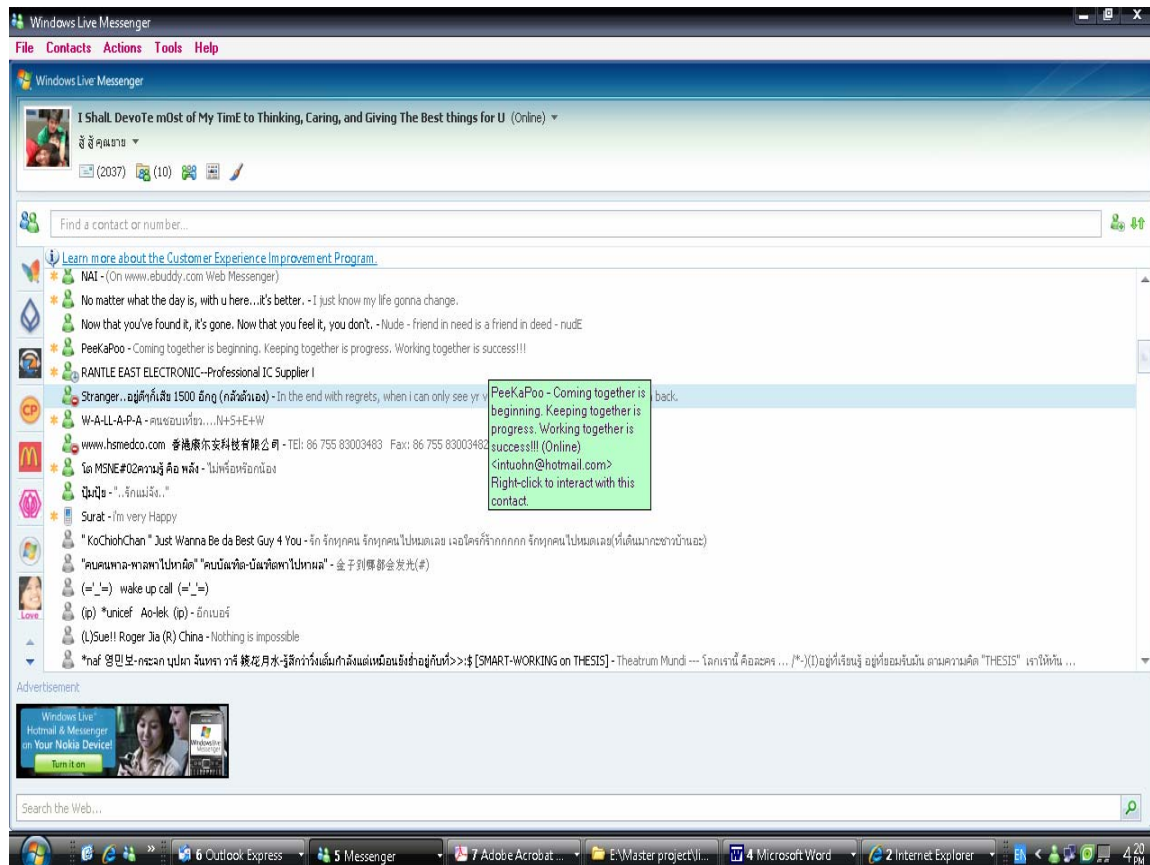


Figure 1 a green button showing user's availability

Employees are able to notice the online status to see other users' availability. The unique presence awareness feature of IM fills some gaps of traditional business communication systems by connecting distant employees, telecommuters, and business partners (Isaacs et al., 2002). IM allows users to select their availability. If a contact is

online status, their current activity is available in different choices such as “busy,” “away,” “out to lunch” or custom descriptions.

Presence awareness helps users notify their availability and decide if they can have discussion. The availability display also increases a communicator’s ability to estimate the likelihood of success in contacting a coworker (Rennecker & Godwin, 2003). For example, an employee who encounters a question and need an urgent help is able to review availability for someone’s support.

This function also allows users to indicate where they are and where/how/when is the best time to contact them. According to Dabbish and Kraut (2003), presence awareness is used to time interruptions and to minimize adverse influence on performance. If the available status shows “busy” or “away,” the users perhaps request to postpone the conversation. Also, ignoring an incoming IM is acceptable; a non-response might simply mean that the person is away from the computer.

In sum, IM messages are normally text-based communications which are short and sent line-by-line. This typical communication of live chatting is similar to a telephone conversation. The communication through IM is more economic than other communication tools: phones and faxes. The speed of IM communication is also faster and closer to real time than emails and exchanging letters. As a result, this effective communication is used in brief questions, clarifications, coordination, scheduling, and other tasks. IM integrates into business communication and enables users to do multiple tasks in their business. Employees are able to send messages through IM display, while they are speaking with other business people over the phone used. In addition, using IM develops a better understanding and improves relationships among the users, thereby helping in building

stronger teams. The last function of IM in presence awareness helps the employees see their contacts' available status.

Concerns of Instant Messaging (IM) Use

Today the use of IM is widely available in workplaces because employees are able to install the software by themselves without acknowledging or involving IT administrators and executives. Therefore, it may adversely affect because the employee's use of IM is unmonitored. In this part, concerns which are risks, threats and awareness for the use of IM in workplace will be explored.

For personal communications, American Management Association revealed a survey in the year 2004 that 94 percent of IM users at work used it for business purposes but 58 percent of respondents admitted to use IM applications into their personal communications and issues (Swartz, 2005). According to this incorrect behavior regarding business function, Schwarz (2007) concerned that the employees might pay more attention to their personal matters rather than to working issues. Ultimately, these employees may lose their concentration on working procedures and may not be able to finish their jobs in committed time.

Furthermore, the effect of IM on employees is also considered. Ditzler, Stillfield and Wang (2007) revealed their findings in using IM at workplace among the employees. They found that sometimes most IM users were imposed to respond the receiving messages, whereas they were unable to respond such messages due to their personal limitations such as hard issues and complex tasks. Moreover, the findings revealed that IM users were

frequently disturbed by knowing their online status from the presence awareness function. Additionally, the finding also revealed problems of lacking privacy from using IM because other IM users easily viewed other profiles which were in the other users' private space.

The incoming messages and downloading of attached files are the main cause of this problem (Esker, 2006). According to Swartz (2005), IM unsecures a window chatting program by letting unverified dangerous viruses posed to network security, personal computer and corporate software systems. This disadvantage is a cause of concern since the spread of virus files cannot be blocked by firewalls. Sending IM transmission through the online network is not secured because few IM applications cannot protect the session (Valiente, C. Jr. 2006). As a result, IM is able to attack and enter the corporate network when provides a way for virus transfer (Valiente, C. Jr. 2006).

A potential disadvantage of IM use comes with the idea that IM has open communication. This open communication can lead to disastrous effects on an organization. The use of IM to transmit inappropriate language, adult contents, or harassing materials between IM users can result in legal liability for the company whose resources are used (Valiente, C. Jr. 2006). This disadvantage can be solved by organizational policies.

One of the other concerns of IM use comes with the exposure of the user's internal IP address. When IM users engage in file sharing, the user's network address is revealed due to the design of the IM protocol (Valiente, C. Jr. 2006).

Consequently, it is essential that the executives and IT administrators recognize these mentioned concerns and plan to place IM application into their companies. They

must set up an appropriate policy in the use of IM for business communication to obtain highest benefits from its applications.

Implementation of Instant Messaging (IM) in Meditop Co., Ltd.

With greater benefits of IM than other electronic devices, its uses as a communication tool are widely preferred by users in a workplace in Thailand companies.

Meditop Co.,Ltd. has been established for 25 years as a leading company of healthcare equipment and supplies in various fields such as diagnostic, cardiovascular, dialysis , scientific, critical care and optical. The company provides a wide range of products with high technology, reliability and high efficiency to serve various needs of doctors, nurses and scientists. The customers are well-known hospitals, medical colleges, universities, research centers and industrial laboratories nation wide.

The representative products are imported from overseas suppliers in various countries; therefore, employees have to communicate and exchange business information consistently. The use of IM is another alternative for business communication in giving faster responses without communication costs. As IM provides a lot of benefits, it also has some potential concerns for the company. Consequently, the use of IM in this company is limited to only employees who are responsible to communicate with the suppliers and customers such as senior managers, sale managers, product specialists, and international coordinators.

These employees always communicate through IM connections using English with the customers; however, they prefer to respond to their colleagues using Thai Language through IM communication. IM is a real-time communication so the customers are from

countries in the Asia Pacific region such as China, India, Malaysia and Philippines. This typical communication will not lead a time-zone problem to the IM users with Europe and American customers. These IM users send the emails which is an asynchronous method.

Microsoft Windows program is an office window program which is widely used in the workplaces so it is popular for its instant messaging. MSN (Microsoft Networks) Messenger certainly becomes a well known IM use among employees in Meditop Co.,Ltd. because whenever Microsoft Windows is installed in a computer, MSN Messenger program is automatically installed. However, other platforms such as Yahoo Messenger, AOL and Skype are also steadily implemented to business organizations to serve a business requirement.

With these mentioned benefits of IM towards business, the executives are important to consider implementing IM into the employees' daily communication to obtain these benefits and facilitate their employees' communication.

Previous Research

Previous research on the use of IM towards business environments has revealed its benefits and some aspects of potential concerns to the business organizations as follows.

Garrett and Danziger (2007) studied a widespread belief that instant messaging leads to an increase in disruption. The study was conducted against the argument that the use of IM led to increase interruption and reduce productivity. The study analyzed empirically the experiences of contemporary U.S. employees with IM application. The result showed that IM was often used to reduce work interruptions from telephone, e-mail, and

face-to-face conversations. Moreover, the use of IM led the users to have more conversations on the computer, but briefer ones. As a result, these researchers concluded that the employees who used instant messaging on the job were reported to have less interruption than others are disruptive applications.

Cho, Trier, and Kim (2005) focused on the effectiveness of IM use in developing and improving working relationships. This study examined if IM use helped the employees of a Korean tire manufacturing company improve their working relationships with their coworkers within organizational boundaries and departments, across departments, and outside the organization. Finally, it was concluded that relationships both inside and outside the company improved after adopting IM to their work.

Sachpazidis et al., (2006) explored IM benefits in a medical network environment. Their findings showed that real time communication helped communication among doctors, pharmacists and other medical teams. These people used the function of presence awareness to check their colleagues' availability. It was concluded that IM might be a convenient way of chatting over the internet for any people.

Ditzler, Stillfield and Wang (2007) conducted a study of using IM in a workplace. They studied IM users' feelings and distractions while using IM at works. Referring to the negative concept of implementing IM into business, they found that some IM users felt obligated to respond to messages. Moreover, they were easily disturbed when other users noticed their online status.

In summary, this chapter gave the definitions and explained the applications of IM as a business communication in the workplace. Studies focus on the popularity of IM benefits in business: real-time communication, minimal work interruption, team collaboration

and presence awareness and also explore concerns of IM use which impact to the individual work and the company. Participants of this study were the employees of Meditop Co.,Ltd., who used IM on a daily basis for communicating and dealing business with their customers and overseas suppliers. The last part of this chapter presented previous research based on the benefits and the concerns of IM use in workplaces.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological procedures employed in this study. It is divided into four main parts: participants of the study, the research instrument, questionnaire conduction, and data analysis.

Participants of the Study

Participants were purposively selected from 30 employees in Meditop Co.,Ltd., who usually spontaneously responded to overseas suppliers and customers through the use of instant messaging (IM). As IM is a real-time communication, the customers were from countries in Asia Pacific which were in the same time-zone such as China, India, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Of the total number of IM users, these IM users were 17 female and 13 male. They were 11 IM users in International Coordination department followed by Diagnostic department (5), Cardiovascular department (5), Critical Care department (3), Dialysis Supplies department (2), and Scientific Department (2). With regard to participants' positions of these IM users in Meditop Co.,Ltd. were eight international coordinators, seven managers, six product specialists, six senior executives and other three secretaries and sale coordinators. This is because the international coordinators are responsible to keep in touch with the overseas customers and follow up sale information with the overseas

suppliers. IM was used as an important tool to facilitate their rapid communication on a daily basis.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data. The questionnaire was written in English because English was a medium of communication among participants in the workplace under study. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants in the beginning of September, 2009 and collected at the end of September, 2009. This specific timeframe allowed these participants to have enough time to review the benefits from IM use. Moreover, the participants were asked about the potential concerns of IM use that impacted on their individual work and the company. The questionnaire consisted of four main parts as follows:

The first part asked about the participants' division and current position.

The second part included reasons, frequencies and preferable platforms of IM used in the workplace.

In the third and fourth parts, the participants were asked to show the level of agreement or disagreement in using IM in the workplace. The rating score is of typical five-level Likert items (Rensis Likert, 1932) : strongly agree (5), agree (4), uncertain (neither agree nor disagree) (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1).

The final part was for the participants to give further comments or suggestions which are related to this study. The respondents were able to give benefits and problems which may result from IM use in their communication.

Validity of the Questionnaire

To ascertain validity, the questionnaire was developed on the basis of literature and research reviews. The draft questionnaire was then modified and/or revised, based on the suggestion of the advisor and four experts who were English specialists and senior managers.

Data Analysis

After the questionnaire was collected, the researcher had reviewed the general information of the participants to study their experience in IM use. Additionally, in the third and fourth parts, frequency of respondents was presented in percentage in order to analyze this significant data.

In summary, this chapter presented the methodology of this study by describing the participants and the procedures used in the collection and analysis of the data, and the data analysis of the study. The questionnaire was designed to comply with the purpose of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study in benefits and concerns of IM use at Meditop Co.,Ltd. and is divided into four parts:

- 1) Employees' attitudes towards benefits of IM use
- 2) Employees' attitudes towards concerns of IM use
- 3) Use of IM at Meditop Co.,Ltd.
- 4) Additional comments from the participants.

Employee Attitudes towards Benefits of IM Use

With reference to the research question this section presents the findings of how the IM users at Meditop Co.,Ltd. think about benefits of IM use for workplace communication. The respondents were asked to indicate their ideas on the following benefits: 'real time communication', 'minimal work interruption', 'team collaboration', and 'presence awareness'. They were then requested to rate level of agreement based on typical five-level Likert items (Rensis Likert, 1932): strongly agree (5), agree (4), uncertain (neither agree nor disagree) (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1). In order to provide a more in depth understanding of the findings, the extents of agreement were explained as: the most important (strongly agree), important (agree), neutral (uncertain), slightly important (disagree) and least important (strongly disagree). The data gathered in this part were presented in percentage.

TABLE 1 EMPLOYEES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS BENEFITS OF IM USE

IM Benefits	Respondents' number (%)				
	5	4	3	2	1
Real time Communication					
1. Real time message and rapid communication with a customer and a contact person.	84	16	-	-	-
2. Users can send and receive files, photos, and video clips easily.	67	33	-	-	-
3. IM provides a more immediate response than email.	70	23	7	-	-
Minimal Work Interruption					
4. Enables users to integrate communication with phone calls and emails, "Multi-tasking".	7	13	3	57	20
5. Allows the users to have multiple discussions in communicating with other IM users.	17	60	3	17	3
Team Collaboration					
6. Facilitates remote communication to users in individual communication and team productivity.	33	53	-	7	7
7. Helps users save communication costs from phone calls, traveling, and fax transmission.	60	40	-	-	-
Presence Awareness					
8. Enables user awareness of availability from online status.	90	10	-	-	-
9. Enables user expectation of immediate response from availability status.	63	31	-	3	3

Firstly, in response to benefits of real-time communication (see question1-3), (84%) considered that receiving real-time messages and having rapid communication was the most important aspect of workplace communication and the remaining 16% agreed. To further explain this finding, these IM users thought that doing effective business required rapid information exchange and real-time communication to ensure efficient work and communication at work. In addition, this finding was consistent with Esker (2006), who

asserted IM is an effective way for employees to spontaneously communicate instantaneously and get work done.

With regard to the benefit of easy sending and receiving of attached files, the majority (67%) of respondents viewed this benefit as very important to support their workplace communication and 33% of the respondents also agreed with this. According to Muller et al. (2003), IM use is more convenient for sending and receiving private texts, file-sharing, and voice and video features with multiple participants simultaneously in the workplace.

The third benefit findings for real-time communication revealed that 70% of the respondents felt IM response was faster than email use. Today employees at Meditop Co.,Ltd. officially use email in their communication, but IM is increasingly used to facilitate work completion. This is because IM is synchronous communication (Herbsleb et.al., 2002) which enables the users to receive an instantaneous response, while email is traditionally asynchronous communication, which means a longer time to receive a response from contacts.

The second area of IM use in minimal work interruption asked the respondents to indicate their thoughts i.e. multi-tasking and multiple discussions. In terms of integration of IM with phone and email (Multi-tasking) 57% believed that this benefit was slightly important to support their workplace communication, whereas 13% of the respondents agreed with this benefit. This finding was different from Garret & Danziger (2007) who noted that the employers who used IM as their daily communication tool had less interruption than the other employers who did not use it. When considering the interview response here, it is

evident employees complained that they felt very confused and disorganized in talking on the phone or writing email with IM use

The next benefit of minimal work interruption focused on multi-discussion. The respondents were asked how they thought about having discussions on IM with many IM users at the same time. The finding revealed that the majority (60%) agreed with this. They further noted that this benefit did not result in confusion in the IM users while they were talking with several IM users at the same time. This finding was consistent with González & Mark (2005), who proposed a function of multi-discussions in IM communication to break through communication barriers. They indicated that the employees were able to communicate with many online contacts. This would enhance workplace communication across different issues at the same time.

The third area of questions (6-7) focused on benefit of team collaboration which enabled IM users to have easier remote communication with their colleagues and customers. The finding showed that (53%) agreed to use IM to communicate with their business partners in remote locations and 33% also strongly agreed with this. This finding was in accord with González & Mark (2005) who studied integration of IM use in the workplace. These researchers concluded that the use of IM in daily business would enhance communication among employees, colleagues and customers. In this way it would save communication expenses for the users such as oversea calls or traveling expenses for international activities such as service training, distributor meetings and annual conferences.

The forth area of IM use (question 8-9) asked the IM users what they think about benefit of presence awareness (online status) in their work. The finding was that all IM users in the company agreed with this functional provision. They pointed out that seeing

other available statuses helped the users maximize efficiency in response times. They also had an impression of receiving responses quickly.

Employee Attitudes towards Concerns of IM Use at Work

The findings aim to respond to the second research question on employee attitudes towards concerns of IM use at Meditop Co.,Ltd. The participants were asked to view these questions which reflect impact of IM on their individual work and company work. The following table presents concerns on IM use as they impact the company in questions no. 1-3, whereas the concerns on IM impact on the users themselves are reflected in questions no. 4-7. The findings are presented in percentages as follows:

TABLE 2 EMPLOYEES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS CONCERNS OF IM USE

IM Concerns	Respondents' number (%)				
	5	4	3	2	1
Company					
1. Distracts users from their current jobs or other communication tools such as emails and phones.	23	40	-	20	17
2. Users use for personal purpose.	43	30	10	10	7
3. Virus transfer from attached files.	70	17	-	10	3
Individual					
4. Imposes on users to make an immediate decision or immediately respond to the receiving messages.	37	33	3	17	10
5. Disturbs users when another user sees their online status.	23	46	7	17	7
6. Users lack privacy because other users can view their created profile.	-	3	7	53	37
7. Chatting for a long time can also impact users' health.	60	37	3	-	-

In response to the first concern of IM use, that IM would distract users from their current jobs, (63%) revealed that they sometimes were distracted. In contrast, 37% felt that they were relatively well able to maintain work focus.

With regard to the second concern of IM use, 43% of respondents admitted that they sometimes used IM for chatting on personal issues with their colleagues or the customers and 30% were similarly affected. However, 17% of the respondents never used IM off the business issues. Himes (2004) indicated IM use for personal issues had a large impact on employee productivity in the workplace. He suggested that the executives or managers should focus on individual communication through IM and find an appropriate policy for IM communication or they might purchase a security software program to prevent this impact.

The third concern to the company was virus transfer to the company software system. Most respondents (70%) took this very seriously and 17% agreed with this impact. It was found that some respondents (13%) did not think that this concern impacted their work because they believed the company protection system would be sufficient. Valiente (2006) suggested that the company should install a strong anti-virus program and ensure constant searches of users' personal disks for known viruses and Trojans to lessen this impact,

The questions also asked IM users to explore individual user impact, such as personal feelings and health problems. The fourth question asked whether IM use imposed on users to make an immediate decision or promptly respond to messages received. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents stated that they felt imposed upon to respond to the IM messages and 33% of the respondents agreed. The interview data suggests

customers usually forced them to make an immediate decision on very tough issues, such as price list, payment terms and delivery date. These issues concerned other divisions, such as the financial division for price lists, accounting division for payment terms and production division for delivery dates.

One benefit of IM is that the online users are able to see one and other contacts once they activate IM 'presence awareness'. However, the fifth area of concern showed that 46% of the respondents felt disturbed due to this function. Also, 23% of the respondents strongly agreed with this concern, whereas 24% of the respondents did not feel disturbed from presence awareness.

The sixth area of concern was IM users' lack of privacy due to online visibility and ease of access to personal information. However, the findings showed that most respondents (53%) disagreed with this concern and 37% also strongly disagreed. Thus, 90% of respondents consider this to have no serious impact on their work. They realize that their IP address and personal information is disclosed publicly when they signing up for the IM program or any other online service.

The seventh concern focused on the IM users' health. For example, long chats could result in backache eye strain. A number of respondents (97%) were serious about this impact.

Use of Instant Messaging (IM) at Meditop Co., Ltd.

This part of the questionnaire presents respondent data regarding frequency of IM use in the workplace, the most preferable IM platform, and why they consider implementing IM in workplace communication. This part was very useful to the study to learn how Meditop Co., Ltd employees use IM in their daily business.

Firstly, frequency of IM use in the Meditop Co., Ltd. shows (97%) used IM to facilitate their communication more than once a week, whereas (3%) used IM less than once a week. This indicates the employees have to frequently communicate with overseas customers and suppliers.

Second, with regard to the IM platform in the Meditop Co.,Ltd., it is possible that the Microsoft Office Program automatically installed the MSN program when loading its licensed software into each computer. This automatic provision makes computer users familiar with MSN Messenger rather than Yahoo Messenger or Skype for example.

Finally, on reasons for using IM in Meditop Co., Ltd., a number of the respondents indicated need for a quick response (97%) followed by immediate talking (67%), saving communication costs (53%), socialization (37%) and avoiding face-to-face communication (20%).

Additional Comments from the Respondents

In the last part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to give further comments on the problem of IM use at work. Due to these useful comments, the executives have applicable information to help develop effectiveness in daily communications.

Regarding the first problem, (83%) claimed that they were unable to save and copy received IM messages compared to email, which was easier. These respondents noted that sometimes they needed to keep a record of incoming messages as business evidence. The IM software system did not provided for this.

Another problem was emoticons (textual representation of facial expressions to indicate mood or emotion). Some respondents (13%) revealed that they were not familiar or did not fully understand the exact meaning in each emoticon.

In terms of linguistic ability, (60%) were seriously concerned about their English competence because this impact might lead to misunderstanding in the overall messages. In addition, 33% claimed that sometimes they did not understand “sophisticated” business terms.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusion, implications limitations, and recommendations for further studies.

Conclusion of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate employee attitudes towards benefits of IM use in the workplace which include real-time communication, minimal work interruption, team collaboration and presence awareness.

According to real-time communication benefit findings all IM users at Meditop Co.,Ltd. agreed 'rapid communication', and 'easy sending / receiving of files' and 'faster response time vs. email' were very important to their work. They further noted that 'receiving information rapidly' and 'getting faster responses' were essential in making work more convenient and successful. All IM users also considered presence awareness (online status) as a very important function. In addition, presence awareness allowed for a feel of a potentially quick response time when seeing others' online status.

All of the respondents strongly agreed that IM use enabled them to save on communication costs and traveling expenses. Most IM users disagreed on the benefit of minimal work interruption 'with respect to multi-tasking. They complained that integration with other communication tools such as phones and email made them slower and confused.

The second purpose of this study was to explore the employee attitudes towards concerns about IM use in the workplace. In particular, most IM users at Meditop Co., Ltd. thought that IM use contributed to virus files being uploaded to their computers and company system. In the area of individual impact, it was widely recognized health concerns were a problem. They indicated backache and eye strain resulted from extended periods of IM use. Most IM users did not consider privacy (personal information) a serious concern.

In summary, most respondents expressed 'real-time communication' and 'presence awareness' were very important benefits of IM to support their daily work, whereas there were concerns about virus transfer and health.

Implications of the Study

The findings are consistent with contributions of IM as workplace communication at Meditop Co.,Ltd. IM use has changed the way people communicate with people inside and outside the organization. IM communication helps to maintain relationships with customers and other business partners. By implementing this real time communication, business users will gain in faster response times and immediacy of services provided. Instantaneous communication which enables immediate support and rapid information exchange means transaction costs are reduced and value is added for business partners and customers. Thus, this communication channel has a highly positive effect on customer satisfaction with respect to service.

The findings on IM use at work demonstrate potential for employees and management to better understand effective strategies for workplace communication after

they employ IM in an organization. Although IM provides a lot of benefits towards a business and communication, there are some concerns which impact individual work and the organization as a whole. Consequently, the executives and IT division at Meditop Co.,Ltd. should set an appropriate policy on IM use in the workplace such as matching target customers, limiting duration of IM discussion, and securing practices of downloaded files. This safe use policy would help the IM users obtain the benefits and keep away from inappropriate use.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study are as follows:

1. The participants in this study were limited to a small group of participants only 30 employees at the Meditop Co.,Ltd. who regularly used IM at work. To accurately examine the effectiveness of IM use in the workplace, the participants of the study should extend to customers. In this way, results would more accurately represent the business environment.
2. This study was limited to only seven questions of concern on IM use, whereas more concerns were discovered, e.g. language ability, textual expression (emoticons) and technical terms. In order to more accurately explore concerns of IM use, these areas could be addressed to add more detail to the data on employee perception of IM use at work.
3. In order to receive in-depth information on IM use, other research instruments such as interviews and opened ended questioning may be used. Beyond benefits and concerns of IM use, other theories on IM use may be examined to further investigate employee attitudes.

Recommendations for Further Studies

Based on the findings, the following areas for further research are suggested:

1. This study focused on Meditop Co.,Ltd. which is a medical international trading company. Further study should seek other business sectors, for example international business (import-export), hotel business (online reservation), industrial business (electronics and textiles). In the business completion, these mentioned businesses are required rapid information and real time communication so the results may reveal different perceptions of IM use in the workplace communication.

2. This study examined only the employees' attitudes and did not investigate customer feedback, so the findings did not encompass all industry players. Further study should review feedback on IM use from the customers and the overseas suppliers for a comparative analysis in the effectiveness of IM use in business.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Benefits and Concerns: Employees' Communication

via Instant Messaging in the Workplace

This questionnaire is designed for a graduate master project in the Business English for International Communication Program at Srinakarinwirot University. To accomplish this survey, the researcher would like to ask for your kind cooperation completes this questionnaire. The information received from this survey will be kept confidentially and used for academic purposes only.

Part I: General Information

Please select the appropriate answer by putting a mark ✓ in ☐ provided or write down your answer in the space provided.

1. Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Age ☐ 19-25 years ☐ 36-40 years
 ☐ 26-30 years ☐ 41-45 years
 ☐ 31-35 years ☐ 46-50 years
 ☐ More than 50 years

3. Division
 ☐ International coordination
 ☐ Diagnostic Department
 ☐ Dialysis Supplies Department
 ☐ Cardiovascular Department
 ☐ Scientific Instruments Department
 ☐ Critical Care Department
 ☐ Optical Department

4. Position

- ☐ Senior Executives
☐ Sale Manager
☐ Product Specialist
☐ International Coordinator
☐ Other, please specify

Part II: The Use of Instant Messaging (IM)

Please select the appropriate answer by putting a mark ✓ in a box ☐ provided.

5. How often do you use IM for business communication?

- ☐ Once a month
☐ Once a week
☐ Twice a week
☐ More than twice a week
☐ Everyday

6. What IM platforms do you use for business communication?

- ☐ MSN Messenger
☐ Yahoo Messenger
☐ ICQ
☐ Skype
☐ Other, please specify

7. What are the reasons of using IM in the workplace?

(You can select more than one item)

- ☐ Building socialization with customers and colleges
☐ Immediate talking with customers and oversea suppliers
☐ Getting a quick response or simple answers
☐ Avoiding face-to-face conversation
☐ Saving money on phone calls and fax transmission
☐ Other, please specify

Part III: Benefits of IM Use toward Business Communication

Please check in a box ☐ which best describes your level of agreement of each benefit of using IM in the workplace.

(5 –Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Uncertain, 2 – Disagree, 1 – Strongly Disagree)

Benefits	Level of Agreement				
	5	4	3	2	1
Real time Communication					
1. IM is a real time message and rapid communication with a customer and a contact person.					
2. IM allows users to send and receive files, photos, and video clips easily.					
3. IM gives immediate response than email.					
Minimal Work Interruption					
4. IM enables users integrate this communication with phone calls and emails, "Multi-tasks".					
5. IM allows the users to have multi discussion while communicating with other IM users.					
Team Collaboration					
6. IM facilitates remote communication to users in individual communication and team productivity.					
7. IM helps users save communication costs from phone calls, traveling, and fax transmission.					
Presence Awareness					
8. IM enables users know each other availability from their online status.					
9. IM enables users expect to receive an immediate response from their available status.					

Part IV: Concerns of IM Use toward Works

Please check in a box ☐ which best describes your level of agreement of each concerns of IM use in the workplace.

(5 –Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Uncertain, 2 – Disagree, 1 – Strongly Disagree)

Concerns	Level of Agreement				
	5	4	3	2	1
Company					
1. IM distracts users from their current jobs or other communication tools such as emails and phones.					
2. IM users use for personal purpose.					
3. IM bypasses virus transfer from the attached files.					
Employees					
4. IM imposes users to make an immediate decision or immediately respond to the receiving messages.					
5. IM disturbs users when another user sees their online status.					
6. IM users lack privacy because other users can view their created profile.					
7. Chatting for a long time can also impact the users' health.					

Part V: Additional comments for IM Use in the workplace

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Thank your very much for your time devoted to completing this questionnaire.

VITAE

VITAE

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