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CAUSE 1997 Conference Presentation
Can We Talk?
The Faculty and the CIO: Conversations about Communication

By: Lawrence B. Coleman
Professor of Physics and
1995-97 Chair, Academic Senate
and
Carole A. Barone
Associate Vice Chancellor -- Information Technology
University of California, Davis

When two groups need to work together, real communication is critical. This is even more important when the two cultures are as disparate as the faculty and the typical university Information Technology (IT) organization.

We are departing from the usual Track Session Presentation format to present a series of short “street theater” scenes that illustrate some of the ways in which faculty and Information Technology units clash. Each act will be followed by group discussion. In this way our presentation will allow attendees to join in, and contribute to, our conversations about communication. Because of the interactive presentation style, this pre-conference paper will only outline the scenes we will present and give only a brief comment of the theme of each scene.

We have found that in many apparently different problems the root is a lack of true communication and the collision between two very different cultures. The technology culture is sufficiently different from the faculty culture as to many times make good communication difficult.

Each of our short “plays” illustrates a typical interaction between a faculty member and the campus IT organization.

Scenario 1: Hypertext, Hypermedia, Hyperlinks...... HYPERBOLE!

The technology industry sells itself with a great deal of hyperbole. Newer, faster, easier to use! The campus IT organization with one foot in the technology world follows this culture and presents to the campus both a need to be at the leading edge and a view of the technology as simple yet powerful.

This apparent ease of use leads to trouble when the typical faculty member is led down the garden path to the leading (bleeding) edge. When problems arise and the faculty member cannot get the project or lecture to work, IT takes the blame.

Scenario 2: Annoyed or Just Paranoid?
Here we deal with the issue that faculty want IT to serve them, while IT wants to be viewed as professionals who assist faculty in their responsibilities.

**Scenario 3: World Views Collide.**

Cultures of IT and the faculty collide in their respective views of the campus network and the world wide web. IT views the network as a communication system, a utility like the phone system. While faculty see it as the library. Attempts to charge for network access lead to confrontation.