



Online Communications in Transnational Trade Union Projects – Experiences with the int.unity Project

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The int.unity Project

Project duration: 11/2001 – 01/2004

Project coordinator: ver.di – Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft
(United Services Union) (Berlin)

Project partners: Communication Workers Union (London)
OrbiTeam Software GmbH (Bonn)
IAI – Institute of Applied Information Science at
the University of Saarland (Saarbrücken)
Union Network International Europa (Brussels)
associated partner

Project funding: European Commission, ESF Article 6

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The Idea

- Globalization / Europeanization demand a new quality of international trade union work.
- International trade union work
 - ➔ Demands continuous cooperation in transnational project teams
 - ➔ Is hindered by spatial distances and language barriers
 - ➔ Reaches time and financial limits in its traditional forms (journeys, meetings, conferences)
 - ➔ Internet, language (translation) technology enable virtual, geographical dispersed, multilingual trade union communities
- ➔ int.unity - Building up an **int**ernational trade union comm**unity** in the net

The Aims

■ Political

- Intensification and increased effectiveness of international trade union cooperation by networking the actors and lowering language barriers.

■ Contextual

- Exchange of analyses, ideas, concepts on current problems in trade union work.

■ Technical

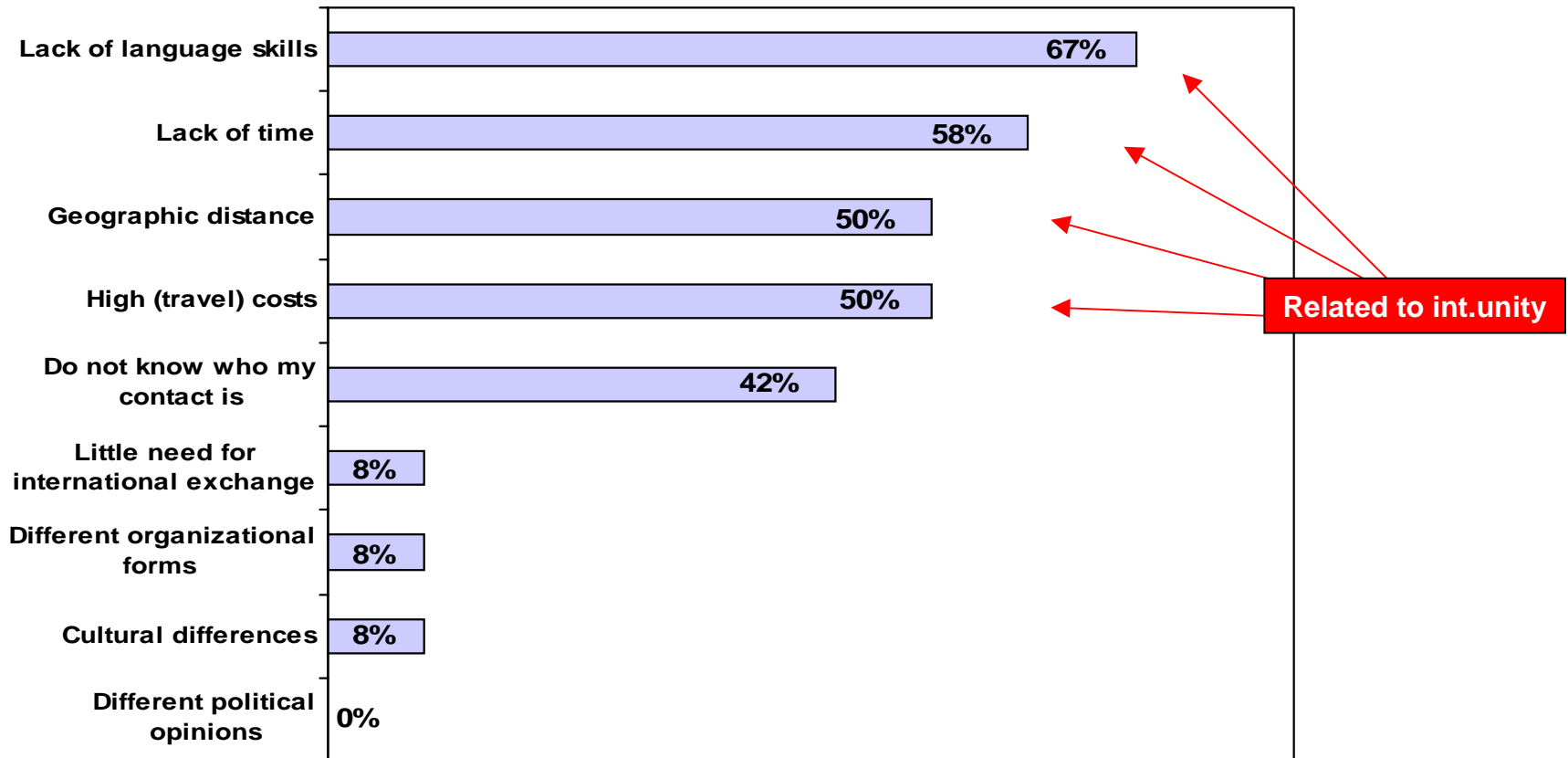
- Integration of language (translation) technology in a web-based cooperation platform (BSCW - Basic Support for Cooperative Work)

Actions

- Set-up of three transnational trade union project teams on the topics of
 - trade unions and “New Economy”
 - trade unions and the Internet (“e-union”)
 - trade unions and European Works Councils
- Bilingual cooperation – in each native language - in virtual workspaces in the net
- Testing, adapting and optimizing the technologies used
 - Cooperation platform (BSCW)
 - Language technology (automated translation, language control)

Barriers to Transnational Trade Union Work

Selected results from the int.unity user survey



? [Question: "For you, what are the primary impediments to international cooperation with trade unions / trade unionists?" (strongly agree / agree)]

The Contribution of Modern ICT to Overcoming Barriers to International Trade Union Work

Barriers	Contribution of ICT to overcoming this barrier	Advantage of ICT over conventional forms of cooperation
Distance	All digital information can be transferred via the Internet around the world in seconds.	Supplements verbal (face-to-face) communication with electronic (written) communication.
Time	The Internet enables efficient, asynchronous communications.	Travel and hotel times are reduced with virtual cooperation. Asynchronous communication makes continuous international work chronologically compatible with other regular duties.
Costs	Internet use is low cost.	High (travel) costs of international work can be saved with virtual communication / cooperation.
Language	Modern language technologies can facilitate / enable the overcoming of language barriers.	Foreign language skills are linked to persons and must be learned over a long period. Language technologies are usable by anyone.

The Need for International Trade Union Work

Selected results from the int.unity user survey

- Relevance of international trade union work for daily work
 - Very important: 33%
 - Important: 17%
 - More or less: 33%

- Desire for international cooperation in own work area
 - Should increase considerably: 17%
 - Should increase somewhat: 75%
 - Should remain the same: 8%

Functionality of the Online Communication

Selected results from the int.unity user survey

- **Intensity** (number of contributions written)
 - ➔ 58% wrote more than 5 contributions
 - ➔ 25% wrote between 2 and 5 contributions
 - ↻ 75% would have liked to communicate more in the project
 - 58% were kept from doing so due to other activities outside of int.unity
 - 33% found the effort of using the int.unity technology an impediment.
- **Interactivity** (reactions to contributions by another participant)
 - ➔ 8% reacted more than 5 times to a contribution
 - ➔ 58% reacted between 2 and 5 times to another contribution
 - ↻ 67% would have wished for more reactions from other participants to their own contributions, 8% were satisfied with the reaction frequency.

Functionality of the Online Communication

Selected results from the int.unity user survey

■ Evaluation of the communication contents

- Interesting and informative: 75%
- Very suited to the topic of our discussion: 67%
- Understandable in content: 58%
- On a high level of expertise: 58%
- Directly related to a problem: 50%
- Relevant to my trade union work: 42%

? [Question: What do you think of the contributions put up on int.unity Internet platform? The contributions I am familiar with are, on the whole ... (strongly agree / agree)]

Quality on the Online Communication

Selected results from the int.unity user survey

■ Evaluation of online communication

- Is an **inexpensive** opportunity for international communication (92%)
 - Is a **time-saving** opportunity for international cooperation (83%)
 - Can prepare for in-person meetings on an international level (83%)
 - Enables **expert knowledge sharing** on a high level (75%)
 - Is a good supplement to in-person meetings (67%)
 - Is an effective opportunity to come into contact with other colleagues (67%)
 - Can often replace in-person meetings on an international level /
Can provide far better work results than in-person meetings (8%)
- ? [Cooperation via an Internet platform is a new type of international cooperation between trade unions. What do you think of this kind of cooperation? **Knowledge sharing via the virtual network of experts in the int.unity project** ... (strongly agree / agree)]