The three papers presented herein reflect two important directions for distributed group support research. The first is a focus on what has been a significant but largely implicit aspect of research to date. The second is the growth of investigations concerned with distributed support issues in real organizations.

Over the past decade, social interaction has been at the core of distributed group support systems research. Studies presented in this mini-track have been concerned with a variety of communication issues, especially investigating the effects of technology support on social structures that arise from social interaction. For instance we have witnessed processes such as cohesion, conflict management, group development, satisfaction, and others be influenced by various types and aspects of technological intervention.

Fundamental to many of these investigations and to collaboration in general is the role of communication. After all, it is through social interaction—in communication in its myriad forms—that these and other social structures develop. Despite the centrality of communication however, most studies have treated it as a “black box” and have not examined it explicitly nor have they looked at those activities and phenomena that constitute communication.

Two of the papers being presented in this session seek to bridge that gap. The first, "The Impacts of Delphi Communication Structure on Small and Medium Sized Asynchronous Groups: Preliminary Results" by Cho, Turoff, and Hiltz, examines the effect of using a specific communication structure in concert with a particular technology. The Delphi method of communicating and sharing ideas is embodied in a specially designed asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) system to see how the two interact to affect the development of a group's judgment. Results suggest that using a Delphi communication structure may generate more unique ideas than when using an unstructured approach.

The second paper also looks at a particular communication issue in the context of CMC. In their paper, "Politeness Theory and Computer-Mediated Communication: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Analyzing Relational Messages.", Morand and Ocker present a compelling discussion detailing how various 'politeness phenomena' signal intentions and emotions in social interaction. The paper then explains how the expression of several of these phenomena might be mediated in CMC. More importantly however, the authors describe the relationship of politeness and CMC to outcomes like cohesion and communication effectiveness while also explaining researchers can use linguistic analysis to observe and measure such relationships. Their results offer an exciting direction for distributed group support and particularly CMC researchers.

Rather than examining specific communication systems and issues, the final paper in the current DGSS session is more concerned with macro-level issues. The study tries to determine what types of distributed support systems tend to actually get used in live firms. Bajwa, Lewis, and Pervan assess organizational adoption of various collaboration technologies in their paper titled "Adoption of Collaboration Information Technologies in Australian and US Organizations: A Comparative Study."

While some of the results in the final paper may seem predictable (for instance system complexity may impede adoption), nonetheless, some of the related factors the paper suggests might be more surprising. Regardless of the conclusions the authors draw, the paper is significant because it presents findings from a number of organizations in two different cultures.

We hope you'll once again enjoy and find informative the papers presented in this session of the Distributed Group Support Systems Mini-track.