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THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF ICT

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THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF ICT

As it is known from time immemorial that everything in life is like the two side of a coin, there is always a positive and negative side of every phenomenon. But whether the effect is positive or negative the effects of Information Communication Technology (ICT) is far reaching and cannot be overemphasized. The Effects of ICT lens looks at how our lives have been changed, for better and for worse, by the impact of ICT. It includes both positive effects and negative effects and looks at how individuals organisations and society are affected.

POSITIVE IMPACTS OF ICT

ICT CAN HAVE POSITIVE IMPACTS ON PEOPLE

- **Access to information:** Possibly the greatest effect of ICT on individuals is the huge increase in access to information and services that has accompanied the growth of the Internet. Some of the positive aspects of this increased access are better, and often cheaper, communications, such as VoIP phone and Instant Messaging. In addition, the use of ICT to access information has brought new opportunities for leisure and entertainment, the facility to make contacts and form relationships with people around the world, and the ability to obtain goods and services from a wider range of suppliers.
- **Improved access to education,** e.g. distance learning and on-line tutorials. New ways

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of learning, e.g. interactive multi-media and virtual reality. New job opportunities, e.g. flexible and mobile working, virtual offices and jobs in the communications industry.

- **New tools, new opportunities:** The second big effect of ICT is that it gives access to new tools that did not previously exist. A lot of these are tied into the access to information mentioned above, but there are many examples of stand-alone ICT systems as well:

- a) ICT can be used for processes that had previously been out of the reach of most individuals, e.g. photography, where digital cameras, photo-editing software and high quality printers have enabled people to produce results that would previously required a photographic studio.
- b) ICT can be used to help people overcome disabilities. e.g. screen magnification or screen reading software enables partially sighted or blind people to work with ordinary text rather than Braille.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF ICT ON PEOPLE

- **Job loss:** One of the largest negative effects of ICT can be the loss of a person's job. This has both economic consequences, loss of income, and social consequences, loss of status and self esteem. Job losses may occur for several reasons, including: Manual operations being replaced by automation. e.g. robots replacing people on an assembly line. Job export. e.g. Data processing work being sent to other countries where operating costs are lower. Multiple workers being replaced by a smaller number who are able to do the same amount of work. e.g. A worker on a supermarket checkout can serve more customers per hour if a bar-code scanner linked to a computerized till is used to detect goods instead of the worker having to enter the item and price manually
- **Reduced personal interaction:** Being able to work from home is usually regarded as being a positive effect of using ICT, but there can be negative aspects as well. Most people need some form of social interaction in their daily lives and if they do not get the chance to meet and talk with other people they may feel isolated and unhappy.
- **Reduced physical activity:** A third negative effect of ICT is that users may adopt a more sedentary lifestyle. This can lead to health problems such as obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Many countries have workplace regulations to prevent problems such as repetitive strain injury or eyestrain, but lack of physical exercise is rarely addressed as a specific health hazard.

ICT CAN HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON ORGANIZATIONS

There are three main areas in which organisations are affected by the use of ICT, communications, information management, and security. The three areas have considerable overlap.

- **Communication:** By using ICT has brought a number of benefits to organisations, such as: Cost savings by using e.g. VoIP instead of normal telephone, email / messaging instead of post, video conferencing instead of traveling to meetings, e-commerce web sites instead of sales catalogues. Access to larger, even worldwide, markets. Web sites can be seen from all parts of the world and orders can be taken wherever there is a compatible banking system to process payments, e.g. credit / debit card, Pay-Pal, bank transfer facility. Web sites also have 24 hour opening and are available every day of the year. Flexible response. Organisations with good communications can respond to changes quickly. This may mean better customer relations, an improved supply chain for goods and services, faster development of new products to meet a new opportunity, etc.
- **Information management:** Organisations can benefit from using ICT for information management. e.g. Data mining of customer information to produce lists for targeted

advertising. Improved stock control, resulting in less wastage, better cash flow, etc. Managers are better informed and will have more reliable and up-to-date information on which to base their decisions.

- **Security:** Although the use of ICT can bring its own security issues, see next section, it can also solve or reduce some security problems, e.g. Encryption methods can keep data safe from unauthorized people, both while it is being stored or while it is being sent electronically. This is important for reasons such as data protection legislation or commercial secrecy. ICT enables physical security systems such as fingerprint, iris or facial recognition.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF ICT ON ORGANIZATIONS

- a) **Cost:** the cost of using ICT may cause a number of problems for organisations. A lot of ICT hardware and software is expensive, both to purchase and to maintain. An ICT system usually requires specialist staff to run it and there is also the challenge of keeping up with ever-changing technology. These extra costs should be offset by the positive effects of using ICT, but if an organisation gets its cost-benefit analysis wrong it may lose money.
- b) **Competition:** this is usually thought of as being a good thing, but for some organisations being exposed to greater competition can be a problem. If the organisation is competing for customers, donations, or other means of funding nationally or even internationally, they may lose out to other organisations that can offer the same service for less money.
- c) **Security:** this is always a problem for any organisation that uses ICT. Data must be kept secure, Internet connections must be protected from attack, new viruses and other forms of malware are released nearly every day.

Organisations will usually have legal obligations to protect data such as customer information. Even if the organisation does not have to comply with a specific data protection law it will usually be in the organisation's interest to protect data from rivals.

ICT CAN HAVE POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE SOCIETY

Probably the largest effect that ICT use has on society is allowing members of society to have greatly increased access to information. This can have numerous positive effects, such as:

- a) increasing opportunities for education
- b) improving communication
- c) allowing people to participate in a wider, even worldwide, society.

The positive impact of ICT on education: On the positive side, the use of ICT in education can provide opportunities that might not otherwise exist, such as:

1. distance learning, where students can access teaching materials from all over the world,
2. the ability to perform 'impossible' experiments' by using simulations,
3. the possibility for students to have individual learning programs within a topic, rather than everybody having to do the same thing at the same time at the same pace. More able students can be given more challenging work, less able students can access remedial lessons.

the negative impact of ICT on education:

I. There are large costs involved and poorer students / educational establishments can end up being disadvantaged. This is often referred to as being a factor in the **digital divide**

II. Students, and sometimes teachers, can get hooked on the technology aspect, rather than the subject content. Just because a topic can be taught via ICT, does not mean that it is taught most effectively via ICT.

Even if a subject can be taught effectively via ICT, and there is the money available, it does not always follow that there is any advantage to it. There have been a lot of studies / assessments carried out, looking to see if ICT usage improves learning. The results are mixed. Much simplified, it would appear that:

1. there is some initial impact of using ICT in that students get a wider range of resources and experience some extra motivation.
2. the motivation effect soon fades as using ICT becomes the new normal
3. the wider resource range remains a positive factor
4. there are some well documented positive effects in specific. e.g. simulation and modelling is effective in improving science standards, use of word processing and communication software is effective in developing language skills, but there is concern that large areas of the curriculum are not benefiting.

The manner in which the subject is taught probably has a larger effect than the mere use of ICT. i.e. if the teacher does not adapt their methods in order to make best use of ICT, the students do not gain from that use.

The attitude of the educational establishment also seems to have a greater effect. i.e. the people running them may not have the knowledge and experience, or often the money, to enable widespread and effective use of ICT in their schools.

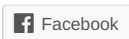
The attitude of society / government can have a large impact of how ICT is perceived and thus how effectively it is used. Countries where the government encourages ICT usage and where the majority of the people use ICT on a daily basis are likely to make better use of ICT in education as well as in the larger society.

On the other hand, in countries where some uses of ICT are restricted because of e.g. political or religious reasons, the use of ICT in education becomes less effective and may even be seen as a threat to those in power and thus actively discouraged

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF ICT ON SOCIETY

Probably the largest effect that ICT use has on society is allowing members of society to have greatly increased access to information. This can have numerous negative effects, such as: causing a digital divide between those who can access information and those who cannot, reducing levels of education and understanding due to the vast amount of incorrect and misleading information that is available causing moral and ethical problems due to the nature of some of the material available.

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