Editorial Preface

User Attitudes: The Forgotten Variable

Have you ever introduced a new computer information system (application) into your organization and the system did not meet its expectations? When evaluating new computer information systems, most evaluators examine the basic components of the system: software, hardware, data, procedures and users. Unfortunately, we normally do an adequate job evaluating the software, hardware, data, and procedures, but we do a poor job evaluating the user component of the system.

Most user classifications include two major categories: expert and novice. I believe that there is a third category that has not been addressed properly: user attitudes toward computer information systems. This category includes: a fear of using the computer, a loss of job security, a resistance to change that a new system would bring, and an unwillingness to adapt to a new environment. Basically, this category is an evaluation of the user’s acceptance, fear, or rejection of the computer information system.

Researchers have identified and discussed issues related to user attitudes under various topics such as human factors and computer technology, and cyberphobia (computer anxiety). I would like to see, however, an active evaluation of user attitudes before and after a new system is introduced into the organization. User attitudes play a major role in performance. In field experiments that I’ve conducted, users with a “poor attitude” toward computer information systems do not increase their performance when using a computer, even when the computer information system was developed to improve user performance. There was a strong correlation between user attitudes and “computer success.” Therefore, if your organization adopts a new computer information system and the system fails to meet organizational expectations, the culprit may not be the hardware, the software, the data or the procedures. The problem may lie in the attitudes of the users.

I recommend assessing the users’ attitude before and after introducing a computer information system in your organization. If the user has a “poor attitude,” can that attitude be changed? If it is the first introduction of computer technology into the environment, consider teaching the users basic terminology and uses of the computer in general. This computer education should include simple tasks developed to promote user success. Users have a great need for success and cannot develop a “good attitude” without successful completion of an automated task. Until users have a good attitude, they will not be able to function to their fullest capacity.

Attitudes do affect performance and should be considered actively when introducing computer technology into the workplace. My experience shows that even the “perfect” information system fails when the users have a poor attitude.

Tonya B. Barrier
Southwest Missouri State University