Chapter 7

Technology Acceptance: Are NFPs or their Workers Different?

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ABSTRACT

During the past decade there has been an increasing interest in research within Not-for-Profit (NFP) organisations. Research has indicated that there are a number of characteristics that make NFPs different from other organisations. This paper considers whether workers within the NFP sector have different attitudes to technology and whether such differences affect the measures used within technology acceptance models. An exploratory study of workers within two NFPs indicated that workers within the service delivery functions of NFPs have different attitudes to technology than workers within the standard business functions of a NFP organisation e.g., marketing. These attitudes affected their perceptions of the use of and ease of technology.

INTRODUCTION

All businesses, including not-for-profit businesses, have had to adapt and become more efficient and effective to survive. Differences exist between for-profit and Not-for-Profit (NFP) organisations. Exemplifying firm type differences within the two sectors are environmental demands, managerial roles, managerial perceptions of external control, and work-related attitudes among employees (Damanpour, 1991; Cunningham et al., 2004; Saidel & Cour, 2003).

The ability of workers within businesses to accept technology is still an important issue, with technology acceptance critical to the ability of organisations to successfully implement technology. With this in mind, a person’s positive or negative attitude towards technology, formed by prior experience with technology, may influence their preferred career choice.
The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989; Davis et al., 1989) is well accepted as a model to predict acceptance of new technology by individuals (Benamati & Rajkumar, 2008; Khalifa & Ning Shen, 2008). TAM argues that a person’s belief about the perceived usefulness of a technological artifact and perceived ease of use of that artifact determine an individual’s behavioral intention to use the artifact. Although TAM has been and still is extensively used, its universality to predict across all situations has recently been called into question (McCoy et al., 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether two groups of people who have entered different careers, have ex ante different attitudes to technology that in turn could affect the variables contained in technology acceptance models. In particular we explore the relationship between attitude, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use in relation to technology for workers within NFP organisations. This research examines whether employees in a NFP organisation and working in service provider roles differ in their attitude, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use in relation to technology from workers within NFP organisations that are working in a traditional business area, e.g., marketing.

The results reveal differences between the groups in relation to the technology acceptance variables. The results may impact the manner in which firms need to handle different users when implementing new technologies.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 1 discusses the theory behind technology acceptance, before linking technology acceptance to career choice. The next sections describe the research method, results and implications. Finally, the conclusions are presented together with the research limitations and directions for future research.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

TAM: A Model of Technology Acceptance

The majority of models investigating technology acceptance focus on an individual’s ability to accept new technology within specific circumstances (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Davis, 1989; Thompson & Higgins, 1991; Davis et al., 1992). The most popular and well-supported of these models is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis et al., 1989). The basic premise of TAM is that an individual’s reaction to using technology, in terms of their perception of ease of use and usefulness, affects their intention to use technology, and ultimately their actual usage. Researchers have extensively tested and found support for TAM’s ability to predict acceptance of new technology by an individual employee (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

Researchers have, however, begun questioning the generalisability of TAM. TAM does not always hold across all cultural groups (McCoy et al., 2007). More recently, Greenfield and Rohde (2009) found that social sciences students’ attitudes to technology had an effect on both their perceptions of the usefulness of and the ease of use of technology, when compared to business students. Social sciences students were also less likely to act in accordance with their attitudes than business students and consider technology more of a necessary evil. The findings of this more recent TAM research calls for an examination of the model across a wider variety of situations.

This lack of variety is further supported when considering TAM research published since 1989 as 63% of the studies were conducted within the USA (Yousafzai et al., 2007) and focused on the business or for-profit sector using participants from within traditional business functions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). There is, however, another business sector, the not-for-profit (NFP) sector.