Chapter 14

The Effect of Attitudes, Goal Setting and Self-Efficacy on End User Performance

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Research on the influence of attitudes toward computers and end user performance has reported inconsistent results. The inconsistent results, at least in part, could be attributed to the lack of correspondence between the general nature of the attitude measure and the specific nature of the criterion, end user performance. Based on Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) behavioral intentions model, we argue that attitudes toward working with computers matches end user performance in terms of specificity and relevance, and therefore should be consistently related to end user performance. In this study, in addition to attitudes toward working with computers, the effects of goal setting and self-efficacy on end user performance were also tested. Results indicate that attitudes toward working with computers, goal setting and self-efficacy significantly influence end user performance. Strong support for attitudes, goal setting and self-efficacy indicate that end user performance can be substantially enhanced by shaping end users’ attitudes toward working with computers, teaching end users to set specific and challenging goals, and enhancing end users’ beliefs to effectively learn and use computing technology.

The proliferation of end user computing (EUC) has been widely reported (e.g., Burrows, 1994). Computer literacy requirements have skyrocketed for clerical and support staff (Bowman, Grupe, and Simkin, 1995) and for many
middle and senior management positions (Olsten, 1993). EUC has the potential to influence productivity, competitiveness and profits. In recognition of this potential, organizations are devoting a substantial portion of their information technology budget to EUC activities. Given that training can affect the success or failure of EUC within an organization (Bostrom, Olfman, and Sein, 1990; Rivard and Huff, 1988), preparing the workforce to use information technology productively has become a high priority in many organizations and is reflected by increased training budgets (Aggarwal, 1998; Finley, 1996). Since the primary purpose of introducing new technology is to improve productivity, organizations expect their employees to learn and apply EUC technology to increase their job performance and contribute to organizational effectiveness.

The preponderance of research on end user performance has focused on attitudes toward computers to predict end user performance. However, these studies have generally reported inconsistent results (e.g., Kennedy, 1975; Kernan and Howard, 1990; Marcoulides, 1988; Mawhinney and Saraswat, 1991; O’Quin, Kinsey, and Beery, 1987; Roszkowski, Devlin, Snelbeker, Aiken, and Jacobsohn, 1988; Szajna, 1994). So it is not clear if, in fact, attitudes influence end user performance. It is important to identify factors with potential to influence end user performance because such knowledge can enable educators and trainers to design better programs and enhance end user performance. This line of research has practical significance because unless end users learn and utilize end user technology to improve their job performance, organizations are unlikely to reap the benefits of investments in training and in EUC technology.

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of attitudes, goals setting and self-efficacy on end user performance. The conceptual foundation of this study is based on the dispositional paradigm. The dispositional paradigm is founded on the premise that individual differences are relatively stable both across time and situations and can be used to explain and predict behaviors and outcomes (see Allport, 1961; Kane, Bernardin, Villanova, and Peyrefitte, 1995; Staw and Ross, 1985).

This paper is organized into four sections inclusive of this introductory section. In the second section, we will review the studies that examined the relationship between attitudes and end user performance and offer plausible explanations for the inconsistent findings. In the third section, we will develop hypotheses for the study. Finally, we will present results of this study, offer suggestions to enhance end user performance, and discuss avenues to extend research on end user performance.
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