Chapter XVII

The Role of Group Learning in Implementation of a Personnel Management System in a Hospital

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Abstract

A new HR system was introduced in a Dutch hospital. The system implied collaborative work among its users. The project planning seemed to be reasonably straightforward: the system’s introduction was intended to take place gradually, including pilots in different departments and appropriate feedback. After some time, the system was successfully adopted by one group of users, but failed with another. We conceptualize the implementation process of groupware as group learning to frame the adoption of the system, and analyze the qualitative data collected during the longitudinal case study. We found that in the user group with strong
group learning, adoption of the system occurred effectively and on time. In another user group with rather weak group learning, the use of the system was blocked after a short time. The results provided a first confirmation of our assumption about the importance of group learning processes in the implementation of groupware.

Introduction

It is broadly recognized that the IT use often develops differently from the expected plans, and that the degree to which use of technology corresponds to the anticipated rules and norms can vary a lot, depending on an organizational context, type of IT, end-users’ awareness of the system, and so forth (Bardram, 1998; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Orlikowski, 1996).

Different research perspectives have developed their views on this issue in parallel. Orlikowski (2000) gives the following examples. Social constructivists refer to the IT “inscription,” analysing further the role of debates, social interests, and conflicts in achieving a consensus in IT functioning (Akrich, 1992). Structurational traditions examine how technologies develop through the interplay between “embodied” and “embedded” structures (Orlikowski, 1992). Similarly, adaptive structuration theory focuses on the differences between “faithful” appropriation (use in line with IT intention) and “unfaithful” appropriation (actual use) (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). Developing the structurational concepts, Orlikowski (1996) talks about “institutional” (prescribed) and “on-going,” “enacted,” or “situated” use of technology. All these views start with characteristics of technology, and analyze how those are used, appropriated, accepted, or adapted by the targeted employees.

Rather then starting with technology and examining how people appropriate, adapt, or accept it, we shall start with the employees and explore how they develop their work with the system. Whether through mistakes, or purposefully, users often ignore, alter or play around the “anticipated,” “inscribed,” and “institutionalised” technological characteristics. Even if technology is given and its use is mandatory, employees will influence their recurrent work with it through developing certain interpretive schemes like making preferences, new rules of the work being automated, new tasks facilities, norms (e.g., traffic regulation), interpersonal interaction via IT, modification of technological