

5-2008

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## Recommended Citation

Drum, Dawna; Bourne, Kristina; and Standifer, Rhetta, "I Still Hate It!": Understanding Workarounds after Large IT Implementations" (2008). *MWAIS 2008 Proceedings*. 14.  
<http://aisel.aisnet.org/mwais2008/14>

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# “I Still Hate It!”: Understanding Workarounds after Large IT Implementations

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Keywords: research in progress, workaround, change, qualitative research, system implementation

In this longitudinal qualitative study we are examining the phenomenon of technology "workarounds" after large-scale information system implementations. Workarounds are defined as the intentional use of "computing in ways for which it was not designed or avoiding its use and relying on an alternative means of accomplishing work" (Gasser, 1986: 216). Therefore our primary research question asks under what conditions do users of information systems not use the system in the manner intended by the implementers? To explore this question, we gathered data at multiple branches of one heavy equipment sales and repair organization in the Midwest that was transitioning from a legacy green-screen system to a Windows-based enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

In a two-phase longitudinal process, we conducted interviews of system users immediately following implementation of the new system and then again three months later at a peak workload time. Data were gathered at one regional office and three branch stores operating under that regional office's scope of operations. At branch store A, six employees were interviewed at Time 1 and seven at Time 2, with an overlap of four employees. Branch store B had 100% overlap of eight employees at Times 1 and 2. Regional office employees were only available near Time 2, and a total of six interviews were conducted. Branch store C employees were also only available near Time 2 and a total of eight interviews were conducted. Representative employee titles included Parts Sales, Service Technicians, Outside Sales Representatives and Cost Accountants, representing several layers of organizational structure across the four locations. In total we conducted 45 interviews. A wide range of subject ages were represented, ranging from individuals in their early 20's to those in their mid-60's. There was also great range in tenure diversity, extending from four months to over 30 years. Interviews were digitally recorded; in addition, field notes were taken by interviewers during the interview process. Sessions lasted on average 30 to 45 minutes, and were conducted at the employees' workplace during the work day. The recordings were then transcribed in full.

This qualitative study is complimentary to a quantitative study in which we theorize that workarounds can be both positive and negative. Positive workarounds would be those devised by employees to either make their work more efficient, or to compensate for a deficiency in the newly implemented system; these should help the system (and by extension) the organization be more efficient. In contrast, negative workarounds are brought about by an employee's refusal to accept the new system and a persistence to adhere to the old ways of working, or perhaps even deliberate sabotage of the new system or processes (Ferneley & Sobreperez, 2006; Gasser, 1986; Koopman & Hoffman, 2003; Petrides, McClelland, & Nodine, 2004). The theoretical framework underpinning this study is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which establishes a causal relationship between perceived ease of use (PEU) and perceived usefulness (PU) to a computer user's intention to use the system, their attitudes and their actual usage (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989). We have added a third construct, prior technical knowledge (PTK),

based on the theory that individuals with stronger technical backgrounds will be more likely to accept new computer systems. The questions asked of our interviewees reflect the two primary constructs of TAM as well as our additional construct.

We theorize that 1) perceived ease of use, 2) perceived usefulness and 3) prior technical knowledge will be positively related to positive workarounds and negatively related to negative workarounds. In other words, those who perceive the system to be useful and easy to use, and who have good computer skills, will be more likely to accept the new system and find ways to use it to best advantage. Those who do not have positive perceptions and/or do not have good computer skills will be more likely to try to find ways to adhere to how things have “always” been done.

In this qualitative study our purpose is to provide further insight and understanding into the perceptions of users to the primary constructs of the model, specifically, their perceptions of PEU and PU based on PTK. Based on interviews we delineate between “accepters” and “refusers” of the new system. Based on that distinction, we can further distinguish between positive and negative workarounds. The concept of positive versus negative workarounds may be different when the perspective changes from individual to work unit to organization. Even those who refuse to use the new system may do so for reasons that they perceive as positive, and in fact their workaround may have positive consequences for themselves or their work unit. However, when viewed from an organizational perspective, that same workaround may have negative consequences for another individual or work unit, or on an even larger scale, the accumulation of small supposedly positive workarounds may have an overall negative effect on the organization as a whole. In addition, through the use of qualitative methodology we hope to provide richer insights into users’ perceptions of workarounds and their reasons for adoption (or rejection) of the system as implemented.

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