IT Adoption and Usage in Non-Profit Organizations: A Cross-Generational Case Study

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Abstract

A gulf has tended to develop between the adoption and usage of information technology by different generations, at the heart of which is different ways of experiencing and relating to the world around us. This research idea is currently being developed following data collection and feedback is sought on ways forward to enable impact. The research focuses on information technology in the form of multimedia. Multimedia meaning 'media' and 'content' that uses a combination of different content forms; or electronically integrated communication engaging all or most of the senses (e.g. graphic art, sound, animation and full-motion video presented by way of computer or other electronic means) mainly through presentational technologies. Although multimedia is not new, some organization's particularly those in the non-profit sector do not always have the technical or financial resources to support such systems and consequently may struggle to adopt and support its usage amongst different generations. However non-profit organizations are being forced to pay more attention to the way they communicate with markets and the public due to the professionalism of communication everywhere in society.

The case study used for this study is a church circuit comprising of 15 churches in the Midlands region of the United Kingdom which was selected due to the diverse age groups catered for within this type of non-profit organization. Participants in the study also had a range of skills, experiences and backgrounds which adds to the diversity of the population studied. Data gathered focused on the attitudes and opinions of the adoption and use of multimedia amongst different age groups. 395 questionnaires were distributed, comprising of 11 opinion questions and 4 demographic questions. 83% of the questionnaires were returned, representing 35% of the total circuit membership. Three people from each of the following age categories were also interviewed: 1920 – 1946 (Matures); 1947-1964 (Baby Boomers); 1965-1982 (Generation X); 1983-2004 (Net Generation).

Results of the questionnaire and comments from the interviews were found not to tally with the widespread assumption that the younger generation is attracted by the use of multimedia in comparison to the older generation. The highest proportion of those who said that they gain more from a service enhanced by multimedia was from the Baby Boomers. Comments from interviews suggested that: 'we need to embrace multimedia if we are to attract and retain the younger generation'; 'multimedia often helps children to remain focused and clarifies the objective of the service'. However, because the younger generations' world tends to be dominated by computer technology the questionnaire showed that they are more likely to have higher standards when it comes to the use of multimedia, such as identifying higher levels of equipment failing to work and annoying use of sounds compared to older age groups. In comparison problems experienced with multimedia for the Matures age group had the highest percentage of difficulty with the size of letters; the colour of letters and background and the sound not loud enough which is to be expected.

Since every organization is unique any type of multimedia adopted and used should be specific to their needs, its stakeholders and the physical building in order to enhance that uniqueness and its needs. Giving thought to whether the type of multimedia is the best method for communicating the message to the particular audience alongside how technical and financial resources are best used can assist in accommodating different age groups that need to be catered for.