

Chapter 5.25

Motivation to E-Learn within Organizational Settings: An Exploratory Factor Structure

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ABSTRACT

E-learning is expected to support organizations and individuals so they can become more adaptable and competitive. However, in order for organizations to realize the full potential of this technology, they should create and sustain the right context to foster learning in articulation with business objectives. This requires active participation and engagement of workers. This work explores a variable called motivation-to-e-learn, a key component of this process. Our goal is to identify what motivation-related variables are critical for users' engagements in the process. To this end, we explored the importance of a set of motivation-to-e-learn variables for a group of participants at our university. From this activity, an exploratory four-factor structure emerged that explains 67% of motivation to e-learn variance. We discuss our results, together with their implications for designing technology-supported learning experiences, lessons learned, and future work. Our contribution is a step toward integrating business processes, learners, and e-learning systems into an effective and harmonious whole.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing usage of the Internet in education raises important questions concerning both its effectiveness and its efficiency. Thus, accessibility, usability, and learnability are key issues for user engagement during interactions between people and learning systems (Dix et al., 1998; Preece et al., 2002). Any of these aspects in the context of use affects user engagement, acceptance, and continued usage. To this end, development teams, acting holistically as a multi-disciplinary team, should address these issues by anticipating breakdowns or factors that can impair users' experiences, specifically in their motivation to learn and perform.

Motivation is an individual variable that is shaped by internal factors and influenced by context (Bandura, 1997; Organ & Bateman, 1991). It captures the impact of events that may take place within the individual immediate context. Such events may affect the effort users put on the task at hand. Understanding how motivation works and what could affect it the most is critical to improve acceptance behaviors and, consequently, to increase learning effectiveness. From an efficiency point of view, matching potential learners' needs to physical and temporal requirements is required in order to optimize resources for both the organization and individuals.

This chapter focuses on the interaction between people and e-learning systems by exploring the people-system fit. Moreover, we only explore the motivation-to-e-learn component of this fit. Our main objective is to further identify underlying factors with a larger sample than that of a previous study (Rentroia-Bonito & Jorge, 2004). Our main contribution is to offer organizations a holistic view and a set of tools to assist in the adoption of e-learning. We feel that adoption is especially important, as new learning paradigms progressively get enmeshed in work settings and process-based roles. In the remainder of this

chapter, we present our conceptual framework, the study methodology, an experiment conducted in our university, the preliminary results garnered, lessons learned, and future work.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Many organizations view e-learning as a tool with which to achieve context-specific, work-related, and just-in-time learning. However, current results have not shown the expected benefits (Oliver, 2001; Waight et al., 2002; Wentling et al., 2000; Zhang et al., 2004). We believe that a careful adaptation of e-learning systems, which takes into consideration individual- and context-related key variables and context-related settings, would make such systems better suited for people. As can be seen in Figure 1, within organizational settings, e-learning systems reflect an organization's strategic options regarding workforce skills and system development processes. The external and internal fit between organizational macro-level variables (e.g., vision, culture, leadership style, etc.) and micro-level variables (e.g., work processes, tools, objectives, etc.) affects people's perceptions and, in turn, their motivation to engage in new situations and perform tasks (Walker, 1992). In this model, we assume that individual learning takes place within the immediate work context by using the available resources and tools (e.g., systems) to achieve specific goals within their process-based roles. This would define the dynamics, processes and conditions of e-learning environments. This way, the goodness of organizational fit would positively influence learner's motivation, and consequently behaviors and performance levels.

To further analyze these variables, the next section describes our study methodology. We aim at exploring the underlying nature of this hypothetical variable and its implications for designing e-learning experiences.

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