Chapter 7.15

Does User Centered Design, Coherent with Global Corporate Strategy, Encourage Development of Human Resource Intranet Use?

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ABSTRACT

In organizations, researchers as well as professionals have generally observed insufficient use of computer technologies when compared to their expected outcomes before their implementation (Bowers, 1995). Reiterating in detail Orlikowski's theoretical propositions, the authors try to impart a clear theoretical status and to identify how transformation of the « artifact » can eventually transform uses. Using a longitudinal case study describing uses of a HR Intranet in an aeronautical firm, the authors want to show that: computer technology conception integrating user's needs, which scientific literature usually calls « user centered » conception, allows use development. However, data gathered in the interviews allows stating that this kind of conception achieved to develop uses only because it was in a strong interaction with corporate policy.

INTRODUCTION

In organizations, researchers as well as professionals have generally observed insufficient use of computer technologies when compared to their expected outcomes before their implementation (Bowers, 1995). This phenomenon can be explained through the characteristics of the individuals using them: some have a negative perception of technology, others fear the consequences on their own activity or on their influence within the organization (Markus, 1983; Marakas, & Hornik, 1996). Even if these criteria must not be minimized, the scope of this phenomenon constrains researchers to identify complimentary explanations.

In this reflection, the conceptual framework proposed by Wanda Orlikowski (2000) emerges as being clearly fundamental. This author offers a coherent and structured conceptual framework that allows analysis of the reasons that conduct an actor to develop a particular use « style » for a specific technology. She especially insists on creative user capacities by showing that uses of a given technology can be very different.

Reiterating in detail her theoretical propositions, our article develops her work on two points. First, even though her theory allows for it, Orlikowski does not develop concrete examples showing how use evolves. We propose an example. Then, by highlighting user's creativity, she seems to minimize the influence of the graphic interface (what is seen on the screen) in the uses. By naming it « artifact »—a term, which comes from Orlikowski (Orlikowski, 2000)—our article tries to impart a clear theoretical status and to identify how transformation of the « artifact » can eventually transform uses.

Using a longitudinal case study describing uses of a HR Intranet in an aeronautical firm, this exploratory research allows us to see that computer technology conception integrating user's needs, which scientific literature usually calls « user centered » conception, (Beyer & Holzblatt, 1998),

allows use development. But data gathered in the interviews allows stating that this kind of conception achieved to develop uses only because it was in a strong interaction with corporate policy. After a literature review centered on Orlikowski paper (2000), we will present our research design then detail main results of our exploratory research.

COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY USE LITERATURE REVIEW

In the computer technology research field the question of use occupies a paradoxical position. This question seems to have always been at the heart of conceptors preoccupations and still, literature offers few theories allowing to understand and to anticipate development of use in concrete company situations. On this level, Orlikowski's contribution (2000) is particularly motivating. After presenting it in detail we will continue by developing two areas that she explored less: technology use evolution and the role of the graphic interface (artifact) within this evolution.

Concrete Use are Relatively Absent in Research Analysis

In the area of computer technology research, the question of use occupies a paradoxical status. On one hand, the question has been the object of diversified and in-depth investigations. For example, the « Human Computer Interaction » (HCI) approach has focused on use since its goal is to improve the « usability» of technologies (Ruta, 2005). That is to say ergonomical technologies that demand minimal user learning in order to be used. In a more cooperative development logic, the Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) approach has also focused on use of IT solutions (Greif, 1988).

But, even if those literatures have placed the uses at the very centre of their reflection, they talk finally very little of «real» uses for their technolo-

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