Does a Good Fit between Mobile Work Support Functions and Mobile Sales-Force Worker Tasks Lead to Improved Work Performance?

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ABSTRACT

Mobile devices can improve the way sales-force work is conducted in information intensive industries such as the pharmaceutical industry. However, there is a lack of empirical research which has examined the extent to which a good fit between mobile work support functions and sales-force worker tasks and individual characteristics influences intention to use. Does a good fit translate into a perceived positive impact on sales-force worker performance? Drawing on TTF and TAM theories, an online survey was conducted with sales-force workers in the German division of a large pharmaceutical company. The findings indicate that location dependence and time criticality positively influence perceived usefulness of mobile work support functions and that this perceived fit positively influences intention to use and perceived performance impact of mobile work support functions. Furthermore, there are differences in the perceived usefulness of mobile work support functions across job roles, pharmaceutical business units and length of tenure.

Keywords: Mobile Computing Technologies (MCT), Mobile Work Support Functions, Pharmaceutical Sales-Force Work, Sales Technology, Task-Technology Fit (TTF)

INTRODUCTION

Despite high investments in sales technology and a considerable amount of research investigating the link between sales technology and work performance (e.g., Ahearne, Jones, Rapp & Mathieu, 2008; Ahearne & Schillewaert, 2001; BenMoussa, 2006; Koschembahr, 2005; Scornavacca & Sutherland, 2008), the ‘relationship between sales technology and sales-force worker performance remains primarily unsubstantiated’ (Ahearne et al., 2008). This research identified that there are gaps in the current literature regarding the impact of mobile...
computing on sales-force worker performance. Mobile computing technologies (MCT) are expected to add value to mobile workers such as pharmaceutical sales-force workers by reducing paper-based work, providing online access to a company’s systems and the Internet during dead times and enhancing existing business processes (Henri & Aurelie, 2006; IBM Cooperation, 2004; Liang & Wei, 2004; Schierholz, Kolbe, & Brenner, 2007; Sheng, Nah, & Siau, 2005). MCT can play a key role in adding value to pharmaceutical sales-force work and the sales force-physician relationship through improved access to relevant information and more efficient use of the pharmaceutical sales workforce’s time in the field.

An adaptation of Goodhue and Thompson’s task-technology fit (TTF) model which includes two aspects of the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989) provides the theoretical framework for this research. The main objectives of this study are to investigate:

1. The extent to which perceived usefulness (task/mobile work support function fit) is influenced by task characteristics and individual sales-force worker characteristics;
2. The extent to which perceived usefulness (task/mobile work support function fit) and intention to use mobile work support functions influence mobile sales-force worker performance; and
3. Does the perceived degree of innovativeness of mobile work support functions moderate the relationships between perceived usefulness and intention to use and perceived impact on mobile work performance.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Sales-Force Work and Technology Support

In this research, pharmaceutical sales-force work is considered to be a specific form of mobile work, as pharmaceutical sales-force workers are ‘working away from their desk for at least 20% of their time’ (Gartner, 2002). According to Lilischkis’ (2003) categorization of types of mobile work, pharmaceutical sales-force workers in this study’s case organization can be considered ‘Yo-Yos’ as they have many working locations inside a geographically limited area. Their main purpose is to promote pharmaceutical products (‘detailing’), and maintain and enhance customer relationships by visiting traditional customers in the German pharmaceutical market such as physicians, hospitals and pharmacies (Fischer & Breitenbach, 2007).

Initially, sales-force automation (SFA) applications were designed to support sales-force workers in information-gathering tasks (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). An effective CRM initiative that is supported by the appropriate SFA applications is expected to positively affect an organization’s sales-force effectiveness (Larpsiri & Speece, 2004, p. 392). Often referred to as mobile SFA or ‘mSFA’ (Scornavacca & Sutherland, 2008), MCT can provide the technological foundation for certain SFA applications and thereby has the potential to positively affect sales-force worker performance.

Benefits of Mobile Computing Technologies (MCT)

Benefits of MCT can be considered from two perspectives, namely at the individual worker level and at the organizational level. At the individual mobile worker level, four major benefits of MCT have been identified that have the potential to increase an individual mobile worker’s work efficiency and effectiveness, namely effective use of dead times or waiting times, improved preparation for unexpected events increased communication, collaboration and information-gathering capabilities and work process optimisation (Henri & Aurelie, 2006; IBM Cooperation, 2004; Liang & Wei, 2004; Perry, et al., 2001; Schierholz, et al., 2007; Sheng, et al., 2005).

At the organization level, a review of the relevant literature suggests that organizations
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