Chapter XLIV
From Conception to Demise:
Implications for Users of Information Systems in Changing a Local Parastatal Educational Institution in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the issues of the interface between Information Systems (IS) and society. We investigate IS and users of these systems at a local parastatal educational institution in South Africa. Local governments have had many IS developed and implemented for the use of customers. The problem is that the impact of IS on social communities have not been taken into account, especially in e-governance in the South African context, when systems are being designed or implemented; as a result may lead to IS failures. Details regarding certain social aspects of IS are discussed. This chapter finally proposes a set of guidelines to help ensure that the social aspects of local government IS are taken into account in the design and implementation of these systems, thereby increasing the chance of success of those systems.

INTRODUCTION

Social issues permeate any technology, including its origin, its use, and its demise. Information

System software development projects suffer from a high rate of failure (Jiang *et al.*, 2006). In the Extreme Chaos study (2001) it was found that in the year 2000, lack of user involvement was

noted as the number one cause of project failure. According to Rosenbaum and Sawyer (2000) the last half of the 1900s has been characterised by the increasing importance of information and communication technology (ICT) in social and organisational life. Lamb and Kling (2003) suggest that most analysts' view of users are socially thin and limited, thus the social context of the user needs to be included. Internal and external social community of an organisation impacts and is impacted by the organisation and its operations, including its information systems (Some social…, 2006). More precisely, an organisation must be viewed as a socio-technical system with the people, processes, and technology working together to achieve a common goal or set of goals.

This chapter is structured as follows; we provide a literature review, which is followed by a background discussion. Then we outline our research design and methodology. This is followed by a discussion of the analysis and impact of IS on the local community respectively. We then discuss the influence of IS on the social responsibility of users as well as users involvement and participation in the development and implementation of the particular IS. Then we discuss the users' involvement and participation relationship to IS success and we discuss the social factors that should influence the development and implementation of IS. Finally we conclude with some recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

IS are becoming prominent and pervasive in governmental and local government institutions. People are being exposed to new technologies that aid or replace certain tasks and activities. As a results these IS have expected, and often unexpected and unplanned implications, for the users and encompassing social environment of those systems. These unexpected and unplanned implications can often impact negatively on users and their social environment.

The problem related to the social aspects of Information Systems is that they are rarely taken into account when systems are being designed or implemented. A major social aspect of an IS are the role that users play in the success of an IS, but the social implications that effect them are not fully accounted for by system designers\analysts and those implementing the system.

A literature survey will be used to establish a theoretical framework of the social implications of IS's. Literature surveyed will be used to gain insight into the background of this area of research and to establish what problems other researchers have previously solved.

BACKGROUND

Social Context

The introduction and utilisation of technology in organisational settings may be more complex than technologically deterministic accounts (Horton *et al.*, 2005). The social context of IS are specifically examined in social informatics research. Kling (2000), for example, describes social informatics, as the body of research that examines the design, uses and consequences of information and communication technologies, in ways that take into account their interaction institutional and cultural contexts. It can therefore be said that the social context of an Information System is vital when considering the area of Information Systems and Technology (IS&T). Kling (1999) states that 'social context" does not refer to some abstract 'cloud' that hovers above people and information technology, but rather to a specific matrix of social relationships. Lamb and Kling (2003) note that several organizations have stressed the need for a larger environmental scope when dealing with ICT use, noting that the individual ICT use is influenced not only by organisational, cultural, and global contexts, but also the social context within the environment.

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