

# Chapter 6

## Time, Attitude, and User Participation: How Prior Events Determine User Attitudes in ERP Implementation

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### ABSTRACT

*Assimilation of a standard ERP system to an organization is difficult. User involvement seems to be the crux of the matter. However, even the best intentions for user involvement may come to nothing. A case study of a five-year ERP implementation process reveals that a main reason may be that the perception of usefulness of the system in any given phase of the implementation is heavily dependent on preceding events—the process. A process model analysis identifies eight episodes and nine encounters in the case showing that the user's attitude towards the ERP system changes between acceptance, equivocation, resistance and rejection depending on three things: (1) the dynamic between user and consultants, (2) the dynamic between different user groups, and (3) the understanding of technical, organizational and socio-technical options. When relating the empirical findings to existing theory on user participation, it is argued that the changes could be explained as a slide from influential user participation toward pseudo participation and back to influential participation, and that user participation in the context of ERP implementations raises new issues regarding user participation. Thus further research regarding new approaches and/or new techniques and tools for user participation in the context of ERP implementations is needed.*

### INTRODUCTION

When the organization Alfa decided to implement an ERP system, it also decided that there should be user participation in all phases of the

implementation. Alfa's top management and the ERP project manager considered user participation essential for the quality of the solution as well as necessary for assimilation of the system in the organization. Thus during the project us-

ers participated in requirements specification, evaluation of candidate systems, scoping of the project, configuration of the system, testing of the system, and user training in the new system. The ERP system was implemented on time and within budget, but despite the user participation, the quality and the assimilation of the system in the organization was problematic, seen from the user point of view. When interviewing project participants and end-users, it became clear that the attitude toward the system changed during the project and so did user involvement in the project. When the ERP project was initiated, both the system as well as the implementation approach had wide support in Alfa's organization, but at the time of go-live, this had changed dramatically, and in the years following go-live, Alfa struggled to achieve quality in use and in getting the intended user groups to use the system. It took two years after going live before the users' attitude toward the system had changed in a somewhat more positive direction.

This article takes an outset in the empirical situation explained above. The aim of the research is to better understand the issues related to user participation during Alfa's ERP implementation in order to identify better alternative approaches. Thus the research questions for this article are:

1. How and why are the users' attitudes toward the system changing over time in Alfa's ERP lifecycle?
2. Why did user participation *not* provide the intended user involvement and the intended quality of the system?

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section provides a theoretical reference for understanding user participation and user involvement in software projects in general and ERP implementations in particular. In the two sections thereafter, we describe the research method followed by the section where we discuss the case and the case analysis. In the

last two sections, we discuss the findings related to the theoretical understanding and then conclude our article.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR USER PARTICIPATION IN SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT AND ERP IMPLEMENTATIONS**

Having users participate and being involved in ERP implementations is considered essential for success (Kawalek & Wood-Harper, 2002; Robey, Ross, & Boudreau, 2002; Nah, Zuckweiler, & lau, 2003) and is expected to provide a better fit of user requirements, achieving better system quality, use, and acceptance (Esteves-Sousa & Pastor-Collado, 2000). It has been argued that implementing ERP package software products is different from traditional IT-system development and therefore needs a different implementation approach, namely adapting the organizational processes to those implied by the ERP Package (Lucas, Walton & Ginzberg, 1988; Markus & Tanis, 2000; Parr & Shanks, 2003). The design team should be balanced or cross-functional, and comprise a mix of external consultants and internal staff; the internal staff should develop the necessary skills for design and implementations (Holland, Light, & Gibson, 1999; Summer, 1999; Shanks et al., 2000). Both business and technical knowledge are important (Summer, 1999; Shanks et al., 2000). Sharing information among the various parties involved is vital and requires partnership trust (Stefanou, 1999), and the team should be empowered to make quick decisions (Shanks et al., 2000). Research on how to organize and support user participation in the context of ERP implementations is, however, very limited.

Within the field of participatory design (PD), issues related to the nature and reasons for user participation can be thought of in terms of three distinguished arenas (Gärtner & Wagner, 1996): (1) The *individual project arena* where specific

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