

The Lonely Comate: The Adoption-Failure of an Intranet-Based Consumer and Market Intelligence System

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The case study concerns the disappointing reception of an intranet application at TopTech, a prominent player in the field of electronics. The application in question, called Comate, which stands for “Consumer and Market Intelligence Technology Environment,” was conceived and built by the central staff department for Consumer and Marketing Intelligence (CMI) of the company. When this application was introduced some years ago, its purpose was to smooth information flows between CMI departments worldwide and to enhance networking between these departments. The organization decided to form a project team to investigate the reasons for the lacking acceptance of the system by intended users and to establish what would be the most appropriate reaction on the part of Central CMI: change the system, initiate new, supportive initiatives, or abandon the Comate project altogether. The case study examines how this project team tackled the problem. The team decided to address the evaluation, diagnosis, and redesign of the system and its possible contribution to CMI from the perspective of the system’s acceptability. Key component in its methodology was the integrated use of the Technology Acceptance model (TAM) and Task-Technology Fit model (TTF).

BACKGROUND

A few years ago, a large global electronics company, that had its headquarters in The Netherlands, introduced an application to support its consumer and market intelligence. This application, called Comate (Consumer and Market Intelligence Technology Environment), was offered via the company's intranet facilities to staff departments all over the world. The main rationale for developing and introducing the application was twofold. First, its aim was to channel information requests from local departments to the central Consumer and Marketing Intelligence (CMI) Department and to enhance the communication between these departments. Second, by using the system, the central CMI Department hoped to achieve standardization and efficiency gains in its governance of local departments. The functionality of Comate included access to market reports, product data related to consumers and markets, consumer and market monitors, facilities to support communication with the central CMI Department, address and expertise information of departments and people from all over the world, access to information about ongoing and finished projects, and the like. However, the figures concerning actual usage of Comate showed that the system was not being used to the extent that was expected and intended. In fact, because of the disappointing reception, the organization deemed the Comate Project a failure. A regional component proved to be present in the figures signaling this failure. In some countries, the system was used on a regular basis by at least a small group of people; in others it was hardly used at all. However, in none of the countries did the reception and usage of the system meet the standards defined beforehand.

Despite its name, the system apparently did not encourage "mating behavior." This was a big disappointment to the head of the CMI Department, Hans Broekmans, as it was his initiative to start the Comate Project and his initial ideas that constituted to a large degree the basis for the current content and operation of the system. He realized that a decision had to be made regarding the future of the Comate system, for the sake of improving the flow of CMI information, but also to prevent the failure of the system from affecting his career within TopTech or elsewhere. How should he react? Should additional functionality be added to the system? Were the datasets presently offered perhaps not the ones Comate's users desired and should others be added? Was the interface perhaps difficult to use, and if so, why? Should additional measures be taken to instruct, support, and guide the users of the system? Or should the discontinuation of the Comate Project be considered?

At the time Hans Broekmans had only some vague notions as to how to answer such questions. He had no clear idea as to which reaction to the disappointing reception of Comate would be most appropriate. He therefore decided not to rush things, as apparently he had done when the system was built, but to look into matters a little more carefully. He formed a project team with a threefold task. First, the team should evaluate the use of the current system to identify reasons for the current lack of usage. Second, he requested an exploration of possible redesign alternatives based on a diagnosis of the current situation of how CMI information was produced, distributed, and used. Third, he asked the team to specify the lessons to be learned from the evaluation of the current system and the diagnosis of CMI's operations, and to use these lessons for substantiating a recommendation as to what the appropriate path to follow would be, i.e., redesigning the current system, reconsidering the procedure of its introduction, or abandoning the project altogether. He decided to appoint the head of his IS department, Johan van Breeveldt, as the project team leader. He selected

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