



**Chapter 7**

**The Role of User Ownership and  
Positive User Attitudes in the  
Successful Adoption of Information  
Systems within NHS Community  
Trusts**

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*The factors that influence the ultimate level of success or failure of systems development projects have received considerable attention in the academic literature. However, despite the existence of a 'best practice' literature many projects still fail. The record of the National Health Service has been particularly poor in this respect. The research reported in this paper proposes that two additional factors; user ownership and positive user attitudes warrant further development and investigation. The current study investigated these two factors in a homogenous organizational sector, Community NHS Trusts, using a common type of information system, in order to eliminate the potentially confounding influences of sector and system. A multiple case-study design incorporating five Community Healthcare Trusts was utilized. The key results from the analysis indicated that both user ownership and positive user attitudes were important mediating variables that were crucial to the success of a CIS. In addition, it was also identified that the adoption of best practice variables had a dual role, directly influencing the level of*

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*perceived success but also facilitating the development of user ownership and positive user attitudes. These results will be of particular interest to practising IM&T managers in the NHS and also to the wider academic research community.*

## INTRODUCTION

*The challenge for the NHS is to harness the information revolution and use it to benefit patients* (Rt. Hon Tony Blair, 1998)<sup>1</sup>

Over the past twenty years the level of penetration and sophistication of information technology has grown dramatically, with computer-based information systems actively supporting all key business processes and significantly enhancing both the operational effectiveness and the strategic direction of organizations of all types. The UK's National Health Service (NHS) is one, particularly large and complex, organization that has been keen to harness the potential of IT to enhance its administrative, managerial and clinical performance. Unfortunately, in both the public and private sectors, the successful acquisition and introduction of information technology is still dogged by high failure rates (Lyytinen & Hirschheim, 1987; Kearney, 1990; Hochstrasser & Griffiths, 1991; Clegg et al., 1997). More specifically, there is much evidence to suggest that the NHS's record has been particularly poor, with respect to the successful deployment of computer-based information systems (for example: National Audit Office, 1991; Keen, 1994; National Audit Office, 1996).

There is, therefore, still a pressing need for well-focussed research to provide insights into how levels of failure can be reduced from both a general perspective and with regard to the NHS in particular. To help investigate these issues a research project was initiated to explore the factors that affect the success of Community Information Systems (CIS) within the NHS. It was envisaged that the application of CIS within the community healthcare sector would provide a particularly fertile research domain for the following two reasons:

1. Community Trusts form a reasonably homogeneous organizational sector, distinct from the acute sector and community information systems provide different instances of a common type of application; consequently the number of confounding factors in the study are greatly reduced;
2. Two recent official reports (Audit Commission, 1997; Burns, 1998) have identified a high degree of variability in the quality of CIS with many existing systems failing to deliver the anticipated benefits. Consequently, it would be possible to compare and contrast the experiences of Trusts, which had experienced a range of different outcomes.

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