Does IT at Work have to $#!& or How Can We Create Better IT Experiences?: A Call to Study Digital Employee Experiences

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Much of today’s knowledge work and clerical work as well as communication and collaboration relies on information technology (IT). Both the adoption of new IT and the continued effective use of IT largely hinge upon the employees’ perceptions, e.g., the perceived usefulness of a specific artifact or the salience of system’s quality attributes. Consequently, organizations can benefit most from their IT investments, if they are able to ensure employee buy-in: They need to ensure that employees understand how a specific application or IT-related change benefits their own work and the firm’s goals. However, focusing purely on an IT system’s instrumental value to influence employee perceptions and behavior about its utility is insufficient. Prior research has repeatedly highlighted the role of other factors, e.g., social and physical contexts, or hedonic and affective antecedents and outcomes. Organizations therefore need to follow a holistic approach that focuses on IT engagement by offering positive IT experiences. They need to identify what motivates employees to be engaged with IT at work and how they can influence these motivational factors.

But how can organizations create better IT experiences and instill technological excitement and engagement with IT at work? We propose a digital employee experience (DEX) approach that regards employees as internal customers for IT experiences. At work, employees have different touchpoints, e.g., business processes, with IT and each encounter substantially affects their DEX. Therefore, DEX management should involve all activities that promote IT engagement and thus evoke vigor, dedication, and absorption with respect to IT at work. To achieve this, organizations require a broad understanding of the cognitive, emotional, social, sensorial, and physical needs of their employees and the design, implementation, and evaluation of IT artifacts. Here, the IS discipline is well positioned to provide the necessary expertise; it has historically advanced the understanding of IT artifacts and their context following a socio-technical perspective (Sarker et al., 2019). We argue that studying IT at work from a DEX perspective advances the socio-technical tradition of IS and has three benefits for research and practice: (1) It motivates the joint analysis of both instrumental objectives (e.g., task performance) and humanistic objectives (e.g., well-being, satisfaction) of IT exposure at work. (2) It acknowledges that IT experiences should not only afford utilitarian value (e.g., usefulness), but also hedonic value (e.g., playfulness, cognitive absorption). (3) It connects phenomenon understanding (e.g., through empirical research) with actions (e.g., through design-oriented research).

References