

# Importance Of Discretionary Efforts In Technology Adaptation: A Conceptual Framework

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**Abstract:** The transformation of organizations and companies in the last decade has phenomenally grown from local to global presence and this brought along a whole set of new challenges. In order to overcome the challenges, the workforce needs to be trained in the new technology. But there should also be discretionary effort from the employee itself to learn the skills. Discretionary effort is the willingness of an employee to take up work more than the prescribed amount. It is their discretionary effort that becomes the measure of their value to the organization. This study is based on the experience of the authors. Thus, this paper focuses on the concept of discretionary effort and its influence on technology adaptation.

**Index Terms:** Career development, Discretionary effort, Self development, Technology adaptation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

THE quality of service depends upon the quality of human resource, which needs continuous skill training. The human resource development practices in an organization should emphasize to attain such human resource. The training policy is framed with the objectives of providing need-based, role-based training to all cadres of employees. In this light, the discretionary effort of the employees also comes into the picture. Discretionary Effort (DE) is the effort an employee wants to give to the organization's work above the minimum required. Needham (2005) explained that DE motivates people to do more than their jobs and to produce maximum output at the work places. DE cannot be observed, but the actions resulting from it can. The new technology trend is radically changing the platform of business transactions. Use or innovation of a new technology often involves huge upfront costs, for example, investment in production, training of workers, and marketing. These later obtain profits that justify the initial investment. While development in technology have provided an array of opportunities for the banks, they have also brought along a whole set of challenges. Thus, to create a learning environment the spirits of the employee should be uplifted and they should be continuously motivated by peers and superiors. There should also be self-discretionary effort from the employee itself to learn the skills. A research in this topic will excavate that how an employee applies his/her own effort in his growth and growth of the organization as a whole. The purpose of this article is to explore the historical development of discretionary effort in an effort to define the concept across relevant fields of literature. Several questions guided our quest, such as (a) What are the historical underpinnings of discretionary effort? (b) What definitions of discretionary effort are cited in the literature? (c) How discretionary effort influences technology adaptation?

## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The term discretionary effort was identified as the main keyword to use in the search. Based on the problem statement and guiding questions, the first determination was the selection of which fields and types of literature to search. A total of 150 records were searched. A staged review method

was used initially to analyze all articles containing the phrase discretionary effort. A total of 108 articles were selected for further review. Articles were gathered from 20 different journals. Of the 108 articles, 20 were duplicates and 15 were found to be unrelated to the topic. The remaining 73 articles were selected for critical review.

## 3 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

DE is that work effort which is voluntarily exerted by an employee and contributes in organizational development. The management is aware of the impact of discretionary effort on overall organization development, whereas individual employees do not always apply personal discretionary effort due to non-alignment of personal goals with organizational goals (April K. and Katoma V., 2008). Morris (2009) depicted 'perks' as non-monetary rewards and 'irks' as the hindrances in workplace against discretionary effort. Her study comprised of three broad constructs, i.e. perks, irks and monetary rewards. According to her findings, perks seemed to have a stronger and more pervasive influence on discretionary effort than either irks or monetary rewards.

According to Parrey A. H. and Bhasi J. (2012), monetary rewards do not lead to DE where overtime is regularly available. Motivational factors like team oriented leadership, co-worker support, recognition of performance are the important predictors of discretionary effort. Brown & Peterson (1994) found that DE is intrinsically linked to motivation. Individuals with similar motivation levels can differ in the effort levels expended.

### 3.1 Evolution of the Context of Discretionary Effort

DE is the sub-component of the concept of work effort in the labour economics literature. Early theories of labour supply identified work time and work intensity as distinctive elements of labour provided. The concept of DE was initially put forward by Yankelovich and Immerwahr (1983) as the voluntary effort that employees provide beyond what is required. Work effort is comprised in the dimensions of duration, intensity and direction, in organizational behaviour literature. Duration concerns the time aspect of work effort. Intensity is the level of effort a person exerts per unit of time. These two facets of work effort encapsulate the notion of working long and hard. The direction is the frequency of the work activity a person engages in. According to Needham, DE is an additional effort over and above the requirements of a job description. It is the difference between how well people actually perform and how well they are capable of performing. The researcher estimated

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that discretionary effort could represent a range of performance above actual performance. This estimate represents unmanaged and unrealized resources for organizations. Fielder (2006) explained that unless workers felt really motivated or inspired to give more, they are not utilizing their DE.

### 3.2 Defining Discretionary Effort

In order to understand discretionary effort, we first have to understand the meaning of discretion and effort. The notion of discretion arises when some people are attempting to exercise power in a political context and other people are prepared to challenge these attempts. Discretion arises when a decision maker has a wide range of choice as to what he decides, free from constraints which characteristically attach whenever legal rules enter the decision process. Discretion also generally means maintaining confidentiality. Discretion may be a construct of theoretical importance in explaining several phenomena of interest to organization and strategy scholars (Finkelstein and Boyd, 1998). Engaged employees are those who willingly perform above and beyond what is expected of them and remain committed, even when the conditions in which they work become difficult (Palmer and Gignac, 2012). Discretion is based on the assumption that persons have responses available to them that can affect the environment (Arnaud S. and Waiseleski D. M., 2013). According to Leveille J., discretion is left as an unexamined concept, one that hides within it a conceptualization of the subject, as a universal and timeless thing. Discretion involves the extent to which the environment permits a change from the status quo and the degree to which the organization empowers the decision maker to implement change. It is also constrained by the individual manager's vision and abilities (Hambrick and Abrahamson, 1995). At a basic level in absence of constraint discretion is exercised (Hambrick 2007). In the judicial system, a judge employs discretion to choose the level of severity to sentence a convict. Police discretion allows the police officers to decide whether to file a complaint or simply let go a criminal with a warning. The police have often used informal methods while dealing with minor offenders (Smyth P., 2011). Provincial discretion is required for local economic development (Zeng Q., 2016). Discretionary choices are sometimes made in contexts in which there are fairly specific criteria or standards that we can use to judge the soundness of the choice. Nonetheless, the presence or absence of criteria for choosing is not what makes a choice a discretionary one. If people are accountable for their choices, they have discretion. If they are not accountable for their choices, then talk of discretion is out of place. Discretion is based on the assumption that persons have responses available to them that can affect the environment (Arnaud S. and Waiseleski D. M., 2013). Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987) introduced the idea of managerial discretion. Managerial Discretion refers to the degree to which CEOs make changes in organisational decisions and subsequent outcomes (Oh W. Y., Chang Y. K. and Cheng Z., 2016). Skill discretion is concerned requirements to learn new things, whether skills were required, whether creativity was required and whether the work was monotonous or variable (Losada A. F., Forsell Y, Lundberg I). Market power typically gives firms large discretion over the level and the structure of their prices (Iozzi A., Sestini R., and Valentini E., 2006). The term discretion indicates that interest rates could be used or allowed to absorb transitory shocks to

smooth volatility in interest rates (Edison H. and Macdonald R., 2003). Prosecutorial discretion will allow the court to largely comply with the provisions of referral and avoid the antagonistic methodology of judicial review (Gallavin C., 2006). Effort is defined as the force, energy, or activity by which work is accomplished. Effort refers to usage of energy to accomplish a task and discretion is the liberty to decide a course of action during a process. Thus, discretionary effort means the effort that is exerted beyond the call of duty. As a whole, discretionary effort imparted by the employee is extra-role performance that has an impact on the organization (Dubinsky and Skinner, 2002).

### 3.3 Influence of Discretionary Effort on Technology Adaptation

An employee's discretionary effort is influenced by several job-related and training factors imparted by the management. Job-Related factors are decisions taken by the management to build a work environment that will facilitate its employees and give them ample returns. Jobs are designed to match with the job requirements and the worker's physical abilities to perform the job effectively. Ergonomics refers to a job design strategy where a perfect fit is searched for between the job and the employee. Work practices are traditional or usual ways of doing a job, which is followed by most number of the employees. Evidences are available which proves that ignoring work practices results in unfavourable outcome. Feedback on the other hand helps workers improve their performance. Job design should enable the practice of feedback deliverance at the workplace. Lack of variety causes boredom which in turn leads to mistakes and accidents. This can be eradicated by incorporating variety of tasks in the job. Job design is the process of organising work to overcome job dissatisfaction arising from repetitive tasks in a mechanised setting. It aims at raising productivity level and focuses on non-monetary rewards such as recognition on personal achievement. Job design deals with allocation of tasks. A job design arrangement includes job enlargement, job enrichment and job rotation techniques. Organising is the process of making arrangements to enable the employees to work cooperatively together (Armstrong, 1977). An organisation is an entity that exists to achieve a purpose through the collective efforts of its employees. Organisations not only should try to understand existing jobs but also worry about new jobs and consider whether they should revise existing jobs or not. For expansion, an organisation needs help from various professionals like supervisors and HR managers must help plan for new or growing work units. These professionals should concentrate on viewing the jobs with a fresh outlook. The perfect example of job design is when an organization decides the contents of a job keeping in mind the methods and processes to carry out the job within the stipulated time. So, that the employees are not overloaded with work and synchronization of work becomes smooth amongst the workforce. This in return allows the employees to apply their thought process in improving their job roles. An employee doesn't feel overloaded with work. Work overload leads to stress and excessive stress leads to reduced performance. Also under stress employees are unlikely to engage in extra effort beyond their duties. Technology is a part of every job role. Thus, the job design process is tangled with technology. And with upgradation, technology transition has become a major concern. Making new software systems fit into the

existing system is a gruesome task. Not only the system needs to be updated but also the employees need to be trained gradually to adapt with the new working methods. Training factors are the facilities provided by the management to equip their workforce with skills needed to perform their duties. Trainee selection determines the size, location and characteristics of the target population, as well as their current level of experience and expertise with the topic. Course content encompasses the research and expertise needed to form and teach relevant content. Feasibility determines space and location requirements as well as the time required and cost of the training. Organisations nowadays are fully dependent on information technology for their business operations. They prefer to hire staff those are well equipped with technical knowledge that is needed in their operations (Clark, 2011). Because training a person with prior technical base is easier than training a person with little or no technical knowhow. Technical knowledge doesn't mean high end knowledge of computer programs. It can also describe mere knowledge of computer operations i.e. the proficiency to work with a computer in a day to day life. Computer proficiency can be divided into various parts like file management, word processing, spreadsheets, the internet, and search engine (Bradlow et. al, 2002). The count of these workers with technical background is increasing day by day. But the workforce also consists of people who are not from a technical background. Training these person needs a bit more than the average effort imparted. Peer support tends to be a major facilitator in this scenario. Emerging markets require workforce which can acquire and apply new skills. Learning requires life-long effort and use of instructional resources. Many workplace tools such as new software systems embed training and memory support within the tool itself. In a global economic environment, learning must be aligned to business strategy and increasingly integrated into the work environment. An effective training environment consists of learning during the training as well as on the job. Workforce learning is changing from a series of isolated events to environments with vast repositories of examples, performance templates, access to expertise, personal interaction and virtual media. Effective learning environments are the products of a structured process and proven instructional methods. An effective training program starts and ends with the job. It includes guidelines, examples, and exercises that are job relevant. An effective training program focuses on knowledge and skills that are aligned to important organisational objectives. It incorporates on-the-job performance support as well as training events – delivered in classrooms and on computers. Often training is conceived as a discrete event with a start and end. Instead consider learning as an ongoing process that include both traditional teaching as well as other activities scheduled before, between, and after the process. Some important skill requirements such as management skills or skills associated with widespread computer programs can be achieved with prepackaged training materials. However, many job tasks are unique to a given industry, organisation, or department. No prepackaged training exists to meet these needs. It is this training that will be developed by or under the supervision of each organisation's training staff. For example, in the banking or telecommunications industries the call center representative must be able to apply industry regulations, company-specific processes and policies, specialized computer applications, and communication skills to respond accurately and effectively

to customer requests. The employee's personal factors also play a vital role in overall discretionary effort. Personal factors are driven by perception. An employee's perception related to work creates a belief system in them, which either encourages or discourages them to perform in their job. Individuals enter a job with specific qualification, training, skill and experience. When employees feel that they are not treated or rewarded accordingly, they may take specific actions which could include, psychological distancing from the job, reducing work effort, and even leaving the firm. According to Braun, when time availability is low, perceived equity decreases. Under such conditions, employees are unlikely to take on additional work, whether mandated by management or not. If an organisation is not offering fair pay package, then it won't attract a better workforce who are proficient with technology and the existing workforce will also not be motivated enough in adapting with gradual technology upgradation. Resource independence decreases perceived equity (Braun et. al, 2008). This statement can be explained by a situation where the employee's daily needs are not met by the pay package provided by the company and they have to look for some other means. Thus there might be a lag in performance. Employees need a competitive pay as well as a degree of flexibility. Employees when given flexibility in performing their duties feel that they are valued and trusted. Employees often are influenced by the future prospects of their own and the company's. They tend to enquire whether the job role is a progressive step in their career or not. They are also mindful of the skillset required in the role, and whether there would be an increase in responsibility with promotional opportunities. Candidates often consider the opportunity for development as they want to be challenged in their position. They wish to grow and learn gradually and are often excited about the training that the position offers and the resources that are available to them. Supportive networks that could help them out with understanding technology and solving software problems are what they are looking for. Career stage also plays a major part, as it decides the level of commitment an employee applies to his/her work according to their age and experience. As stated in the career stage theories, people undergo changes over the course of their lives and careers. Thus, benefits from the organisation might be valued differently by the employees at their different career stages and eventually affect altruism positively or negatively (Sammorra et. al, 2014). Reichers (1986) classified career stage into three stages: early, mid and late career stages. Super (1957) classified career stage over four stages: exploration, establishment, maintenance and disengagement. In the exploration stage, emphasis is placed on finding a career. Employees try to establish themselves professionally through their top performance. Maintenance stage resembles the high performers. And disengagement stage employees have minimal motivation as they are at the end of their career and have no further career goals to achieve. The urge and ability to learn something varies among these various stages. In this era of head hunters, organizations find it hard to recruit skilled knowledge workers. These organisations need to create jobs which are interesting enough for an employee to stick to for a long period. These jobs should be satisfying at all career stages and designed according to the specific needs of the employees on those stages. Many organisations face the situation of staff turnover. A new employee enters the organisation with lots of expectations and when they face the reality, their commitment



declines. Employees react more favourably in a work environment when they perceive their jobs to help them in career growth (Fried et. al, 2007). It is also observed that older employees are more committed to the organisation. Always more experienced employees have better positions in the organisation (Allen, 1993). In mid and late career stages, employees look for the variety of tasks in a job (Fried et. al, 2007).

#### **4 FACTORS DEPICTING USE OF DISCRETIONARY EFFORTS IN TECHNOLOGY ADAPTATION**

From the literatures on technology adoption and technology adaptation, two factors can be deduced i) Perceived Usefulness of technology and ii) Perceived Ease of Use of Technology, which can ultimately lead to use of discretionary efforts in learning technology.

##### **4.1 Perceived Usefulness of Technology in Career Development**

Working with computer software is the key to perform every job these days. These software systems also get updated frequently in order to resolve the problems and implement new ideas in work. Thus, there appears a constant need among today's workforce to adapt with the technology gradually. A job holder might require technology proficiency. Thus, learning software systems required to run the organisations might help them in their career ladder. As an employee climbs up the career ladder, he/she is loaded up with additional responsibilities and to take care of these responsibilities they need additional expertise. Often training is imparted after promotion in a pre-conceived training event. But learning is not an event, it is a gradual process of inculcating habits and adding skills to one's inventory. If employees believe that using a specific application system will increase their job performance within an organisational context they will try to learn it. Job relevance is an individual's perception of whether the software system is applicable to his or her job or not (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). Skilled workforce continues to grow in industries most dependent on safety, knowledge, and service, just like the banking industry. If workers perform the task efficiently, not only does the organisation benefit, but also the workers are less fatigued. This involves two aspects, one is of organisational training and other is the conviction of self-development of employees. The organisation classifies workforce based on their skills and then train them to perform their job according to their skills and the company requirements. But the wish to learn amongst employees takes a major role and is an important aspect. Only focusing on efficiency will create jobs that are monotonous. These jobs get boring with repetitive tasks. Hence, organisations combine elements in the job that portray them as more goal oriented and useful in career development. So, that the employees are willing to learn the methods to perform the job in a structured manner.

##### **4.2 Perceived Ease of Use of Technology**

While learning new software there comes several challenges amongst the employees. These challenges differ amongst employees in different career stages. The employee who is from an IT background finds it easier to learn the software than the one who is not. Even if training is imparted, these trainings are not enough to make them adapt with the software

adaptation is a process of learning gradually. It is a habit that a person develops through a course of time. There comes a part which regards the employee's willingness to learn. If an employee feels there is not enough time to complete their existing duties, they won't be willing to employ more time in learning some software which is not essential in performing their daily duties. Perceived Ease of Use refers to the employee perception of effortless learning of the target software system (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). In a banking scenario, we can observe that the transformation of Indian banks in the last decade has phenomenally grown from local branch to global presence and anywhere-anytime banking. As per banker's opinion, information technology needs training to develop expertise (Shaikh M. A., 2014). Kevin, Benard and Ronald (2013) suggested that banking institutions should make their employees upgrade their skills and should put more effort on customer awareness. Machogu A. M. and Okiko L. (2015) stated that staff must be trained to enhance their soft and hard skills. Senthilkumar L. and Karthikeyan G. B. (2015) stated that, "Hierarchical structure and minimal contribution of employees in decision making procedures and also lack of employee's involvement in implementing the objectives and strategies of the organisation leads to specific organisational behaviour which can be characterised as laggards". Thus, employees have to put their own effort in learning new skills, else overall improvement cannot be achieved.

#### **5 CONCLUSION**

This research is regarding the technology adaptation of employees and the role of discretionary effort in it. In recent years, application software has taken the responsibility of completing most of the daily tasks in a personal level as well as in a management level. Learning computer and its functionalities to perform tasks has become much easier as computers are introduced to people from a very early age and knowing about the computer has become a habit or a generalised thing amongst the workforce (Bradlow et. al, 2002). The banking work environment consists of employees from different age groups. For some employees the computer was introduced at school or college, for others it was introduced at work. The effort and content to learn about computers varies amongst these groups. But obviously with discretionary effort all of the workforce can delve into the journey of self-development throughout their career. Self-development requires voluntary effort and conscious attention from the learner to learn something. It is a lifespan process, beginning in early childhood and extending to old age. It includes undertaking training or self-education in a work related area. In case of banks, it means computer proficiency of employees and their adaptation to software changes. And the adaptation process eases out when the workforce perceives the software easy to use. An employee's perceived equity influences their altruism at work. The employee would not attempt to help the employer, if they perceive that the employer receives more than the employee even with minimum effort (Charness and Haruvy, 2002). Altruism is helping others intentionally. It involves voluntary effort directed at supporting and cooperating with specific individuals on work related tasks and problems. This includes 'helping others, who have heavy workloads', 'volunteering to do things without being asked', and 'share knowledge and expertise'. It is well-established in the extensive literature that discretionary effort is the extra effort applied beyond a person's prescribed duties

and helping others doesn't come under prescribed duties. Thus, altruism is discretionary effort.

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