WHY MANAGERS TOLERATE WORKAROUNDS – THE ROLE OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Complete Research

Röder, Nina, Technische Universität München, Boltzmannstrasse 3, 85748 Garching, Germany, nina.roeder@in.tum.de
Wiesche, Manuel, Technische Universität München, Boltzmannstrasse 3, 85748 Garching, Germany, wiesche@in.tum.de
Schermann, Michael, Technische Universität München, Boltzmannstrasse 3, 85748 Garching, Germany, michael.schermann@in.tum.de
Krcmar, Helmut, Technische Universität München, Boltzmannstrasse 3, 85748 Garching, Germany, krcmar@in.tum.de

Abstract

Workarounds are deviations from defined routines in business processes and challenge standardization and thus the performance improvements expected from information systems. Researchers study the phenomena of workarounds across different domains and industries with varying conclusions. Literature associates workarounds predominantly with performance losses, facades of compliance, or inferior process quality. In contrast, few studies report on performance improvement or creative flexibility because of workarounds. Literature does not yet provide sound guidance to organizations that face the decision of either tolerating or prohibiting a workaround. Literature, however, does provide a deep understand of what constitutes a workaround. In this paper, we build on this understanding to investigate, what characterizes situations in which workarounds are tolerated to yield potential performance improvements? This study examines situations in which organizations are able to decide whether to tolerate or to prohibit workarounds. We report on a multiple case study with four organizations and use existing research on workarounds to structure our analysis. Building on this, we show that expected efficiency gains, exposure to compliance risk and perceived process weakness have an effect on the willingness of organizations to tolerate workarounds. We develop a model that illustrates important aspects of situations that influence this willingness. Furthermore, we understand information systems as an enabler of business processes, which help organizations to support their key business activities. Employees are looking for indicators that help them to identify risks and benefits of enacting workarounds in a particular process instance - we refer to them as cues. Organizations implement cues in IS in order to predict whether a workaround is perceived as improvement or does actually endanger the business process. Thus, we extend IS literature by enhancing the knowledge of ambivalent process consequences and the design of cues.

Keywords: Workaround, tolerance, routinization, standardization.