

Situational Application Usage: A Framework for Success in Enterprises

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1.0 Introduction

The concept of Situational Applications (SA's) is not a new one. They have long existed, going under many different names; situated applications, 'good enough' software, opportunistic software and mashups to name but a few. In this paper, the term that will be used is Situational Applications. Shirky [20] defined SA's as software "designed for use by a specific social group, rather than for a generic set of users". Similarly, Balasubramaniam et al [18] agree, adding that it is "personalized, localized software that has evolved organically and has been created by the community that uses it". These interpretations differ slightly from that of Jhingren [6] who focusses in on how SA's are those software products "constructed on the fly for some transient [business] need".

Unfortunately SA's remain a poorly defined term. Many have argued that it is

Addressing niche business requirements is one of the critical defining factors of SA's [1]. Such software is created to address the long tail business requirements, as opposed to the traditional big ticket items which software projects usually focus on. This alone has the capability of becoming a game changer for those enterprises who are able to successfully deploy and maintain SA's. Anderson [1] studied this effect, known as the 'long tail'. He identified that considerable opportunity existed in the smaller niche markets and desires of consumers than when compared with the opportunities in the larger high volume 'common' market segments. Fo

When reviewing the available literature it is clear that there is an overriding bias towards highlighting differences, rather than similarities. It is difficult to ascertain whether this is a gap in research or simply highlighting a pertinent fact about the two types of traditional vs situated application. Further research is needed in this area in order to answer this question appropriately.

2.3 Benefits and Challenges

It is with the benefits and challenges of SA's that we see the true potential of the research being proposed. Cherbakov et al. [19] lists three groups of benefits which SA's can bring to an enterprise: (1) empowering businesses through encouraging innovation, eliminating frustration and improving morale (2) improve business solutions by deve2(t)8M

3.2 Aims and Objectives

In order to successfully answer the question above, the research is designed to meet the following aims and objectives. The authors aim is threefold.

Aims:

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defining what SA's are and the benefits they offer. This is not helpful in answering the research questions laid out in this paper.

The aim of this paper is to set out a research methodology that could be implemented in order to solve the questions put forward earlier in this section. In order to do this, it would be necessary to secure real world data and thus a case study approach should be followed, selecting a large scale enterprise organisation which currently uses and develops SA's. This type of ethnographic approach will allow the author to explore, in detail, the themes highlighted from the literature review as well as meet the above aforementioned objectives. A case study approach benefits from encouraging data triangulation through the examination of multiple data sources, e.g. documents, interviews and focus group accounts. Whilst it is acknowledged that more than one case study would be beneficial it is difficult to ensure engagement from multiple companies, instead a focus will be maintained on one company allowing an in-depth analysis. If resources allowed a small scale pilot case study could be performed in order to fine tune the approach before engaging in a more costly (in time and money) full scale case study.

An exploratory sequential mixed methods research approach is proposed. In addition to the benefits of data triangulation, mixed methods leads to methodological triangulation also. The biggest advantage of a mixed methods approach is that the weaknesses of one method will often be countered by the strengths of the others, this enables the overall study to weather result nuances or inconsistencies, leading to a more credible outcome [5] The problem this paper sets out in section 3.1 is primarily exploratory in nature and thus beginning with a qualitative research approach is logical. It allows an in-depth exploration of managers and end users perceptions of SA critical success factors within their natural organisational setting. Once key themes around success and risk have been explored the second phase of the study will turn to quantitative methods to allow a wider focus through the use of data extraction on usage of specific lines of business or departments as well as through surveys. The result being it is then more feasible to generalise from the findings through the larger sample size.

3.3.1 Interviews and Focus Groups

The first phase of research focusses on qualitative interviews and focus groups. A minimum of f

organisation. It is necessary to begin the research by gaining as much in-depth knowledge as possible - starting with expert users and managers gives the best chance of eliciting the most information downstream in later research phases, e.g. focus groups and surveys. Demographic variables, such as age and gender, are not relevant to the study and therefore no demographic stipulations will be made against the chosen interview population. The selection of interviewees will be made in combination with an approved representative at the chosen organisation, i.e. the gatekeeper, this individual will facilitate all access to materials or people for the researcher. The gatekeeper will advise and suggest a pool of resources who meet the role criteria outlined above for selection by the researcher.

Given the exploratory nature of the SA problem domain a semi structured interview type will be followed. This gives the advantage of providing key questions or subject areas for discussion whilst avoiding the very rigid and inflexible nature of structured interviews which could result in the researcher being unable to follow interesting or emerging themes. The following open discussion questions will be followed in the semi structured interview:

- How are SAs created, implemented and maintained?
- What are the risks with SA's?
- What makes a successful SA?

The intent of this research is to examine multiple themes relating to SA's, such as creation, risk and governance, therefore it is logical to use focus groups as an additional method to garner feedback. Focus groups are beneficial for exploring multiple themes, especially when little is currently known about the research area.

and signed by parties involved in the research study, this ensures that commercially sensitive data remains protected and secure. Given that interview staff may touch upon commercially sensitive data, any information obtained as part of the research must be secured and held confidentially, it should not be shared or passed to any other individual or organisation without prior consent. Interview subjects themselves must be informed as to the purpose of the research and what will be done with the data collected, thereby ensuring informed consent. At any point during the data collection phase participants should be able to withdraw from the process without penalty.

During interviews and focus groups the researcher must ensure that they do not cross the line and become intrusive or collect data outside of the remit which has been agreed. For example, it is understandable to record data pertaining to types of SA's, general functionality and feedback etc. But storing any data held within the applications is likely to be unnecessary and could be deemed intrusive. This could damage relationships between the case study participant, university and researcher, not to mention it would go against the first rule to do no harm [16]

In accordance with Bournemouth University Guidelines an Ethics Checklist would be required to be submitted as per the online template

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