

## Stupid, ineffective, and cruel: the true cost of bad employee self-service technology experiences

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For many years there has been a steady increase in use of employee self-service technology solutions. Self-service solutions allow employees to complete administrative HR, IT, travel and procurement tasks instead of having them completed by support professionals. This includes things like requesting vacation time, enrolling in benefits, transferring employees, filing expense, accessing tax forms, changing job titles, adjusting pay levels, posting job openings and a myriad of other activities associated with the administrative side of work.

There are two major advantages to self-service solutions. First, they allow companies to save workforce costs by eliminating support services roles. Second, they provide employees with the ability to perform tasks independently. This can create a greater sense of efficiency and autonomy. However, this second advantage is predicated on the assumption that self-service solutions are effective. Sadly, all too often this is not the case. What is even more sad is that many companies are unaware or insensitive to the pain, frustration and suffering that bad self-service technology is inflicting on their employees.

### The Cost of Bad Self-Service Solutions

Empirical research has shown the negative impact that bad self-service technology has on employees<sup>1</sup>. These solutions do more than just frustrate employees. Ineffective self-service solutions send a message that the company does not appreciate employees' time. [A survey of over 10,000 professionals](#) found that only 53% of employees feel their company pays attention to their needs when introducing new technology. In contrast, 90% of C-suite executives felt their company's technology was sensitive to employee needs. There is a major disconnect between what leaders think and what employees are experiencing when it comes to the use of technology solutions that are supposed to help employees.

Let's be clear about this, forcing employees to use bad self-service solutions is:

- **Stupid.** The hourly rate of managers and line employees is usually higher than the rate of administrative support staff. Many self-service systems require employees to struggle at completing unfamiliar tasks that could be done by experienced administrative staff personnel in much less time. It does not make financial sense to have employee's complete administrative tasks unless it takes considerably less time than having them done by lower paid administrative staff. This is not the case with many self-service solutions.
- **Ineffective.** When self-service systems are poorly designed, employees will try to minimize time spent in the solution. This includes purposefully leaving out or changing information to make the process faster. For example, a manager might reclassify an employee turnover reason from involuntary to voluntary to avoid going through additional steps that might be forced upon him if he provided the real reason why an employee left the company. The result is a solution that systematically creates bad data.
- **Cruel.** Self-service solutions often support tasks that employees must complete to move forward with their work (e.g. get a new computer, hire a staff member, complete expenses, adjust an

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher, SL & Howell, AW (2004). Beyond user acceptance: an examination of employee reactions to information technology systems. *Human Resource Management*, 43, 243–258.

Meuter, ML, Ostrom, AL, Roundtree, RI & Bitner, MJ (2000). Self-service technologies: understanding customer satisfaction with technology-based service encounters. *Journal of Marketing*, 64, 50-64

employee's pay). Forcing employees to use poorly designed self-service solution to perform these tasks can create considerable stress and anxiety. Many employees openly admit to having sworn or lost their tempers due to bad experiences with self-service technology. Companies are requiring employees to use system that literally raise their blood pressure.

### **The cause of bad self-service solutions.**

The problem with self-service solutions is not the idea of employee self-service. The problem is forcing employees to use poorly designed self-service solutions. Many company's self-service solutions use legacy on-premise platforms that cannot be easily accessed using mobile technology. They also use outdated user interfaces and contain HR and financial information that is unfamiliar to most employees. This is a result of how these solutions where designed. Rather than building a true self-service solution, companies took old legacy solutions designed to be used by support professionals and changed them so managers and employees could log-in to them directly. Or they designed self-service solutions based on the what the support functions need them to do, not what employees want them to do. As a result, many employees are forced to use self-service solutions that were never actually designed for them.

To be truly effective, self-service solutions must be designed so employees find them simple to use. This starts with using mobile enabled solutions updates with modern user interfaces. These systems should leverage the same sorts of artificially intelligent interfaces found in consumer platforms that employees use outside of work.

Companies should also be sensitive to asking employees to do something that is not what they were hired to do. It is financially inefficient and culturally disrespectful to ask professionals hired for their specialized skills to spend significant time on tasks that could be performed by administrative support staff. There is actually a very easy way to see if a company's senior leaders truly appreciate the value of their employees' time. But almost no large company does it. Require executives to use the same self-service solutions they expect their employees to use. And make sure they do it using same level of administrative support their employees receive. The world would be a much better pace if every executive had to use the same self-service solutions they force their employees to use.