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**User Developed Applications:  
Evaluation of Success From the DP Department Perspective\***

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**ABSTRACT**

User development of computer-based applications (UDA) is a new phenomenon in organizations, and can provide benefits for both users and for data processing departments. The benefits of UDA to DP departments are considered in this paper. The UDA literature suggests that the DP departments can expect to receive two major types of benefits: the backlog of DP application development projects should decrease, and the proportion of DP resources spent on application maintenance should be reduced. However, this study, which was carried out in ten large Canadian business firms, found that in no instances were these factors cited by senior DP managers as primary success considerations.

In most cases, these managers felt that UDA might have some effect on the amount of DP resources devoted to perfective maintenance or on the portion of the backlog which consists of smaller, "one-shot" applications. However, in no instances had the DP managers attempted to measure these factors. More importantly, the decrease of the applications backlog and the decrease of the maintenance load were not perceived by the DP executives as being important components of UDA success. Rather, these DP managers were mainly interested in being able to demonstrate that the applications developed by users are of demonstrable, tangible benefit to the organization, and that the users themselves are satisfied with the UDA services made available to them via the DP department. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

This study also found that the evaluation of the tangible benefits to be derived from UDA activities was a critical issue for DP managers. In the paper, a simple evaluation framework, derived from an earlier model by Keen, is proposed and illustrated with experiential data drawn from the companies studied. The framework is useful in explaining why some DP departments are successful in their evaluations while others are less so.

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\*This paper is forthcoming in the MIS Quarterly.

Table 1. Summary of DP Departments' Definitions of UDA Success

	Tangible Benefits to User Community	User Satisfaction
Primary Definition	7	3
Secondary Definition	2	3
TOTAL	9	6

Finally, an argument is presented that users themselves, not the DP department staff, should be held directly responsible for demonstrating that the applications they develop are cost beneficial to the firm. Implications of this argument include:

- (1) that DP departments charge users for the use of computing resources;
- (2) the proper role of the DP department in UDA evaluation is that of advisor.