Chapter II

The Social Antecedents of Business Process Planning Effectiveness

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INTRODUCTION

Although there has been a wide coverage in the IS literature of the alignment of IT plans with organizational plans, most studies focused on the mechanics of this alignment rather than its antecedents (Brancheau, Janz, & Wetherbe, 1996; Rodgers, 1997). Therefore, emphasis was put on the strategies, structures, and planning methodologies used to attain alignment (Henderson & Sifonis, 1988; Tallon & Kraemer, 1998). A minor line of research that focused on the people involved in the creation of alignment (Nelson & Cooprider, 1996; Subramani, Henderson, & Cooprider, 1999) dealt with the state in which business and IT executives within an organizational unit understand and are committed to the business and IT mission, objectives, and plans (Reich & Benbasat, 2000). While this chapter would partially fit within studies examining the social antecedents of alignment, it departs sharply from earlier studies in the sense that it does not consider the organization as made up of distinct IT and business functions. Instead it adopts a holistic view whereby information systems form the skeleton of business processes and neither can be disentangled from the other. This peculiar perspective on the role of IT in the organization makes it essential to consider antecedents to alignment that go beyond the dichotomy between IT and business. The key concepts that will be introduced throughout this study derive from this logic. Information-
enabled leadership, the planning culture, knowledge worker management, and strategic alignment are key constructs that form the backbone of our model of business process planning. The latter is the outcome of integrating IT and business planning. Planning effectiveness that is posited as the outcome variable of the previous variables is itself re-conceptualized within the proposed perspective.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The information systems literature provides a wide range of models for undertaking IT planning but lacks research into the catalytic effect of information-enabled leaders to ensure that business planning and IT planning are fully aligned, knowledge workers are fully involved, and the planning culture is conducive to planning effectiveness. In many cases, the best strategic planning efforts fail to yield desired results because of the absence of an effective, enabled leader to guide planning efforts and oversee their proper implementation.

Strategic alignment implies that enterprise outcomes are a result of the mix of a human resource strategy, a business strategy, and an information technology strategy coated within a supportive planning culture. The achievement of the proper mix requires an action-oriented framework, which goes beyond awareness of the issues and problems and focuses on a structured process of directed change (Wysocki & DeMichiel, 1996). Information-enabled leaders are capable of developing human resource strategies centered on the empowerment of knowledge workers through formal mechanisms like delegation of decision-making power or through informal mechanisms like a planning culture. They are imbued by a process paradigm in planning process-based (cross-functional) IT applications. Subsequently, the IT strategy is expected to fall in place through harnessing the enabling role of IT on one hand and the knowledge and skills of an empowered knowledge workforce on the other hand, with the objective of reengineering business processes in line with the business process strategy devised.

This chapter will assess the role of information-enabled leaders in achieving this strategic alignment between human resources, strategic planning, and IT planning within the framework of a planning culture. A literature review on leadership, information systems planning, and corporate cultures will provide the conceptual framework for analyzing information-enabled leadership in the context of this strategic alignment. Conceptual material will draw on a series of interviews with senior IT planners in several commercial and off-shore banks in the State of Bahrain, to sort out the information-enabled dimension of IT
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