

Only One Evolving Strategy

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Kevin Johnston

Department of Information Systems, University of Cape Town, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Most organizations have multiple strategic plans (de Kluyver & Pearce, 2006); including several Information Technology (IT) related strategic plans. The alignment of an organizations business strategy with its Information Technology strategy has been a concern of CEO's (Bragg, 2011; O'Brien & Marakas, 2006), CIO's (Benson & Standing, 2008; Johnston, Muganda & Theys, 2007, Luftman, 2005), academic researchers (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1999; Kangas, 2003; Luftman, Zadeh, Derksen, Santana, Rigoni and Huang, 2012) and research companies (Longwood & Smythe, 2013; Mahoney, 2013) since the age of vacuum tubes. The Society for Information Management (SIM) studies reveal that 'IT and Business Alignment' has been one

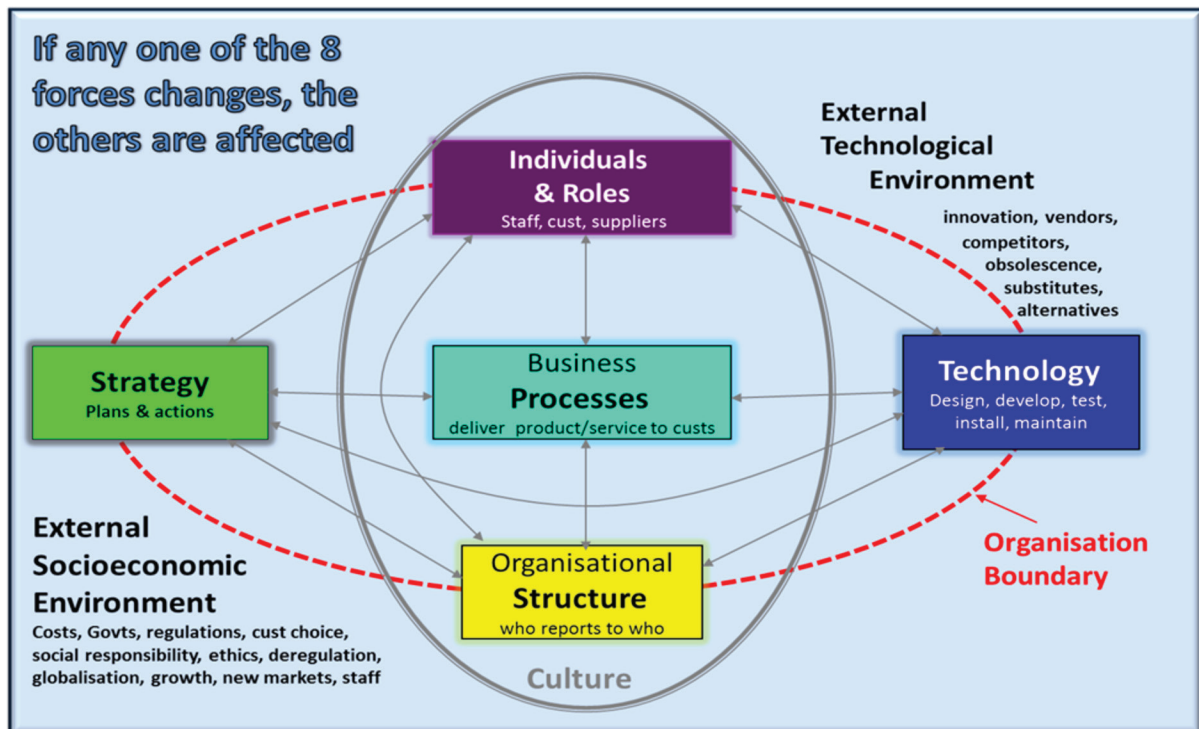
of the top 10 concerns since 1983 (Luftman, 2005), and was the number one concern in 2012 (Luftman et al., 2012).

The contention of this article is that IT and Business strategies should neither be separate nor aligned; organizations should simply have only one evolving strategy.

BACKGROUND

Organizations continually face numerous change forces such as indicated in Figure 1. The framework developed by Scott Morton (1991) (Figure 1) illustrates the inter-relationship between strategy and other forces; namely business processes, organizational structure, people and

Figure 1. Adapted Scott Morton framework of forces on organisations (Scott Morton, 1991, p. 20)



DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5888-2.ch084

IT. External environments (Socioeconomic and Technological) influence the organization. Changes in any one or more of these forces upsets the equilibrium of the organization, a change in any one force may require changes in some or all of the forces. Essentially Scott Morton's framework implies that strategy should be developed in a holistic fashion, taking all forces into consideration. So IT (and business processes, organizational structure, people and their roles) should not be merely aligned with the overall strategy, or be there to support the overall strategy, they each contribute and form an essential part of a single organizational strategy.

Clearly, there is a need to face these forces and challenges, and develop strategies to manage these and other changes. The successful implementation of strategy requires the ability to manage and communicate organisational change (Hempel & Martinsons, 2009). Similarly, organisational change frequently flows from a clear strategic plan.

Much of the IS literature on strategy implementation overlaps with change management. A strategic change can affect people, technology, processes, structures, suppliers, and business partners making it difficult to implement strategic change programmes (Franken, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009). "Strategic execution requires systemic thinking" (Morgan, Levitt, & Malek, 2007, p. 11), as a change in one area can affect other areas (Scott Morton, 1991). There is frequent mention of attracting, allocating, and managing the resources needed to deliver the change programs that will deliver the strategy (Franken, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009). The strategy implementation literature also stresses the importance of culture and communication. It is of interest that this literature refers to practitioners being "left in a state of confusion when having to decide which approach is most appropriate for their situation" (Franken, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009, p. 49). This is similar to the confusion facing IS practitioners when they have to decide on an approach for implementing a system.

Organisational strategy is concerned with an organisation's basic direction for the future: how to move an organisation from its present position to some future desired position (De Kluyver & Pearce II, 2006). This process can be ordered around three questions: "Where are we now? Where should we go? How do we get there?" (De Kluyver & Pearce II, 2006, p. 11). These questions lead to a mission statement which

should be a clear definition of the overall purpose of the organisation (Fréry, 2006). Defining a compelling purpose (mission) for an organization is considered by some to be one of the key management functions (Denning, 2010).

Part of the value of a strategic plan is that it can achieve strategic alignment by applying strategy in an appropriate and timely way, in harmony with all business units (Luftman, Kempaiah, & Nash, 2006). One perspective on the strategic process is that executives control the process by setting goals, and then monitoring actual results against those targeted so that all gaps can be closed (Grant, Hackney, & Edgar, 2010; Lovallo & Sibony, 2010; Schermerhorn, 2001). This view suggests that the process is pro-active, and management attempt to change the organisation to reach certain aspirations (Eden & Ackermann, 2000).

Recent writers have drawn on the work of Mintzberg, and suggest that the strategy setting process is emergent and iterative rather than a sequential process (Grant, Hackney, & Edgar, 2010; Stacey, 2009). This view seems more applicable as organizations often have inconsistent ill-defined loosely coupled goals, plus employees who invest varying amounts of time and energy in the organisation (Weick, 1979). In any strategy, one must assume that everything is going to change during the execution of the strategy, and that strategic planning is an iterative process, not an annual exercise (Barney & Hesterly, 2006; Grant, Hackney, & Edgar, 2010).

Each organization requires a structure, and when that is ignored, the organization will not be able to crawl, much less fly! No organization will last if everyone acts independently; a structure needs to be developed preferably with the employees, which enhances the strategy and vision of the organization.

Organizations need tradition, ritual, and structure to retain their identity. A department in which the author managed had a daily meeting in which all employees met each other and offered encouragement, support, guidance and feedback. The meetings were standup 15-30 minutes affairs, with a fixed regular program. On Mondays projects and work for the week ahead were discussed; Tuesdays were thinking days and employees had to solve puzzles in groups; Wednesdays were learning days where one employee had to teach the others something; Thursdays were to announce and discuss change; and Fridays were for external focus or

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