



## **Chapter XIII**

# **Rethinking Stakeholder Involvement: An Application of the Theories of Autopoiesis and Boundary Critique to IS Planning**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Current practice in strategic information systems (IS) planning seems to be focused on surfacing an organisation's vision and goals, exploring the potential offered by information technology (IT), and designing information systems to support the fulfillment of the stated goals using the most appropriate technology available (García, 1993; Currid, 1994; Lewis, 1994; Andreu et al., 1996). Methodologies for IS planning usually involve the training and participation of individual employees—but only in so far as they contribute to furthering the pre-set organisational agenda.

These methodologies also tend to assume a 'standard' role for IS experts: providing expertise in IT/IS management. Most of the literature and the practice of IT/IS development in organisations seem to be focused upon technical issues (Davies and Wood-Harper, 1989), where computer science experts play an important role (Winograd and Flores, 1987). They are expected to provide knowledge to solve problems.

These assumptions about how IS planning should work are as prevalent in educational institutions as they are in other kinds of organisations (Galvis, 1998). Of course, failures and delays in IS implementation and use occur just as much in the arena of education as elsewhere, and these failures are mostly attributed to

'people problems' (Solloway, 1991; Tarrago, 1993; Carr et al., 1998). When problems appear, they tend to be tackled in a reactive manner, putting the responsibility for the effective adoption of IS on teachers and students (Carr et al, 1998; Spitzer et al, 1998). However, it is the role of experts to say what teachers and students should do. Therefore, it is little wonder that 'user resistance' is so often encountered, both in educational IS projects and more widely (Lyytinen and Hirschheim, 1987).

To us, the phenomenon of resistance points to the need for a rethink of the assumptions underpinning many IS planning methodologies. In the words of Kearsley (1998), "We need to develop a framework that allows for the patterns and relationships among people and organisations that will allow educational technology to be successful" (p.2). In other words, the technology will only be successful if its development and implementation takes into account, and helps people build upon, human relationships and ideas. There should not be an expectation that human relations will be determined by the needs of the technology.

Of course, the implications of this statement for IS design are profound: "...any statement of design is a statement that the designer makes about desirable actions, beliefs and values" (Kozma, 1994, p.17). Therefore, designing an IS without first understanding the details of human relations in a local context will result in the imposition of the designer's value system on users, and will most likely produce resistance. IS planners need to look on IS as *serving* the purposeful activities of individuals, groups and organisations, and this means taking account of the various different perspectives that might inform wider activity planning (Lewis, 1994; Checkland and Holwell, 1998).

This chapter is concerned with IS planning in an educational context (a Colombian University), but we take a different perspective to most IS planning methodologists—including some of the methodologists who are already critiquing the traditional 'expert' approaches to IS planning. We argue that the majority of methodologies fail to consider the diversity of users' social contexts, and that IS planning should involve the participation, right from the start, of a variety of stakeholders, each of whom inhabit multiple domains of action. Each domain of action involves people playing a different 'language game' (Wittgenstein, 1953), which brings forth specific concerns about other people as human beings. For example, a person may play one language game when interacting with her family, and then switch to another at work. The two language games will imply different expectations and duties of both the self and others. Indeed, within the work context alone, people may be able to identify several domains of action, and several different language games (or rationalities) that they draw upon. Even many of the IS planning methodologies based on user involvement define involvement in terms of a single, pre-set purpose to be pursued by the participant group—and this is usually set by senior management. However, the experience of many people is that they have to juggle multiple (sometimes conflicting) purposes and rationalities in the course of managing their lives (Shotter, 1993).

As people are involved in multiple domains of action, pursuing multiple purposes, they also have multiple (and sometimes conflicting) concerns for others. Therefore, stakeholders (including IS 'experts') should not be confined to a single role within IS planning, or be expected to conform to a single rationality. Rather, the

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