



Chapter V

**Managerial Responsibility
and IT: How Does the Use
of Information Technology
Change the Way Managers
Have to Think and Realize
Responsibility?**

Bernd Carsten Stahl
University College Dublin, Ireland

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the relationship between management, responsibility and information technology. It is shown that there are structural similarities between the three terms that facilitate addressing normative issues in the management of IT through the use of the concept of responsibility. That means that responsibility seems to be a perfect choice for dealing with ethical, moral, and legal problems arising from IT. However, there is also another aspect, the fact that the use of IT can pose a threat to managerial responsibility ascriptions. The paper aims at clarifying the nature of these threats and opportunities. The knowledge about them should help managers maximise their chances of successfully discharging their responsibilities in IT.

INTRODUCTION

Responsibility is probably one of the most important and defining notions for managerial work. Every manager is responsible for his or her company, department, etc. More specifically, she has responsibility for the quality of the product or service. The responsibility also extends to employees, customers, and the general public. Furthermore, most managers would probably say that they feel responsibility for their personal lives, their families and a general responsibility as a member of society and a citizen of their state.

This short list shows that responsibility is a many-faceted notion containing numerous roots and meanings. The different sorts of responsibility have always been prone to conflicts and are an old source of moral and legal problems. Nowadays the use of computers and information technology has added a whole new order of magnitude to the potential for responsibility but also to its possible problems. The purpose of this article is therefore to investigate how the use of information technology influences the manager's capacity to assume responsibility. Not surprisingly we will come to the conclusion that the increasing use of IT opens new avenues for responsibility but at the same time poses new threats. Threats and opportunities, however, are not equally distributed. Opportunities are often clearly visible and frequently talked about. IT is a tool that allows greater measures of control and of knowledge about the organisation. Managers can respond better and quicker, which facilitates the discharge of responsibility. The threats, on the other hand, are frequently hidden in conditions and assumptions of IT that seem so natural to us that they are rarely discussed. Management has to take these threats seriously because they can endanger the legitimacy of the use of IT and in some case even the legitimacy of management. In this paper we will demonstrate that IT promises to facilitate management work. Good management, however, that looks at more than just the immediate financial bottom line will in many cases become harder to achieve than it used to be.

In order to give this demonstration, the paper will address several points. In a first step we will show that management and the notion of responsibility are closely related on several levels. In the following section, we will introduce information technology and its impact on management on the one hand and responsibility on the other hand. In a last section we will discuss the feedback between the three terms and take a look at the pros and cons of managerial responsibility as they result from IT.

MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

In this section we will give a brief overview of the notion of responsibility, followed by a definition of management. We will demonstrate that management should pay attention to ethical matters and continue to show that management and responsibility are closely related for several reasons.

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