Chapter III

Information Resources Development Challenges in a Cross-Cultural Environment

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ABSTRACT

Organizations in the Western world devote much attention to the development of information systems as strategic resources. The transfer of this management practice to a different cultural environment generates new challenges as reported in the experience of a Pacific Basin public institution with Western affiliation, while under strong influence of local cultures and practices. The value of the investment in information resources is judged not only on technical merits, but also on the ability of the organization to properly address the cultural and organizational issues related to information usage.

INTRODUCTION

Information Resources Development is a new frontier for organizations in Asia Pacific countries. In many cases, the expectation for information reports from external funding agencies and investor groups has been the primary driving force for the construction of information systems. While justification for capital investment in information technology remained the major challenge, management must overcome organizational inertia and the

general deficiency in information literacy. The mingling of Western management approaches with regional administrative styles creates new dynamics for the management of information resources (Shea and Lewis, 1996; Raman and Watson, 1997). Western management theory considers information the lifeblood of organization. The sharing of information lubricates the interlocking divisions within the organization, promoting the effective achievement of organizational goals. Externally, information exchanges strengthen business relationships in a value chain, improving the competitive positions of business partners. In many regions of the world, information represents power; managers often try to accumulate as much of it as they can while denying access to others (Oz, 2002). The disclosure of information is considered a threat to the span of management control (Rocheleau, 1999). The strategic manipulation of information flow is frequently valued over the potential knowledge gain from the objective evaluation of organizational data. This chapter examines organizational dynamics and possible management solutions in the deployment of information system in a cross-cultural environment. User actions and their interpretation of data reports create challenges that demand the attention of information system managers and designers.

BACKGROUND

The information system literature provided thorough coverage on designs, features and implementation methods for computer-based information systems. Numerous studies examined broad varieties of systems-solutions for organization needs (Applegate, 1995; McLeod, 1998; O' Brien, 2002). Much attention has been on the development of information systems since the lack of them can impede an enterprise in its competitive success. The projected value of information technology has been formulated based on a rough assessment of the possibilities without full appreciation of the limitations due to resistance to organizational and social changes (Osterman, 1991). Lesser known was guidelines for information system managers to ensure a positive contribution to business performance. Well-managed information systems may not guarantee any business value. The information system function must create the conditions that enhance user effectiveness and efficiency in using the information to improve value delivery for the organization (Parker, 1996).

Increasingly, management has realized that massive deployment of information systems on a global basis is not producing the desirable outcomes of value generation. Recent studies confirmed the significant role of cultures towards the success of transferring information technology beyond the Western world. National culture, organization culture, and MIS cultures induced influence over the successful development and management of information resources (Hofstede, 1980; Raman and Watson, 1997). Shea and Lewis (1996) suggested the desirability of placing close attention to user absorptive rate in the transfer of new technology into a different cultural environment. It became apparent that adaptation of information system designs to new cultural environment was insufficient to guarantee successful implementation. User selection of technological features, driven by cultural preferences, could be a key factor for designing information systems in multi-cultural environment.

New challenges emerged as non-technical issues clouded the measurement of information system performance. Since computer information systems were often promoted for the increased speed of data processing, users became conditioned to evaluate the performance of information systems based on the speed of data report delivery. However, the timely

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