Chapter XI

Toward a Model for Investigating Non-Decision Making in ERP Communities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter proposes to reframe current research on decision making process in the area of ERP selection and implementation and to study ERP communities, defined here as triadic groups composed of (1) an ERP vendor, (2) an ERP implementer and (3) an implementing organisation. In this novel perspective, the core contribution of this chapter is to introduce and apply the concept of Non-Decision Making (NDM) in its two basic forms—explicit and implicit—to the area of IS in general and more specifically to ERP research. As far as the authors are aware, this chapter is the first to examine the ERP decision making process under this light.

The researchers' objective is to structure their ideas in the shape of a model of ERP decision making, incorporating both the community dimension of ERP decision making and the ideas borrowed from the NDM literature, that can inform both the practice and investigation of ERP implementation and lead to higher success rates in ERP projects.

INTRODUCTION

Little attention has been devoted to NDM processes — the process of not deciding — even though it may be viewed as the prime mode of "response to crisis" of many human undertakings, as illustrated by many ongoing conflicts in the international community (Judge, 1997; Atlee, 2000). According to Judge (1997), parents make extensive use of NDM processes in persuading children to act, or not act, in particular ways, while sales personnel make use of these skills in dealing with customers or in handling product complaints — as do confidence tricksters. Physicians also use such skills in providing, or withholding, information to patients or their relatives; and couples use them in navigating their relationships. Atlee (2000) proposed five requirements for powerful NDM, for discovering "big obvious truths": diversity, passion, motivation, deep dialogue, and enough time. He stated: "Once the obvious truth has been found, there is no need for a decision. Such truth not only sets people free — it allows a group or community to self-organize."

In this chapter, we argue that *"midwifing the emergence of the obvious truth"* and the way that this can sometimes guide managerial decision making are key areas of research for understanding current developments in the off-the-shelf software market (e.g., the ERP market). In particular, this may be used to explain why some organizations are successful in deploying enterprise-wide solutions, and particularly Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems. Thus, Donovan (2001) claimed that as many as nine out of 10 organizations do not get ERP right the first time around and experience the same kinds of difficulties that they faced with each new wave of IT since mainframe systems were first introduced (Markus & Tanis, 2000). Westrup and Knight (2000) made similar comments when they considered ERP systems in relation to previous approaches to deploying IS in organizations. Doyle and Adam (1996) described the slow and painful decision-making process followed by an organization trying to convince its parent company to let them invest significant funds in a much needed ERP, as the legacy systems of the company were slowly falling apart (see Chapter 3).

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