Preface

In the area of strategic information technology, strategic alignment is an often discussed but frequently misunderstood term. Alignment has been defined in many ways in recent years in the popular press, yet in the information technology realm, it is most commonly defined as the implementation of information technology (IT) in the integration and development of business strategies and corporate goals. Its importance has been well known and documented since the late 1980s and it remains one of the primary areas in which businesses are focusing their attention. In fact, it has become an area of prime interest to managers, eclipsing even such topics as e-commerce and the Internet.

Traditional methods of developing business strategies have failed to take full advantage of IT. In the past, technology was typically treated as a "cost center" or viewed as an "expense" rather than an enabler of business value. Strategic alignment sheds new light on IT and its role in the development of business strategies. It is no longer economically feasible to treat IT as a lower level support tool; failure to leverage IT may seriously hamper the firm's performance and viability in today's global, information-intensive world. Alignment of business strategies with IT goals and objectives to evaluate and assess the level of integration of business and IT strategy within firms is paramount. By concentrating on the alignment of strategy and infrastructure, firms may not only achieve synergy and facilitate the development of business plans, but also increase the profitability and efficiency of their firm within its industry. These tangible benefits allow management to focus on the application of IT as a means to leverage their core competencies, skills, and technology scope, resulting in improved efficiency.

In the quest for alignment, some key questions executives must begin to ask themselves include "Are our business strategies and plans leveraging information technology (IT)?", "Are our company's business and IT organizations aligned?" and "What are the implications of a misalignment between business and IT?" to determine appropriate strategies which take advantage of IT capabilities. Alignment enables a firm to maximize its IT investments and achieve harmony with its business strategies and plans, leading to greater profitability and effectiveness. Alignment is important to firms for many reasons. The major reason is to ease the development and implementation of cohesive organization and IT strategies that enable firms to focus on the application of IT to improve the business. By understanding and leveraging the business/IT partnership, organizations can concentrate on the application of IT to enable the business strategy. This harmony can be extended and applied throughout the organization as new opportunities are identified.

The primary objective of this book is to explore the myriad of issues regarding the application of business strategy and IT strategy, specifically focusing on ways to achieve, implement, and measure strategic alignment and what can be done to facilitate its use in the firm. The chapters presented herein address strategic use of IT and what can be done to facilitate its implementation in the firm. They are based on research from both academia and industry to provide managers and students alike with an understanding of and appreciation for the development of business and information technology strategies.

Use of this book by practicing managers and academics

Managers and consultants may find this book an invaluable "field guide" to the alignment process. Although it is authored by both academics and practitioners, it incorporates many real-world examples and focuses heavily on how executives can implement strategic alignment to achieve competitive advantage within their organization and industry. Consultants and executives will also find this a good resource for understanding alignment and keeping current on an important topic in the information systems field.

This book could also be used as a college text for a senior level undergraduate or graduate-level course in information systems and is particularly well suited for a course on strategic information systems and its implementation. Additionally, this book would be suitable for use by non-IS majors to study the development of business and technology strategy within a business framework.

Format and contents

This book begins with an overview of the strategic alignment process and focuses on how alignment is used to assess the degree and extent of business/ information technology synergy within a company. The remainder of the book focuses on the application and/or implementation of strategic information systems using various constructs and includes implications and suggestions for managers to implement strategic alignment.

The objective throughout the book is to present the reader with a comprehensive look at strategic information technology and how it can be applied by focusing on real-world scenarios. The papers presented in this book represent leading research in the area of strategic information technology by an international cadre of academics and practitioners. Their expertise and knowledge are combined in one text whose premise is that a successful firm must utilize information technology effectively, efficiently, and appropriately if it is to remain competitive in a changing world.

Acknowledgments

This book comprises a compilation of chapters from leading practitioners, teachers, consultants and researchers from around the globe. Each of the authors shares his/her findings regarding the implementation and/or application of strategic information systems for competitive advantage. Bios of each of the authors follow. I wish to thank all the authors whose contributions appear in this

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book. Much of the work presented here represents cutting-edge research on strategic information technology that cannot be found elsewhere.

I also wish to acknowledge Idea Group Publishing, specifically Medhi Khosrowpour for his assistance with my original proposal, and Jan Travers and Michele Rossi for their help in assembling this book.

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Finally, I wish to thank the many students I've had who have suggested that I assemble a contemporary textbook on strategic information systems. It is because of them that this book is a reality.

This book is dedicated to the families of all the contributors. I especially want to dedicate it to my family, whose support and indulgence have made this possible.

Raymond Papp
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