Chapter X

Surfacing Occupational Threats to IT-Enabled Change:
A Neglected Role for Organization Development?

Joe McDonagh
University of Dublin, Ireland

Abstract

While the business press is awash with claims that investing in information technology (IT) is the key to delivering superior economic performance, unfortunately, it appears that reaping the benefits of IT investments is fraught with difficulty. Indeed, the introduction of IT into work organisations is generally marred with persistent reports of underperformance and failure. This chapter critiques the nature of this dilemma and, in particular, explores the role of diverse occupational groups in its perpetuation over time. Executive management tend to view
the introduction of IT as an economic imperative while IT specialists tend to view it as a technical imperative. The coalescent nature of these two imperatives is such that the human and organisational aspects of IT related change are frequently marginalised and ignored. Achieving a more integrated approach to the introduction of IT is inordinately difficult since the narrow perspectives embraced by the executive and IT communities do not naturally attend to change in an integrated manner.

Introduction

Throughout much of the last four decades the introduction of new information technology (IT) based systems has posed formidable challenges for many organizations, both public and private sector alike (Clegg et al., 1996; Dearden, 1972). While each new decade has witnessed significant investment in both administrative and technological innovations, with the lure of achieving significant efficiency and economic gains, it remains that outcomes from such investment programmes have been continuously disappointing (McDonagh & Coghlan, 1999, 2000). Indeed, it appears that underperformance and failure are common experiences, with as little as 10% of IT-enabled change initiatives delivering promised business value (McDonagh, 1999).

Investments in e-government initiatives are prime examples of how administrative and technological innovations coalesce with the implicit promise of significant benefits for all stakeholders involved. Yet, it remains that e-government initiatives are fraught with difficulties (OECD, 2001; Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000). Furthermore, such difficulties evoke memories of ongoing pathologies that have routinely derailed the effective introduction of IT in work organizations over the years.

Drawing from both the information systems domain and its reference disciplines, this chapter presents a detailed critique of this enduring dilemma and in particular explores the role of occupational groups in its perpetuation through time. This chapter concludes by way of noting that effecting an integrated approach to the introduction of IT that accounts for economic, technical, human, and organisational facets of change is inordinately difficult since the requisite knowledge and expertise are widely dispersed among diverse occupational groups.
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