Chapter XIV

Reducing Legal, Financial and Operational Risks: A Comparative Discussion of Aligning Internet Usage With Business Priorities Through Internet Policy Management

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The increased reliance on the Internet exposes organizations to a number of legal, financial, and operational risks through inappropriate workplace information technology (IT) behaviors. This article explores these IT workplace behaviors and how Web and e-mail usage can be effectively aligned with business priorities while allowing for some personal use. The development of alignment is explored through the discussion of eight organizations, six small/mid-sized and two large. The organizational responses converged in policies and processes for controlling actual or potentially detrimental IT workplace behaviors, thus reducing the risks. Alignment is achieved through Internet policy management (IPM), which integrates an enterprise-wide
written Internet usage policy (IUP), effective communication of the IUP and enforcement through Web and e-mail content monitoring/filtering software.

**INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF INTERNET MANAGEMENT**

Once primarily used for e-mail and retrieving information, the Internet is now embraced as a critical component of staying competitive in the 21st century. The Internet is a tool that lowers the cost of communication and is restructuring the way work is done. The Net is becoming the backbone for everything from linking supply chains to storing knowledge, and most benefits are in business practices and integration. It is estimated that the Internet could add approximately 0.4 percentage points to annual productivity growth over the next five years (Mandel & Hof, 2001). The Internet is used in the workplace as a tool for both external and internal communication. External information sharing is in the areas of e-commerce, marketing, supply chain management, remote site connectivity, and customer support. Internal information sharing is found in employee and benefit information, inter- and intra-department coordination, and knowledge storage and management.

Not only has the Internet altered the competitive environment, but also the nature of work has changed. The Internet has played a pivotal role in obliterating the once clear-cut lines between work and personal life. Employees are working more than ever and many people bring their work home. In many jobs, work expectations are 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24-7), without regard to place or time; intertwining of work and personal clocks is now commonplace. Since employees have less personal time, the Internet has become a valuable tool for their personal life, allowing them to book appointments, research trips, manage personal finances and keep in touch with family. In some ways, the Internet allows employees to have a more flexible work schedule because they are able to conduct some of their personal business during traditional work hours and to work at home or on the road.

While the Internet can create many desirable organizational outcomes, it can also generate undesirable outcomes such as the loss of intellectual property, sexual harassment lawsuits, productivity losses due to surfing abuse, and network bandwidth overload. It is becoming increasingly clear that employers have an obligation to proactively manage the Internet-connected workplace. Companies need to set up a middle ground between no or limited access and unrestricted access by managing Internet usage to the benefit of both employers and employees. The first step to aligning individual Internet
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