Chapter 5
Guidelines for Managing B2B Standards Implementation

Eva Söderström
University of Skövde, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a model of a Business-to-Business implementation that is developed based upon a literature review and an empirical study. The model is also accompanied by a set of implementation guidelines derived from the study. These results may guide organizations that plan to standardize B2B processes. They may also help organizations improve the efficiency of their performance as well as guide future researchers towards new possibilities.

INTRODUCTION

Predictions are often made stating that Business-to-Business (B2B) endeavours will grow in numbers extremely fast, but little is known about real-world standards usage and implementations (Chan and Swatman, 2002; Edifecs, 2000). B2B refers to “…the use of the Internet and Web-technologies for conducting inter-organizational business transactions.” (Teo and Ranganathan, 2004). It is focused on streamlining transactions both internally within an organisation, and externally with others (Ersala et al, 2002). Coordination across systems in an organisation is even part of how enterprise systems can be defined, as an integrated planning and resource management system that coordinates information across all enterprise functions (Bendoly et al, 2009). B2B implementation is a complex issue, and much of it is still unknown (Teo and Ranganathan, 2004; Jap and Mohr, 2002; Baghdadi, 2004). This is shown by organisations still having problems in implementation, in spite of the advantages brought about by standards (Premkumar et al, 1994). Hence, simply investing in B2B technology does not automatically lead to improved performance. Previous studies have shown that each IT implementation includes additional concepts (or assets) that impact IT, and finally also the organisation (Kohli and Devaraj, 2004; Lee and Lim, 2003). According to Swann
(2000), the value to business and the economy at large comes not from standards publication, but from standards usage. A model of the implementation process could spur improved planning of B2B standards implementation projects. Potential implementation problems and the kinds of available support need to be described as well. Many standards are complex and difficult to interpret. Implementation knowledge may mean that problems can be reduced and catered for already in the planning process.

Since implementation is complex, research is needed into e.g. how organisations are affected by standards, how the implementation process is structured, and what factors affect it. In this chapter, we present a model of B2B implementation developed from a combination of a literature review and an empirical study. A model alone will not do the trick, since there still would be issues in how organizations can apply the model and what issues to consider when doing so. Therefore, the model is accompanied by a set of guidelines also derived from the study. These results may help organisations about to enter into standardisation to think ahead and to avoid making mistakes. It may also help already experienced organisations to improve their implementation performance, as well as give researchers additional insight by developing novel results. The research thus has a potentially broad application, since results would be of interest to different kinds of standards stakeholders, such as users, developers, researchers, and software providers. The results could help bring research and practice together, as well as help standards stand a greater chance of actually being used. Before travelling further upon the path of B2B implementation, let us first unravel some background information on B2B and standards.

**BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS (B2B)**

There are different levels in which companies can engage in B2B. Egan et al (2003) divide endeavours into primitive or advanced B2B. The primitive level includes for example internal integration of operational databases, and customer transactions over the Internet. The advanced level, or full electronic commerce, refers to integrated fulfilment cycle of ordering, shipping, billing, etc. Many organisations strive for the advanced level, but most are still on their way there (Egan et al, 2003). A similar division of B2B is made by Lee et al (2003), who claim that B2B can be either basic or collaborative. Basic refers to automation of simple exchanges; while collaborative include entire networks of organisations and channel partners. In any case, B2B is focused on streamlining transactions both internally within an organisation, and externally with others (Ersala et al, 2002). Therefore, B2B exchanges are at the heart of high technology markets (Zolkiewski and Littler, 2004). We illustrate a typical B2B scenario in figure 1. This figure will be explained in more detail when introducing standards.

B2B is anticipated to greatly exceed the future of B2C as a means to increase sales and reduce operational costs (Kaefer and Bendoly, 2004). Kaefer and Bendoly’s reasons are two-fold: Large volumes of sales typically take place between business partners rather than between an organisation and individual consumers; and there is an opportunity to gain in efficiency in inter-organisational communication by exploiting emerging IS technologies. This would mean that many organisations feel pressured into B2B. Pressured or not, organisations involved in B2B must form relationships with one another, whether ac-
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