Chapter 17

IT Alignment Intelligence: The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Business and IT Alignment

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ABSTRACT

Above average analytical and mathematical ability are highly sought-after human attributes required from IT professionals at work in the Systems Development Life Cycle (SDLC). These attributes are perceived to be ingredients for a successful career in Information Technology (IT). When companies hire IT professionals, they often focus on the “hard” skills needed to perform the work (Joseph, Ang, Chang, & Slaughter, 2010). There is a growing awareness that technical skills alone are insufficient for success in IT. Technical skills and experience are becoming an entry-level requirement. Being technically competent is no longer enough. For IT professionals, to improve business, a wider set of skills are required. This research aimed to determine what the human attributes are that contribute most to the improvement of business, namely IT alignment. It was found that Emotional Intelligence (EI) of business analysts, systems analysts, and project managers does play a role in the non-delivery of business needs by the IT department. Further, human attributes found to contribute to business-IT alignment were experience, communication skills, professionalism, and collaboration skills. A taxonomy of IT alignment intelligence for business analysts, systems analysts, and project managers is proposed.

INTRODUCTION

The well documented misalignment between business and IT strategies as well as the perceived non-delivery of the IT department resulted in the question as to why despite all the research, there is still on-going misalignment between business and IT strategies (Belfo & Sousa, 2013; Chan &
Reich, 2007; Tallon & Pinsonneault, 2011). Technical skills and knowledge are essential elements but alone they are not sufficient for successful business—IT alignment. IT professionals need IT alignment intelligence to complement their technical skills in the process of improving business—IT alignment. Despite the fact that it is the human in the IT organisation that has to ensure alignment between business and IT strategies, the non-technical skills required by IT professionals traditionally get limited focus on the agenda of IT Managers.

Emotions influence group dynamics, occupational performance, and group effectiveness (Bar-On & Maree, 2009; Bharwaney-Orme & Bar-On, 2002; Dries & Pepermans, 2007; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Higgs, 2004; Janovics & Christiansen, 2001; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; McClelland, 1998; Sala, 2006; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). The world of work is emotional. Palmer, Stough, Harmer, & Gignac (2010) define EI as a “set of skills relevant to how we perceive, understand, reason with and manage our own and others’ feelings”. Emotions influence how we perceive and interpret information, and how we respond to others (Sala, 2006). An increasing body of research published in peer-reviewed journals suggests that developing one’s emotionally intelligence can have a significant positive influence on performance in the work place. Several studies also suggest EI exhibits unique variance (incremental validity). EI was also found to be a unique forecaster of job performance independent of the effects of personality and intelligence (O’Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to establish what emotional intelligence competencies IT professionals could have to improve business—IT alignment. A taxonomy of IT alignment intelligence is proposed. Technical skills and knowledge are required of IT professionals, but on their own, they are insufficient for successful alignment of business and IT strategies (Joseph, Ang, Chang, & Slaughter, 2010; Kaluzniacky, 2004). IT alignment intelligence could potentially compliment the technical skills of IT professionals in improving business strategy and IT alignment. This chapter contributes towards the gap in research as far as EI and the IT profession goes. It further contributes to put forward and to highlight the need for more research on the topic and to create more debate on human factors and the alignment of business and IT strategies within organisations. In figure 1 a conceptual framework is proposed. The framework consists of 5 elements namely competencies required from industry, industry competency guidelines, approaches to EA, the Genos model and the EI profiles of IT professionals. This chapter will only address three elements of the framework namely the competency requirements from industry, the industry competency guidelines and the Genos model.

The conceptual framework seeks to assist in the exploring and understanding of the role of EI in possibly bridging the gap between business and IT in organisations. IT managers as well as human resources departments may want to use the framework and the findings of this research to be more focused on specific competencies in their efforts to improve the performance of IT professionals while delivering on the information systems requirements of business.

BACKGROUND

The growing body of literature the past two decades demonstrates the influence of emotions on occupational performance, and group effectiveness (Bar-On & Maree, 2009; Bharwaney-Orme & Bar-On, 2002; Dries & Pepermans, 2007; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Higgs, 2004; Janovics & Christiansen, 2001; Joseph, Ang, Chang, & Slaughter, 2010; Kaluzniacky, 2004; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; McClelland, 1998; Sala, 2006; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Since humans are emotional, these emotions influence how humans perceive and interpret information, and
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