Holistic Framework for Evolving Effective Information Systems Strategy

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ABSTRACT

The world today is an information society with most of its workforce employed as knowledge workers, thus increasing the complexity of management. There is general recognition of information as a key resource. Information is considered to add value to, and differentiate products and services. New work practices like desk sharing; home working, individual learning, and the use of satellite offices are changing the work culture. In this scenario, information systems strategy plays a pivotal role and much organizational success would depend on how well integrated the information systems strategy is with the overall organizational strategy. Based on in depth literature review, reports and polices desk analysis and the authors own experience in designing and implementation strategies, this paper describes, discusses and reviews the existing models and more important proposes a holistic framework that can be adopted for evolving an effective information systems strategy in general and for SMEs and entrepreneurs in particular.

Keywords: Approach, Communication, Development, Effective, Goal, Information, Knowledge, Opportunity, Strategy, Systems, Universal

INTRODUCTION

The ‘First World’ is an information society, with most of its workforce employed as knowledge workers, thus increasing the multifariousness of management in a business environment that is characterised by complexity, simultaneity, synchronicity and decentralisation. Computers, once seen as constraining and controlling, are now end-user tools seen as liberating and empowering. There is general recognition of information as a key resource or the ‘oil of the 21st century.’ Modern businesses are not possible without the help of information technology, which is having a significant impact on the operations of enterprises (Baragde & Baporikar, 2015). Information is a key determinant of the wealth of nations as world markets depend on it. Information is considered to add value to, and differentiate products and services. New working practices such as desk sharing; home working, individual learning, job sharing, contracting, and the use of satellite offices are changing the nature of work. Internet’s ability to connect people through

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the communication network irrespective of their physical location is changing the landscape of work culture. The benefit flowing out of this is the ability to bring about a collaboration of people for a common task without physically bringing them together into an office (Baporikar, 2015). In such a scenario, information systems strategy plays a pivotal role and much organizational success would depend on how well integrated the information systems strategy would be with the overall organizational strategy. To align the vision or dream with the steps undertaken by middle and first level management it’s important to have streamline flow of information across all levels. Ambiguous and incomplete information flow can happen if there is lack of direction and support from the top management (Baporikar, 2014b).

Moreover, totally new business models are being developed and companies have discovered completely new strategies to gain competitive advantage in this information age. Traditional economies defined by regions and countries have shifted to more globally oriented markets (Baporikar, 2014a). Planning an information systems strategy is a decision-making process (Alter, 1980). Such a crucial process should be undertaken carefully, systematically and with a firm understanding of the business context. Based on in depth literature review, reports and polices desk analysis and the authors own experience in designing and implementation strategies, this paper describes, discusses and reviews the existing models and more important proposes a holistic framework that can be adopted when developing an effective information systems strategy in general and for SMEs and entrepreneurs in particular.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A series of action research projects, conducted by the authors, spanning over a decade, has seen the emergence of an approach to embedding a number of strategic tools and techniques in a simple cyclical framework. These projects have involved strategic, tactical and operational systems in education, health care, construction, banking and other areas of the private sector. Here the attempt is to define a general purpose framework. Thus this research has involved the adaptation and use of a recognised framework for the development of Information Systems (IS) strategy. This strategic framework supports the use of a wide range of established strategic tools, which may be used in one or more stages of the framework as appropriate. The use of Failures Theory, SWOT analysis and PEST analysis has been described here by way of example, but many other tools, techniques and methods may also be usefully employed. Many of the well-established models and methods were originally developed to describe or to model organisations as a whole.

In the current business environment, where organisations often have multi-generation system platforms and applications, they may be more appropriately employed at the application or project level. Understanding the networked environments, with the onset of e-m-learning and knowledge management technologies, combined with other web 2.0 technologies, have an impact on organizations and their relationships within/outside their boundaries (Baporikar, 2014d), is also crucial. Examples of appropriate tools, techniques and methods include: Nolan’s ‘Stage Hypothesis’, Earl’s ‘System’s Audit Grid’, McFarlan’s ‘Applications Portfolio’, Porter’s ‘Five Competitive Forces’ theory, McFarlan’s ‘Information Systems Strategic Grid’, etc. These and other tools, techniques and methods may be used to focus the mind on five key questions: what is the historical background to the change process and what, in broad terms, has been learnt from experience in terms of successes and failures, what aspects of the current situation are likely to be relevant to the strategic decision making process, what are the objectives of the change process, how can experiences, strengths and opportunities be exploited and weaknesses
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