Chapter I

Bringing Social and Organisational Issues into Information Systems Development: The Story of Multiview

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ABSTRACT

Multiview is a framework to support the information systems development process. It was formulated originally in 1985, but has been developed and changed since that time. It was originally defined to take into account the human and organisational aspects of information systems development, as the alternative methodologies of the time—and most since that time—took a very technology-oriented approach. Furthermore, it is a contingency approach, and again this compares with the alternative bureaucratic and prescriptive methodologies. In this chapter, we describe the history of Multiview, and we reflect on the experiences of using it in action in many organisations.

THE MOTIVATION FOR MULTIVIEW

The authors had several years’ experience as systems analysts in industry before joining Thames Polytechnic together in 1974 as lecturers in systems analysis. Our role was to teach systems analysis to undergraduates and post-experience students. The major part of this consisted of a basic course in information systems development. This was based on the National Computer Centre (NCC) course in systems analysis (Daniels and Yeates, 1971) that was used in the UK and elsewhere at the time. However, this provided a very technology-oriented understanding, and our experience suggested that for information systems to be successful this was a very narrow view. Further, the description of the process of information systems development as formal, step-by-step, almost ‘scientific,’ did not coincide with our experience developing information systems in practice, which was much more like a trial-and-error exercise. We felt that there was a major rift between both what was espoused with what was practised and what was espoused with what was desirable.

Our first move was to look as widely as possible so as to ascertain whether there were more enlightened approaches to information systems development. However the alternatives of the time did not provide a human or organisational view. Most were either data-oriented, such as D2S2 (MacDonald and Palmer, 1982) which was the basis for Information Engineering (Martin, 1990), or process-oriented (Yourdon and Constantine, 1978) or a combination of both, leading eventually to MERISE (Quang and Chartier-Kastler, 1991) and SSADM (Downs et al., 1991). There was no approach at that time which took human and organisation issues in information systems development seriously. The main motivation for Multiview was to include these human or organisational aspects fully into information systems development. But we also wanted to suggest that information systems development was not a step-by-step, prescriptive process, but iterative and sometimes applied differently as circumstances dictated. This reflected our real-world experience. Our definition of Multiview was more a contingency framework than a formal set of procedures. We show how Multiview was defined and developed in this chapter.

Our view was that this was not a theoretical exercise. We wanted to see if these ideas would work in practice. Thus our original definition of Multiview was tried out in a number of real-world situations, frequently working with practitioners. These experiences were very different and illustrated the contingent nature of the process. Further, in our teaching we used these experiences to expose the difficulties and practical problems of information systems work, frequently ignored in the texts of the time. We also discuss in this chapter the role of action research in defining and refining Multiview.
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