Chapter V

Communicating Strategic IT Vision to Organization Members: A Conceptual Framework

Mary Elizabeth Brabston, University of Manitoba, Canada
Robert W. Zmud, University of Oklahoma, USA
John R. Carlson, Baylor University, USA

ABSTRACT

The development, communication, use, and benefits of organizational strategic visions have been well documented. Visions focus the enterprise on achieving their strategic goals. Little research has been done to date on the development, communication, and benefits of strategic visions for information technology. Based on a review of the strategic management, information systems, organizational theory, and change management literature, we present a conceptual framework for the development, communication, and potential benefits of a strategic vision for information technology and its alignment with the overall organizational strategic vision.

INTRODUCTION

Today’s dispersal of information technology (IT) decision making across many organizational members offers the promise of greatly increasing the extent to which IT is applied to managerial and operational work systems (Boynton & Zmud, 1987; Jarvenpaa & Ives, 1990). Along with the advantages of such distributed action come the potential disadvantages of inappropriate allocations of effort and resources and associated outcomes — chiefly poor investment decisions, lost opportunities, duplicated efforts, and incompatible platforms and applications. One strategy for minimizing these disadvantages lies in the development of a
common understanding among an organization's members concerning the primary roles to be served by information and by IT throughout the organization. One tactic for achieving this common understanding is through the development, articulation, and dissemination of a strategic IT vision (SVIT) (Collins & Porras, 1991; Nanus, 1992; Parker, 1995; Parker & Benson, 1991; Robbins & Duncan, 1988).

The value of developing and effectively communicating an organization's overall strategic vision to its members is well-recognized (Nanus, 1992; Robbins & Duncan, 1988; Locke, Kirkpatrick, Wheeler, et al., 1991). By sharing a common strategic vision, organizational members will better understand how their individual roles contribute to their organization's strategic mission and will be more likely to act in an appropriate and consistent manner when faced with uncertain or ill-defined situations. Similar benefits are believed to arise when an SVIT is shared by an organization's members (Parker, 1995; Parker & Benson, 1991). If an organization's members are aware of the organization's SVIT, more effective IT decision making and information use are likely to occur.

In order for an organization's members to understand an SVIT, the vision must be effectively communicated to them. Effective communication occurs “when the transfer of an idea from a source to a receiver results in a change in knowledge, attitude or overt behavior on the part of the receiver” (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970-1971, p. 529). Understanding the IT vision (i.e., change in knowledge) is the first step in recognizing an effectively communicated IT vision. Understanding is followed by a change in attitude and changes in overt behavior, consisting of specific actions taken to implement the vision.

Little prior research has been directed toward the communication process by which organizational members may come to understand the SVIT. While Jarvenpaa and Ives (1990) did propose that annual report letters to stockholders “... can effectively serve as rough surrogates for CEOs’ views and the status of IT in the organization” (p. 356), their research did not examine how effective this specific channel was in communicating an SVIT. A review of the strategic and organizational communication literature did not reveal any other findings regarding the process of communicating an SVIT throughout an organization.

The process by which an SVIT is developed is clearly important. If the process produces an appropriate, aligned IT vision, then the IT vision may become reality. We begin by first discussing the nature of an SVIT and its importance to organizations; then a conceptual framework for creating, aligning, and communicating an SVIT is presented. The final part of the framework is the acceptance of the IT vision. Finally, the framework’s limitations and implications for information systems research and practice are discussed.

THE NATURE OF A STRATEGIC IT VISION

An organization’s overall strategic vision is a shared, realistic, yet idealistic and attractive view of the organization that inspires and motivates others, through their individual and collective efforts, to move toward the vision (Nanus, 1992; Collins & Porras, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 1996). Figure 1A graphically represents how an organizational strategic vision can serve as the stimulus for all organiza-
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www.igi-global.com/article/critical-risk-path-method/89361?camid=4v1a