Chapter XIV
Impact Analysis of Intranets and Portals on Organizational Capital: Exploratory Research on Brazilian Organizations

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes the impacts of intranet quality on organizational capital practices. The chapter describes a research model empirically tested in 98 large Brazilian organizations. The variables proposed by the TAM (technology acceptance model) (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) and the TTF (task technology fit) (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995) were converted into portal’s context, emphasizing the importance of leveraging classical information science and information system studies to understand better the portal phenomenon. Furthermore, the knowing organization model (Choo, 1998) was applied in order to offer a theoretical support for the intellectual capital-based variables. The results give evidence that the portal quality has more influence on knowledge creation than on sense-making and decision-making. The chapter reinforces the usage of the Knowing Organization model as a framework to understand intellectual capital and knowledge management initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Intranet is an appropriate tool to systematize and add the explicit knowledge that is dispersed through departments. Intranets are organizational assets, and an important part of the structural dimension of the intellectual capital (Stewart, 1998). However, the efficient usage of intranets is closely related to a wider comprehension of information management contribution to organizational
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performance. Intranets should be understood as a part of organizational information context and its usefulness is influenced by culture, values and principles concerning strategic information management.

The correct balance between managerial and technical aspects constitutes one of intellectual capital’s greatest challenges. Culture and user behaviors are the key drivers and inhibitors of internal sharing, and organizations should develop ways of stimulating people to use and contribute to information systems (Detlor, 2004).

In an attempt to consolidate various departmental Intranets, organizations are constructing corporate Intranets or portals (Choo et al., 2000). But portals are evolving into more complex and interactive gateways, so they may integrate in a single solution many information systems. They are becoming single points of entry through which users and communities can perform their business tasks, and also evolving into virtual places where people can get in touch with other people who share common interests. Due to this evolution from Intranets towards portals, many organizations are using them as the major technological infrastructure of their knowledge management (KM) and intellectual capital initiatives.

The chapter’s purpose is to analyze the impacts of Intranet quality on organizational capital practices. This chapter is organized as follows. First, the TAM—technology acceptance model (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000)—and the TTF—task technology fit (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995)—are applied to portal’s context, emphasizing the importance of leveraging classical information science and information system studies to understand better the portal phenomenon. These studies offer a background to analyze the impacts of portal deployment on a user’s behavior, and consequently on organizational capital initiatives. Then, the knowing organization model (Choo, 1998) is presented in order to offer a theoretical support for the intellectual capital-based variables. The next section describes the exploratory research where the model was empirically tested in 98 organizations. Finally, the future trends and conclusion sections describe future works and give advice about how the research model can be used.

BACKGROUND

A portal’s primary function is to provide a transparent directory of information already available elsewhere, not act as a separate source of information itself (Choo et al., 2000). Common elements contained in corporate portals design include an enterprise taxonomy or classification of information categories that help easy retrieval, a search engine and links to internal and external Web sites and information sources. Perceiving the portal as a specific type of information system is a way of exploiting previous studies related to user behavior, technology acceptance and its organizational impact.

One of the most referenced models of information system (IS) adoption is the TTF (task technology fit) model (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995). The model analyzes the linkage between IS usage and individual performance. According to TTF, a technology has a positive impact on individual performance when it is utilized and has a good fit with the tasks it supports.

The TAM (technology acceptance model) was developed to explain and predict computer usage behavior (Davis, 1989). TAM has received substantial theoretical and empirical support from hundreds of studies, becoming a generally accepted cognitive model for predicting user IT acceptance (Detlor, 2004). TAM has two variables that influence attitudes and use. Perceived usefulness is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance. In contrast, perceived ease of use refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort (Davis, 1989).
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