Chapter XII

Attitude and Management Style Matter in IT Implementation: A Study of Small Business Owners

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ABSTRACT

According to previous studies, a positive attitude towards information technology (IT) among small business owners appears to be a key factor in achieving high quality IT implementations. In an effort to extend this stream of research, case studies were conducted with small business owners. A surprising finding of this study was that high quality IT implementations resulted with owners who had either a positive or a negative attitude towards IT. Another finding was that these owners also all had an entrepreneurial, or shared, management style. By contrast, owners who had an uncertain attitude about IT uniformly practiced a traditional (non-entrepreneurial) management style. This group also
uniformly had low quality IT implementations. It is proposed, based on case study data, that small business owners with an uncertain attitude towards IT might experience higher quality IT results in their organizations through practicing a more entrepreneurial, or shared, management style. The study provides insights for both computer specialists and small business owners planning IT implementations.

INTRODUCTION

Most small business owners can find extensive support for the incorporation and continual upgrade of information technology (IT) into their businesses. The implementation of IT has been credited with significant cost reduction, productivity gains, and organizational effectiveness (Cooper & Zmud, 1990; Doukidis et al., 1994; Stair et al., 1989). One might have a difficult time finding the small business owner that would not at least acknowledge some benefit of using IT. Yet, it is interesting to note that while many small business owners readily commit to IT initiatives, many others delay and even avoid investing in IT (Maglitta, 1992; Nickell & Seado, 1986; Ray et al., 1994).

The small business owner’s dominating role in any IT implementation is well documented (Cragg & King, 1993; Doukidis et al., 1994; Julien & Raymond, 1994; Thong & Yap, 1995). More specifically, some studies suggest that the owner’s positive, negative, or uncertain attitude towards IT affects the quality of an IT implementation (Cragg & King, 1993; Delone, 1988). Additionally, the owner’s management style influences the implementation process and has a direct impact on firm outcomes (Normann, 1971; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971; Winston & Dologite, 1999). These characteristics, attitude and style, seem to play a key role in directing the small business owner’s decisions regarding the technology to implement, the personnel that will manage the implementation, and the supporting managerial and human resource polices (Agarwal & Prasad, 1997; Cragg & King, 1993; Doukidis et al., 1994).

In this study, small business owners were interviewed to primarily explore their attitude towards IT and the quality of their IT. Management style, an expression of owner behavior and an integral aspect of the implementation process, became another significant dimension to investigate. A surprising finding of this study was that high quality IT implementations resulted with owners who had either a positive or a negative attitude towards IT. These positive and negative owners also all had an entrepreneurial, or shared, management style. By contrast, owners who had an uncertain attitude about IT