Chapter XIX

Information Systems Leadership Roles: An Empirical Study of Information Technology Managers in Norway

Petter Gottschalk
Norwegian School of Management, Norway

Information systems (IS) leadership roles have undergone fundamental changes over the past decade. Despite increased interest in recent years, little empirical research on IS managers has been done. This article presents results from a survey in Norway. The survey collected data on general leadership roles such as informational role, decisional role, and interpersonal role, as well as on specific IS leadership roles such as chief architect, change leader, product developer, technology provocateur, coach, and chief operating strategist. The empirical analysis indicates that strategic responsibility as well as network stage of growth influence the extent of informational role, while the extent to which the chief executive uses IT influences the extent of decisional role, and the extent to which subordinates use IT influence the extent of interpersonal role. IS managers with greater operating responsibility will be chief architects. The role of a change leader is positively influenced by the number of years in IT, the extent of IT use, the extent of strategic responsibility, and the organization’s revenue, while it is negatively influenced by the number of years in the current position. Product developer can be predicted by strategic responsibility and chief executive’s IT use, while technology provocateur can be predicted by the extent of IT use. Coach can be predicted by the extent of subordinates’ IT use, and chief operating strategist can be predicted by the extent of strategic responsibility. Although several significant predictors of IS leadership roles were identified in this research, the search for more significant explanations should continue in future research.


INTRODUCTION

Information systems (IS) and information technology (IT) leadership roles have undergone fundamental changes over the past decade (Applegate & Elam, 1992; Cross et al., 1997; CSC, 1996; Stephens et al., 1995). Despite increased interest in recent years (e.g., Armstrong & Sambamurthy, 1995; Earl & Feeny, 1994; Rockart et al., 1996), little empirical research on IS/IT leadership roles has been done. This paper was motivated by the need for identification of IS/IT leadership roles and their potential explanations. The research makes a contribution to the stream of studies which examine the characteristics and role of the chief information officer (CIO) or IT director (Peppard, 1999). The paper presents results from a survey conducted in Norway. Survey results are compared with previous empirical studies by Applegate and Elam (1992), CSC (1997), and Stephens et al. (1992).

LEADERSHIP ROLES

Managers undertake activities to achieve the objectives of the organization. Mintzberg (1994) notes a number of different and sometimes conflicting views of the manager’s role. He finds that it is a curiosity of the management literature that its best-known writers all seem to emphasize one particular part of the manager’s job to the exclusion of the others. Together, perhaps, they cover all the parts, but even that does not describe the whole job of managing. Mintzberg’s role typology is frequently used in studies of managerial work (e.g., Pinsonneault & Rivard, 1998). According to Mintzberg (1990), the manager’s job can be described in terms of various roles:

1. **Informational Roles.** By virtue of interpersonal contacts, both with subordinates and with a network of contacts, the manager emerges as the nerve centre of the organizational unit. The manager may not know everything but typically knows more than subordinates do. Processing information is a key part of the manager’s job. As monitor, the manager is perpetually scanning the environment for information, interrogating liaison contacts and subordinates, and receiving unsolicited information, much of it as a result of the network of personal contacts. As a disseminator, the manager passes some privileged information directly to subordinates, who would otherwise have no access to it. As spokesperson, the manager sends some information to people outside the unit.

2. **Decisional Roles.** Information is not an end in itself; it is the basic input to decision making. The manager plays the major role in a unit’s decision-making system. As its formal authority, only the manager can commit the unit to important new courses of action; and as its nerve centre, only the manager has full and current information to make the set of decisions that determines the unit’s strategy. As entrepreneur, the manager seeks to improve the unit, to adapt it to changing conditions in the environment. As disturbance handler, the manager responds to pressures from situations. As resource allocator, the manager is responsible for deciding who will get what. As negotiator, the manager commits organizational resources in real time.

3. **Interpersonal Roles.** As figurehead, every manager must perform some ceremonial duties. As leader, managers are responsible for the work of the people of their unit. As liaison, the manager makes contacts outside the vertical chain of command.
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