The Expert's Opinion

Interview by Beth Green
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An interview with
David A. Benson, Manager
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GE Information Services, Inc.

GE Information Services, Inc., a global leader in electronic commerce services, provides commerce express, electronic messaging, electronic data interchange, and information management services along with consulting and systems integration and implementation to link more than 25,000 businesses around the world. Headquartered in Rockville, Maryland, GE Information Services, Inc. is a subsidiary of GE, a global technology services and manufacturing company.

IRMJ: In your opinion, what is the current state of information management in most large organizations?

Benson: I think that in most large organizations, information management is in a transition period. If I had to describe the state in one word, I would say improving and becoming more focused on bottom line business results. Today, different technology is being employed consequently many organizations are moving from a mainframe base to a client server base. Organizations are also struggling with questions of whether to outsource and whether the primary role of the IM group is the development and support of systems and the application of technology or helping the business change its processes.

IRMJ: What is meant by the term process reengineering and why is it becoming such a popular issue now?

Benson: I think of process reengineering as the fundamental reworking of business processes and procedures. It is designed basically to dramatically improve the competitiveness of a business. By competitiveness I mean primarily speed, quality, decreasing costs. Its popularity is attributed to a few causes. IM groups are questioning how to ensure that the business gets the maximum return on its investment in technology. Consequently, many systems groups are evaluating the concept of process reengineering.

In terms of businesses in general, process reengineering is popular basically because of increased competition. The markets are now much more global and the competition is much stronger. Customers, faced with greater numbers of choices than in the past, are more sophisticated and demand better quality and better service. Companies now have to be as efficient as possible so that they can offer the best quality products at the lowest prices and with the best service.

IRMJ: How is your company facilitating process reengineering?

Benson: We do not tend to use the term process reengineering in our company. We have been working on fundamental process change and process improvement in GE for a number of years, long before it became a popular term. We have learned over time from what we have done and essentially created a series of tools which we refer to as the GE tool kit. We have a number of approaches that we have used in one business or another which we have collectively decided are our best practices. The GE tool kit is used to drive change in processes, both internally and through consulting contracts with clients.

Internally, we use several groups within the company, such as the Corporate Business Development and Corporate Audit staffs, as facilitators of change efforts. Many of these individuals have very different backgrounds, for instance technical, engineering, financial, marketing, and human relations. Such a diverse group is important in evaluating and affecting process change. The findings are used, both internally and with our clients, as resources to help facilitate change and help individuals become more effective at driving "reengineering" activities.

IRMJ: In your opinion, what are the three issues that are considered to be the driving forces behind process reengineering in organizations?

Benson: I could describe it as one issue: competitiveness. However, if I was to break it up into three issues, I would say it is the need to increase speed, increase quality, and continuously decrease cost.

IRMJ: In your opinion, what should organizations consider prior to applying process reengineering as an innovative approach?

Benson: The level of commitment, how much buy-in there is from the leadership of the company, and how willing the leaders are to struggle through what it takes to successfully drive change are issues which should be evaluated prior to
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