Chapter 18

Evolutonal Patterns of Intranet Applications: Organizational Issues and Information Systems Success

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to propose a theoretical examination, strengthened by an empiric survey of intranet evolutonal patterns and the neologism that designates a communication system, for access to and searching of business information based on Internet technologies. This chapter analyses intranet applications and functionalities in order to classify them according to a taxonomy that allows us to distinguish between an institutional intranet, a knowledge management intranet, and an operating intranet. The main research hypothesis is the existence of an intranet life cycle, as an evolutonal model starting from an institutional intranet that moves to a knowledge management intranet and then to an operating one. This last one is considered as a proxy for successful IS implementation. To substantiate the above-mentioned hypothesis an empirical study was conducted among 110 large Italian corporations, with a response rate of 66% (73 corporations). The method used was a survey conducted during the months of March, April, and May 2010, applying a mix of random sampling (randomly selected interviewees from the directory) and “snowball” sampling (contacting interviewees through leads). The results show how, basically, companies approach intranet implementation processes in an incremental way, which begins with the integration of the basic functionalities as “communication channel,” “service platform,” or “document management.”

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BACKGROUND
The external environment has an overwhelming impact on management uncertainty and organizational functioning. The changes and complexity in environmental domains have major implications for organizational design and action. In this context, organizational changes are assuming a character of discontinuity and an acceleration without precedent in today’s business world. So, it is more and more important for each corporation to consider variables such as dynamic efficiency, flexibility, autonomy and cooperation in their organizational strategies.

In order to provide an effective solution to the new organizational and strategic requirements, first of all, organizations should implement an adequate information and communication system. The related logic and technological architecture must be simple, integrated and without barriers in terms of data exchange or the geographic localization of the information. Moreover, it should allow the connection of the different peripheral organizational units, carrying out effective data and knowledge sharing, without any spatial or temporal boundaries (Buniyamin, 2004; Geczy, 2007; Mateo, 2011). One primary goal for today’s information technology systems is to support efforts to manage and leverage organizational knowledge (O’Boyle, 2009). Having greater access to information is useless unless that information is put to use to further the goals and success of the company (Denton, 2010).

An organization technology that seems to satisfy these informative requirements is the intranet (Goles & Hirschheim, 1997; Crowston, 2002; Norzaidi, 2009 A). This neologism identifies a system for communication, access to and searching of business information, which is an Internet-based technology (TCP-IP protocol and so on) that led to a new way of thinking about organizing and sharing an organization’s intellectual and creative resources (Denton, 2003; Horton et al., 2001; Lloyd, 1998). It refers to the efforts to find, organize and make available systematically a company’s intellectual capital and to foster a culture of continuous learning and knowledge sharing (Averweg, 2010) so that the organizational activities build on what is already known. An intranet can also be considered as an information technology application to a defined community of users within an organisation (Dasgupta, 2001). Typically, intranets use the same technologies and software as the Internet. As such, intranets are typically accessed using the same web browser applications used for accessing the Internet (Baker, 2000).

The main challenge of intranets is the ability to meet business goals through improved productivity and efficiency of employees (Lederer et al., 2000). Intranets can offer significant benefits through internal communication, collaborative/cooperative work, knowledge management and process redesign (Baker, 2000). More in details, Lloyd (1998) identifies many particular benefits experienced by organisations from the development of intranets, including improved competitiveness gained through operational efficiency and improved productivity through increased access to timely and up-to-date information; cost savings related to reduction of papers use, warehousing documents and distribution, time savings on searching for and locating information, improved productivity due to faster communication of information, and easier understanding of information due to instinctive intranet interfaces.

An intranet implementation brings the following most common advantages (Hills, 1997a, Hills, 1997b):

a. technological advantages:
   ◦ web browser interface, standard and user-friendly;
   ◦ flexible and adaptable to business processes and end user preferences;
   ◦ based on open standards;
   ◦ connectivity with other systems;