Chapter VI
Frameworks for Aligned Development

1. FRAMEWORKS FOR ALIGNED DEVELOPMENT

Alignment is the adjustment of an object such as a system, a procedure or a process in relation with other objects so that they work better together. For example, strategic alignment refers to business structure and information technology fit in relation to business strategy and external environment. When alignment is attained, then an organization improves its relative performance as compared to other organizations.

The concept of alignment was originally based on the fit in the context of organizational psychology and became an important concept in the management literature. The construct of alignment is difficult to develop, due to the ambiguity and complexity of management and organizational alignment. There have been a number of integrated conceptual frameworks in the recent decades attempting to understand and provide insights into the business-IT alignment complexity (e.g., Chan, Huff, Barclay, & Copeland, 1997; Reich & Benbasat, 2000; Sabherwal & Chan, 2001).

In this chapter we present both theoretical-based and practical-based frameworks for aligned development. Researchers have developed for example, integration models, frameworks for modeling of cross-organizational business processes,
Frameworks for aligned development of collaborative networks, and a three-level framework for information sharing and cross-organizational process enactment. Governmental information integration initiatives are also described for example the Hong Kong framework, Web-based inter-organizational initiatives in Mexico, UN’s connected governance framework, and electronic voting in Geneva. In this chapter we also take a look at Unified Enterprise Modeling Language (UEML) and Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA).

1.1 Cross-Organizational Back-Office Integration

In electronic government, a distinction can be made between the front and back offices of public service delivery organizations. The interaction between citizens and civil servants occurs in the front office, while in the back office, the assessment of inquiries as well as the supporting registration activities takes place. Back office activities normally require the exchange of information between the back offices of different agencies. However, back-office co-operation is found to be a serious problem (Bekkers, 2007).

Bekkers (2007) phrased the question: Given the political nature of back-office integration, should cross-organizational back-office integration be seen as a command and control challenge or a process of management challenge? He argues that comparative case study research has primarily shown that integration is the outcome of a process in which offices have been able to create a shared understanding about the necessity of integration and in which conflicting rationalities, with their own core values, internal logic and legitimacy, have to be weighed against each other. Integration is a goal-searching, incremental process, which should anticipate a changing political agenda in order to gain support. Bekkers (2007) found that understanding is reached through the ongoing recognition of the interdependencies among back-offices, and as a result of a focus on the content of the problem and not on jurisdictions and costs. Trust and political and legal pressure are the lubricants that facilitate this process.

The integration of back offices implies the integration of information domains. An information domain is a unique sphere of influence, ownership and control over information—its specification, format, exploitation and interpretation. Integration models are being introduced for domain integration. One integration model is integration of back offices through centralization. A super-coordinated back office—as a shared information domain—is created that uses the communication and transaction channels of other organizations in order to provide equivalent services. The other organizations are linked with a database in one central back office, which leads to a situation labeled pooled coupling by Bekkers (2007).
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