

Integrating e-Business, Knowledge Management and Policy Considerations Within an Information Systems Strategy Framework

A Panel Discussion

Tor J Larsen, Norwegian School of Management, Oslo, Norway (Chair)

Pat Finnegan, University College Cork, Ireland

Robert D Galliers, Warwick Business School, England

Sirkka L Jarvenpaa, University of Texas at Austin, USA

Background

Much has been written on the topic of Information Systems (IS) Strategy over the past 30 years or so since the early work of, for example, Kriebel (1968) and McFarlan (1971). We have gone through periods where various approaches to IS Strategy have had their heyday. (Galliers, 1993) These include, for example: long range planning; business-driven (or 'top-down') approaches; strategic data planning; the proactive use of Information Technology (IT) for competitive advantage, and business process analysis (or BPR), to name but a few (e.g., McLean & Soden, 1977; Ein-Dor & Segev, 1978; Martin, 1982; Porter & Millar, 1985; Hammer, 1990). More recently, we have seen the emergence of e-business and knowledge management as major phenomena worthy of our attention in the strategy arena.

Some concerns

Peter Keen remarked, as far back as 1980 (Keen, 1980), that the field of IS suffered from a lack of a cumulative tradition, and there has been a whole succession of fads and fashions feeding IS's apparently insatiable appetite since then. IS Strategy has not been immune to this tendency, with each new wave taking the place of previous thinking – and practice - on the topic. (Galliers, 1999). For example, there appeared to be little in the way of learning from previous research in the manner in which BPR was undertaken (Earl, 1994), with sometimes disastrous results (Davenport, 1996). Similarly, we see e-business and knowledge management being considered in isolation, for the most part at least, from previous research in IS Strategy and organisational learning. (Galliers, *et al.*, 1995; Swan *et al.*, 1999) Additionally, policy issues are as yet under-researched in this context (Jarvenpaa & Tiller, 1999).

An Antidote?

The purpose of this panel is to attempt to provide something of an antidote to this apparently continuing trend. **Tor J. Larsen** will highlight present trends in the area of business strategy and discuss the existence of these within IS strategy (Larsen, 1998). Drawing respectively on their recent research, **Pat Finnegan** will discuss IS Strategy with particular regard to inter-organisational networks (Finnegan, *et al.*, 1998), while **Sirkka Jarvenpaa** will focus her attention on policy issues with respect to e-business strategy (Jarvenpaa & Tiller, 1999). **Bob Galliers'** contribution will be to present a framework which attempts to integrate these various aspects of IS Strategy into a more coherent whole. The framework is an extension of an earlier one (Galliers, 1991) which owes much to the work of Michael Earl (Earl, 1989).

This panel also aims to complement the earlier panel in this Stream and to reinforce some of the messages emanating from various of this Stream's papers by reflecting, in passing, on the role of information in and between organisations. (Konsynski & McFarlan, 1990) It is recognised that not all useful information (and certainly not knowledge) will be found in formal, computerized information systems, but in 'communities of practice' and informal networks (Swan & Galliers, 1996; Swan, *et al.*, 2000). The panel may also be seen as a clarion call for additional research on policy and strategy, e-commerce and knowledge management as related issues. Such research would benefit from an integrated approach along the lines of the foregoing. Further testing and refinement of the ideas presented and discussed could form a useful part of this programme of research so that ECIS could play its part in the cumulative tradition that Keen (1980) called for.

The Panelists

Tor J. Larsen is Associate Professor at the Norwegian School of Management, Oslo, Norway. Dr. Larsen's main research interest areas are innovation processes, managers' use of information, and effects from the deployment of IS. He serves as associate editor for *Journal of Global Information Technology*, *Computer Personnel*, and *Management Information Systems Quarterly* 1996-1999. In 1998 he was co-program chair for the joint IFIP WG8.2 and WG8.6 conference in Helsinki, Finland. His present research agenda includes the development of instruments for documenting information systems effects.

Pat Finnegan is a lecturer in information systems at University College Cork and a senior researcher with UCC's Executive Systems Research Centre specialising in electronic business and commerce. He obtained his PhD from Warwick Business School, University of Warwick following pioneering work in the area of inter-organisational information systems planning.

Bob Galliers is Lucas Professor of Business Systems Engineering and the former Dean of Warwick Business School. He is to take up a Chair in Information Systems at the LSE in the coming academic year. His recent books include: the second edition of *Strategic Information Management* (Butterworth Heinemann, 1999), *Rethinking Management Information Systems* (Oxford University Press, 1999) and *Information Technology and Organizational Transformation* (Wiley, 1998). He is, with Sirkka Jarvenpaa, joint editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*.

Sirkka Jarvenpaa is the Bayless/Rauscher Pierce Refsnes Chair in Business Administration at the University of Texas at Austin, where she serves as a co-director of the Center for Business, Technology and Law. In addition to her joint editorship of *JSIS*, she has served as the senior editor for *MIS Quarterly* and as an associate editor for *Management Science* and *Data Base*.

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