Chapter 17

The Importance of Having a Multidimensional View of IT End-User Relationships for the Successful Restructuring of IT Departments

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The effectiveness of IT departments and the value they are adding to their organizations in many cases are hampered by poor relationships between IT professionals and their end users. This situation impacts on IT professionals’ ability to produce service and support of high quality that delivers competitive advantage for the company. This paper is based on a research study conducted to look into the working relationship between IT departments and their end users. The research was done to be means of a qualitative approach in which thought experiments were used to inductively refine the results of the research study. The paper describes IT end-user relationships as intriguing and complex, and advocates that these relationships be seen and managed as multidimensional entities. Two such dimensions, namely the physical and abstract dimensions, which form the basis of IT end-user relationships, enable one to fully describe the holistic nature of such relationships and encapsulate the important elements of a support-oriented organization, namely mutuality, belonging, and connection. The paper concludes with a brief evaluation of the recommendations made by a consulting group for the restructuring of an

IT department experiencing various problems in providing quality service and support to its end users. This evaluation clearly indicates that the typical approach of the consultants was to try and solve the problems of a typical IT department merely by following a functionalistic approach. This means an approach in which the physical dimension is emphasized and in which the abstract dimension (which describes the soft issues and which forms a critical part of any IT end-user relationship environment) is basically ignored. Such an approach also ignores the holistic nature of relationships between IT professionals (IT departments) and end users (business).

INTRODUCTION

International Data Corporation (CIO, 1997) has found “a strong correlation between the effectiveness of the IT department [IS organization] and the relationship between the CIO and the CEO,” notes the study, which surveyed 283 top executives across three vertical industries: finance, manufacturing, and retail/wholesale. “We suspect that this relationship, if it is close, permits the CIO to develop the IT department [IS organization] into a service that delivers competitive advantage for the company, thus enhancing the careers of every IT professional in the organization.” In other words, “you don’t have to be regular golfing buddies, but a certain amount of mutual esteem will help IT [IS] function as a business partner.”

The above mentioned paragraph and other similar descriptions found in literature not only summarizes the importance of sound relationships between CIOs and their CEOs but also emphasizes the need for ensuring that a supportive culture exist between IT personnel and its end users for the establishment and maintaining of sound relationships. This kind of culture is effectively described by Pheysey in terms of mutuality, belonging, and connection that should exist between the personnel of an IT department and its end users (Pheysey, 1993).

This paper is based on research done in this field and shows that relationships between IT professionals and its end users are intriguing and complex and should be seen and managed as a multidimensional environment.

The objectives of the study were amongst other things to identify and describe the most important elements that are involved in relationships between the IT department and the end user (referred to in the rest of the paper as IT end-user relationships) which will enhance a supportive culture. Furthermore the study focused on the role and effects transacting has in the forming of IT end-user relationships. Lastly the study aimed at creating a better understanding of the social nature and characteristics of the different relationships between IT and its end users while IT is performing its duty as service and support agent.

The research study was conducted taking into consideration the important principles for interpretative research as stated by Klein and Myers (supra) and Sahay
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