



Understanding senior management's behavior in promoting the strategic role of IT in process reengineering: use of the theory of reasoned action

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Abstract

Information technology has been considered as both a strategic catalyst and enabler of business process reengineering (BPR). An area of major concern has been the difficulty to convince senior management's reluctant behavior toward promoting the strategic role of IT in process reengineering. There has been relatively little research on this topic. Furthermore, one common approach might be merely to study senior management's behavior as a whole. What appears to be missing is an examination of the possible underlying reasons for senior management's behavior. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) may provide a basis for analyzing the behavior. In particular, it can be used to assess the effects of interventions designed to change behavior. Basically, this framework has three steps: (1) examining original behavior, (2) developing remedial actions for negative behavior, and (3) assessing the changed behavior. Furthermore, this framework is examined by an empirical study to understand its application in practice.

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1. Introduction

Business process reengineering (BPR) has become a new corporate issue and is ranked as one of the most important issues for CIOs since the early 1990s [5,36]. It concerns the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes to obtain dramatic and sustainable improvements in time, cost, human resources, etc. More and more firms have decided to adopt process reengineering as the primary vehicle for their organizational transformation. Under this context, information technology (IT) should be viewed as

more than an automating or mechanizing force, it can fundamentally reshape the way business is done. It is considered as both a strategic catalyst and enabler of process reengineering [6,15,19]. In particular, when Internet-based e-business becomes pervasive in business organizations, this consideration will become extremely important. Thus, the use of IT to rethink business processes from a high-level or strategic direction is significant to the future success of process redesign.

Despite the importance of the strategic impact of IT in process reengineering as above cited, an area of much concern has been the difficulty associated with convincing senior management of the innovative use of IT in process reengineering. Even if senior

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management has a positive attitude toward process reengineering, they are likely to remain ambiguous about the actual role of IT in process reengineering. Recent studies found that senior management were unaware of those concepts and merely emphasized the role of automating or supporting existing process [34]. For instance, management have typically asked, “how can we use new IT to enhance, streamline, or improve what we are already doing?” Whereas they should ask, “how can we use new IT to allow us to do things that we are not already doing?” The misuse of IT can block reengineering by reinforcing old ways of thinking and old behavior patterns. This causes senior management to be reluctant to promote the strategic role of IT in process reengineering. This is the major concern of the study.

Thus, if IS researchers are to be able to influence or change such decisions, they will need to have a firm understanding of why such resistance exists. What appears to be missing is an examination of the possible underlying reasons for senior management’s unwillingness toward the behavior. Such a research approach can help IS researchers identify the basis for the resistance toward the behavior, and then design effective ways to overcome it. One approach might be merely to study senior management’s attitude toward the behavior in hopes of understanding their future behavior. Many researchers in MIS, psychology, and other disciplines have studied attitude, attitude change, and satisfaction. A richer study of behavior, behavioral intention, and other behavior determinants, however, would provide a more complete assessment of senior management’s position toward the behavior.

Furthermore, it is imperative that researchers approach this problem systematically and base their efforts on a solid theoretical foundation. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) may provide this foundation [13]. It examines attitudinal and normative influences on behavior, which might explain the reasons for senior management’s reluctance toward the behavior. In particular, it can be used to assess the effects of interventions designed to change behavior. Therefore, this study proposed a three-step framework using the TRA as an analysis technique: (1) studying original behavior; (2) proposing remedial actions for negative behavior; (3) verifying the changed behavior. This framework is then examined in an empirical study.

2. Literature review

2.1. IT and process reengineering

A business process is “a set of logically related tasks performed to achieve a defined business outcome”. Typically, maximum performance gains are achieved by the reengineering of a process when related tasks are performed by personnel from several different functional units [8]. Business processes existed and evolved long before the advent of modern computers. Interestingly, major changes in business processes have not occurred as a result of computerization, as the majority of computer systems in organizations merely automate or support existing business processes. While the importance of IT in process redesign may have received attention only recently, its effect on fostering process thinking has been in the making for many years. For example, Ford might have simply computerized its vendor payment process. By doing so, Ford’s executives estimated that they would have been able to do away with 20% of the 500 jobs in the accounts payable unit. Rather than, they eliminated 80% of those jobs by reengineering the business process with the use of IT [33].

Thus, reengineering, unlike automation, is about innovation and it also requires recognition of the new, unfamiliar capabilities of IT for rethinking business process instead of its familiar ones [37]. It therefore serves as one of the major facilitators for reengineering and the expected results will not actually be accomplished without its consideration [16]. Many organizations are beginning to recognize the importance of IT-strategy integration in process reengineering. The conventional wisdom in its usage has always been to determine business requirements of a function, process, or other business entity, and then develop the system. However, an awareness of its capabilities can and should influence process design. Its role should be considered in the early stages of redesign. Thus, IT-intensive processes are often simply automated and its strategic potential is often ignored [17,38]. Moreover, organizations often do not provide a supportive context for individuals to introduce or be innovative with IT.

2.2. Theory of reasoned action

Fishbein and Ajzen developed their TRA about an individual’s behavior (*B*) as a positive function of

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