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REINVENTING THE IS ORGANIZATION: NEW PRACTICES FOR MANAGING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY¹

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ABSTRACT

IS executives in the 1990s face organizational demands that result from increasing competition, a dramatically revitalized focus on customer satisfaction, fast-changing technologies, and sophisticated users. The goal of this research is to identify and assess important new information technology (IT) management practices designed to address these demands. Three questions guide the research:

What new approaches are companies taking to managing IT?

What outcomes do they anticipate from these new management practices?

How can IT management practices contribute to a firm's business value?

Our research model focuses on the distribution of IT management responsibility between IS and users, because new management practices will likely redefine or clarify these roles. Organizational change and IS literatures suggest interactions among IT management responsibility and six organizational factors: information technology infrastructure, organizational structure, nature of subunit tasks, firm-wide computing skills, business strategy and the vendor environment.

Our challenge is to combine the breadth necessary for generalizability with the depth necessary to explain interrelationships among key factors. To address this challenge, we employ diverse research approaches moving from cross-sectional analysis of fifty organizations, to comparative analysis of twelve organizations, and finally to extended, indepth analysis of six organizations.

The first phase of the study involved telephone interviews of fifty top IS executives, identified as being leading-edge in their management of information technology. The interviews revealed that IS executives are primarily concerned with increasing business value, but that they perceive three intermediate objectives leading to the creation of business value: (a) building the IT infrastructure (technical architecture as well as IS skills), (b) increasing IS productivity (reducing cycle time and costs), and (c) partnering with users. These executives employ a diverse set of practices to accomplish these objectives.

The second phase of the research will take a closer look at the impacts of new management practices at twelve organizations. Phase Two will focus on the key factors enabling IT infrastructure changes and human resource practices to lead to achievement of the IS objectives cited above. The third phase will examine new practices at six organizations over the course of a year in order to identify characteristics of successful IS-user partnership efforts and their impact on business value.

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