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Business-IT Alignment Barriers in a Public Organisation:

The Case of Federal Inland Revenue Service of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Business-IT alignment (BITA) continues to attract the interest of researchers and practitioners. Literature review reveals that the focus of past studies was investigated BITA mostly at (1) strategic level, in (2) private and commercial organisations, and in (3) developed countries. Thus, making a generalisation from these findings is difficult. The current study is aimed at shading light on the barriers of BITA based on a case study in a public organisation like The Federal Inland Revenue Service of Nigeria. The data was collected through semi-structured email interviews from business and IT managers as well as IT officers and also from internal organisational documents too. The data collected has been analysed using thematic analysis and has revealed six BITA barriers at tactical and operational levels like previous IT failures, lack of feedback mechanism, organisational structure, lack of standard infrastructure, insufficient time to acquire knowledge, and poor communication between the mangers.

KEYWORDS

Barriers, Business-IT Alignment, Business Strategy, IT Strategy, Operational Level, Tactical Level

INTRODUCTION

The dynamic business environment and the application of information technology (IT) has brought about a situation where the success of today's organisations is affected by their ability to deploy the right IT infrastructure. Regardless of the industry or size of organisations, one of the important factors that separate those organisations who succeed from others that struggle is an effective and efficient business-IT alignment (BITA) in the way IT supports business strategies and processes (Silvius, 2008). BITA which has been described and defined in various ways by authors has attracted the attention of researchers and practitioners. However, the commonly agreed aim of BITA is towards finding a way on how information technology can be used to improve organisational capabilities. Earlier studies referred BITA as a phenomenon where the

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business and IT plans are linked. For instance, Hendersen & Venkatraman (1993) have described BITA as the degree of fit and integration among business and IT strategies as well as business and IT infrastructures. On the other hand, researchers like Campbell, Kay & Avison (2005) and Chan & Reich (2007) refer to BITA as a condition characterised by a collaboration between business and IT to achieve organisational goal. Even though achieving BITA is proved to be challenging, several studies have confirmed its significance and role in improving organisational performance. For instance, Chan (2002); Irani (2002); Kearns & Ledrer (2003) have found that organisations that manage to align their IT and business strategies outperform those who failed to reach BITA. These findings warranty a continued study in the area. According to Chan & Reich (2007) and Coltman, Tallon, Sharma & Queiroz (2015) there is a growing interest of researchers and practitioners towards BITA. However, the findings of these studies have shown that the settings in which these studies were carried out is narrow. Many researchers have argued that only a few BITA studies have investigated public organisations (Enagi & Ochoehe, 2013; Mohammad, 2009). In fact, according to Walser, Christen, Maag & Regli (2016) the new developments in IT and the need for organisational change in public organisations has become an important issue which has provoked discussions among customers, suppliers, employees as well as leaders. Moreover, in their opinion BITA in public organisations has not garnered the attention of researchers. Furthermore, according to Chan & Reich (2007) the presence of wide variety of variables that could influence BITA makes it important to carryout studies in different organisational and business environment settings. Therefore, this study has looked to address the lack of research on BITA in public organisational settings. To address this problem the following research question is formulated: What are the factors that are hindering BITA at tactical and operational levels in a public organisation in a developing country?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Business-IT Alignment Studies in Public Organisations

The strategic use of IT (Gutierrez, Orozco, Serrano & Serrano, 2006) also commonly referred as BITA has steadily gained prominence in the academic literature and among practitioners. Different reasons have been attributed to this development. However, the increased dependency of organisations on IT to improve the delivery of services coupled with the considerable amount of resources spent on IT is cited as one of the main reasons (Tallon, Kraemer & Gurbaxani, 2000). Not surprisingly, in the past three decades, IT leaders have identified BITA to be one of the top challenges they face (Chan & Reich, 2007; Gerow et al., 2014; Luftman, Lyytinen & Zvi, 2015). This concern of practitioners has also motivated researchers into continuing their quest for understanding of the phenomena. According to Gerow et al. (2014), it has been confirmed, from the late 70s until now, that empirical studies BITA is associated with improved organisational performance and helps to gain competitive advantage.

The notion of strategic alignment has its root in body of research in the field of organisational theory where it is found that the performance of organisations is dependent on how they manage to keep alignment between different factors (Schlosser, Wagner & Coltman, 2012). These factors include organisational structure, organisational culture, technology, etc. Subsequently, the aim of BITA research is to identify a congruent pattern that could exploit benefit from IT to realise the overall organisational performance. BITA studies, however, have not resulted in commonly agreed interpretations and theoretical frameworks accepted by scholars. For instance, Gutierrez et al. (2006) found six different terms referring to BITA - integration, fit, linkage, harmony, bridge, and fusion. The common aim of all studies was on how IT can be used to improve the capability of organisations. Despite the agreement among scholars on the relevance of BITA for organisations, there is still ongoing debate on how to go about achieving and sustaining it.

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