**Chapter III**

# Cultivating a Community of Practice Between Business and IT

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## ABSTRACT

*There is a perceived gap between the Information Technology (IT) and the Business function in many organizations, which can lead to poor working relationships and a loss of organizational effectiveness. In this chapter, we discuss an effort to bridge this gap through a program of Relationship Management (RM). The approach is based on the concept of cultivating a Community of Practice (CoP) and relies on facilitating relationships between people in order to share and leverage knowledge. This chapter describes a case study of a large financial services company and shows how the boundaries between Business and IT were spanned through a*

*Relationship Management Community of Practice (RM CoP). The outcomes of the work are embodied in a maturity model that provides a framework for practice and acts as a 'boundary object' enabling the gap to be bridged. The chapter illustrates how cultivating a CoP between Business and IT can be a holistic way to manage the dynamics of knowledge sharing in organizations.*

# INTRODUCTION

The perceived gap between the Information Technology (IT) and the Business function presents a major challenge for many business organizations. Poor knowledge of the issues that affect the other and ineffective communication can result in negative effects on knowledge sharing and leverage; this in turn can lead to poor organizational effectiveness.

In this chapter, we discuss a large-scale effort to bridge the gap, through the implementation of a program of Relationship Management (RM) in a large financial services institution. The sharing and leverage of organizational knowledge between Business and IT is a major focus of the RM initiative, the purpose being to bring about a 'one-team' vision and improve communication. Two major challenges are: (i) establishing a common vision and understanding between Business and IT and (ii) improving knowledge sharing.

This chapter aims to explore the nature of knowledge sharing and leverage between Business and the IT organization through an approach to Knowledge Management (KM) that is holistic in nature. The RM program reveals the process of improving knowledge sharing through the gradual spanning of the boundaries between separate functions, thereby cultivating a Relationship Management Community of Practice (RM CoP). We stress the importance of a holistic approach through the two main concepts of the Community of Practice (CoP): participation and reification. We also discuss the participative and facilitative role that the research team played in achieving these improvements.

In the next section, we argue that the Business/IT gap exists because of poor understanding of knowledge in organizations and propose Communities of Practice (CoPs) as an approach to overcoming this. This is followed by a section that introduces the case study and follows the progress of the RM program from inception, through the broadening of participation in the CoP, to sense making and evaluation. The following section discusses the improvements in knowledge sharing and leverage between Business and IT and highlights some concerns. In the final section, we discuss implications and some of the challenges brought up in the RM initiative and conclude that the findings offer an initial endorsement on the approach.

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