

Chapter 7

Balancing Organization Strategies and Cultures

ABSTRACT

The goal of this chapter is to identify and manage risks related to information strategies and the businesses' use of information in the knowledge economy. Business and information managers must find a fit that grows our information and business cultures and supports our business and information strategies. There is no single tool or rule that you can follow to address the risk. The risk always derives from the business context. It is different for each organization, and it is dynamic even within that organization over time. The authors provide a framework the reader can work with to think through and develop a fit that works by any business context. The authors also provide a seven-step methodology that considers strategy and culture and guides the organization through designing and achieving a balance.

WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT ALIGNING ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES AND CULTURES?

The goal of this chapter is to identify methods for reducing the risk of strategic failures at the organization level. In particular, we are interested in managing those risks that relate to information strategies and the business' use of information in the knowledge economy. As we noted in Chapter 1, we know that risk exists whenever our cultures are at odds with our strategies. In the

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knowledge economy, this risk increases when our information strategies are out of synch with our business strategies and our business cultures.

The assessment process helps us to mitigate risk by identifying pain points (i.e., in our business and information strategies) and looking for and leveraging cultural attributes to alleviate those pain points. Every pain point is unique to a context – to a business and information strategy. Every point of cultural leverage is unique to a context – a specific strategic challenge. Ignoring our pain points is a high-risk strategy in the knowledge economy because they will only increase over time. Ignoring our culture as an attribute and a comparative advantage is a lost opportunity. Wholesale changes to culture can introduce new risks with the potential to do far more significant damage. We can only reduce or mitigate risk by learning how to shape our culture to support our strategies at the point of development and implementation.

While we know which approach will help us to manage risk, we acknowledge that there is no general rule that a manager can follow to achieve this result. Every organization, every business unit, team, or community, presents unique challenges and unique opportunities. Moreover, that unique culture is dynamic over time. It is dynamic because we learn and make progress or because the context changes. Strategies change because business environments – internal and external – change. Cultures change because people join the organization, and others leave. Our goal as business and information managers is to find a fit that grows our information and business cultures and supports our business and information strategies. There is no single tool or rule that you can follow to address the risk. There is, though, a framework you can work with to think through and develop a fit that works for you today, in the situation. We incline to think we can solve the problem by focusing on organization-level strategies and cultures. However, it is not sufficient that we apply the framework and manage the fit at the organization level. We must design a fit at the organization level, but that will fail if strategies and cultures are not aligned in divisions and teams across the organization. Let us begin at the organization level. We explain how to apply the framework at the organization level – and to establish a methodology that can be used at the unit and individual level.

What is the framework? The framework (Figure 1) is comprised of three elements, including (1) harmonized business and information *strategies*; (2) harmonized business and information *cultures*; and (3) achieving a balance by calibrating culture to support the strategy in any business context.

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