Chapter 5

How to Make E-Partnerships Work:
Human and Cultural Issues

Introduction

Today, partnerships and alliances have proliferated and become a key corporate strategy to gain competitive advantage. However, studies show that most business alliances fail halfway through their expected lifetimes (Segil, 2004). The previous chapters have demonstrated that dealing with the challenges and risks of e-partnership is a difficult and complicated task for e-business management. The success of e-partnership will not be achieved by simply adding electronic technologies to the infrastructure of traditional partnerships. Firms need to incorporate an e-partnership concept into their overall corporate strategy. The alignment and integration of information systems and processes and the effective use of various inter-organizational information systems and Web technologies among e-partners are only part of the challenge of making e-partnerships work. The components of alignment and integration between e-

partners should also include corporate strategy, organizational and business structures, job specifications, organizational culture, values and beliefs. While sufficient support of IT infrastructure and resources are undeniably crucial for successful e-partnerships, effectively dealing with human and cultural factors and reducing potential financial, commercial and legal risks associated in e-partnering exceed the complexities of information and communication technologies in building and supporting e-partnerships. Thus, managing e-partnerships requires more than the navigation of technological hurdles and complexity. Human, organizational and cultural factors become more crucial as e-business moves toward maturity. In this regard, the biggest challenges to management include conflict in different organizational and country cultures, taxation, financial and commercial risks, and legal risks concerning online intellectual property, national and international online trade and law.

This chapter focuses on people management in e-partnership and network management. Key human and culture issues will be discussed, including quality of e-partnerships, ecosystems, commitment, communication and termination of partnership. In particular, this chapter investigates the issue of trust and information and knowledge management in the context of e-partnership.

Quality Dimensions of E-Partnership

To systematically manage e-partnerships, it is essential to define and understand the key constructs and dimensions of online and **e-business partnership quality**. Based upon previous empirical studies, Keating, Rugimbana, and Quazi (2004) identified six dimensions of relationship quality in the online environment: trust, effort, understanding, communication, cooperation and liking. Trust essentially refers to the security and credibility of online businesses and information. Effort represents the commitment to customers or partners through increases in levels of security, depth and breadth of services, and the customized nature of the interaction between partners. Understanding refers to the knowledge gained about partners or customers' particular needs and how this knowledge is compiled, shared and utilized in the online environment. Communication is defined as the exchange and sharing of information among partners through electronic technologies, while cooperation requires a high degree of goal congruence between partners and an non-adversarial approach to the exchange. Finally, liking represents the degree of socialization and

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