

Chapter 4.2

Stability and Creativity as Contradicting Values in Information Management

Timo Leino

Turku School of Economics, Finland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case represents the situation at a North European business school in 1996 and the development process since then. At this school, the IT environment was quite heterogeneous and unstable, causing low user satisfaction. We describe the strategic actions taken and the successful consequences of those actions. Finally, we reflect on the lessons learned in our case for the current situation, where modern organizations are planning to implement Windows Vista and Office 2007, and the school in case is facing a new organizational challenge.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Turku School of Economics (TSE) is a Finnish business school that provides research and

higher education in the field of business science. The school is very active in research, and offers graduate, postgraduate and continuing education. Expert consulting services form an increasing part of the School's activities. There are approximately 2,000 undergraduate students and about 300 doctoral students at the School. The teaching and research staff numbers more than 200 and other staff about 100.

The school is organized in departments. There are five departments for teaching and research: management, accounting and finance, marketing, economics, and languages. Two departments are dedicated to consulting, research and management education services: Business Research and Development center and Finland Futures Research center. Beyond these departments, information services units (the library, IT center and communication office) and the Office for Administrative Services are taking care of supporting activities.

More detailed information of TSE can be found on www.tse.fi. Naturally, the situation is not exactly as it was in 1996 anymore, but no major changes have taken place.

The top management of TSE consists of the rector and the vice rector, the administrative director, and the board. The rectors and the administrative director are permanent board members whilst the other members are elected every third year. Students have four of the 13 seats in the board. The management model may be regarded as quite democratic, in the usual manner of Finnish universities.

In 1996, the budget of TSE was around 90 million FIM (approximately 18 million U.S. dollars). As a state-owned university, TSE got 60–70 percent of the budget from the Ministry of Education; the rest came from outside financial sources such as scientific foundations, or companies buying e-MBA courses or research projects. The main part of the budget was spent on personnel costs. In the field of economics and business administration, no major investments (e.g., equipment or laboratories) are needed to produce high quality scientific research, education or services.

In 1996, an intensive strategic planning process was undertaken in TSE. As a business school, TSE had strategic planning as one of the principal topics in teaching and research. The process, therefore, was “by the book.” The newly elected Rector wanted the School to define a new vision and strategy, and he launched a planning process where almost every member of the staff was contributing in some way. The new strategy was approved by the board in September, 1996. The main message of the strategy was growing from a local teaching school to an international research organization.

Ten years later, a strong national trend for bigger university units and more international operations is evolving in Finland. The Ministry of Education is driving for cooperation or even fusions between universities. As a part of this evolution, TSE and University of Turku are enforced

to rethink their positions in the Finnish academia. That led to a decision to form a consortium of these two universities with a common board. The decision was made in a very positive and constructive atmosphere in 2006. The future shared organization will get its concrete form in the years to come, and the actual deepness of unification remains to be seen. Cooperation in teaching and research is to increase, and possibly some restructuring of administration will take place.

SETTING THE STAGE

The IT architecture of TSE in 1996 was a typical mixture of the technology at that time. The LAN had been implemented some years previously, every member of the staff already had a PC on her or his desk and e-mail had been taken into use throughout the organization, though utilizing the Web was still quite novel. No mainframes were in use: a type of client/server architecture was implemented based on file servers, e-mail and Web servers. Most administrative systems such as the student information system or payroll system were installed in the computers at Åbo Akademi University, an institution with Swedish as its language of instruction also located in Turku. The network connections outside the school were developed and maintained in cooperation with Åbo Akademi University and the University of Turku. Each of these three universities boasted their own IT centers and IT resources, but cooperation was quite active and the relationships between IT professionals were excellent.

The most widely used applications in TSE were word processing, e-mail, spreadsheet, library databases, statistical analysis software and the Web. Both Windows and Macintosh were in use, the ratio of Macs at about 15 percent. The blend of applications was quite diverse:

- For e-mail, Windows users had only one option (MS-Mail); Mac users had several

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