

Leadership, decision – making and IT

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Perhaps one of the most important roles of a leader in business is ensuring that decisions which promote the well-being of the organisation for which the leader is accountable are actually made – and that such decisions are optimal within the context of the vision or mission or whatever term is used to define the primary purpose of the organisation itself.

My particular interest is in the area of Information Technology and its application within the Supply Chain. Unfortunately the technical nature of IT sometimes creates a reluctance by Senior Management within the industry to enter into this realm and as a result their organisations miss-out on the opportunity to leverage the potential contribution to efficiency ongoing advances in IT undoubtedly provide. For some it is easier to maintain the status quo than to actively take a considered decision regarding IT, or to allow the urgency of day-to-day operations to usurp the responsibility of proactive decision-making regarding IT.

I have set out below a few thoughts around decision-making which may assist those in leadership who want to ensure that they have objectively determined that they have optimised their IT strategy and its implementation.

Objective of a decision

The decision making process should seek to achieve two objectives: Firstly to ensure that an informed decision regarding the IT strategy is taken to go forward and secondly to obtain commitment to its implementation. The quality of the process depends on active participation by individuals therefore the vital question is “How do you determine who should participate in the decision?” The answer is easy to state those individuals (not institutions) without whom there would not be the critical mass to achieve and implement the decision – but less easy to achieve.

Clearly decisions with greater impact require greater collective participation from the constituencies who are impacted upon. This increased participation allows one to share individual insights and concerns and take these into account when making the decision.

It is worth considering the attributes of the participants in the process – specifically the need to be honest. They need to acknowledge and disclose their personal vested interests, their subjective understanding and their concerns. They need to agree that observations are not interpreted as criticism, comment should not be negative, and differences should not imply disloyalty or disrespect.

Further, individuals should be discouraged from offering a personal view under the guise that it is in the “best interests” of some other party, rather than themselves, as this demands a degree of altruism not many possess. Encouraging people to take a personal view promotes honesty and thus the input to the decision is of higher quality

Obtaining informed decisions

The starting point for an informed decision is an understanding of the organisation’s objective and the potential role of IT therein. Thereafter, the participants have a positive obligation to contribute relevant information which requires that they have either personal knowledge of the situation requiring resolution or the ability to interpret and probe other knowledge. This knowledge should not be expected to be “objective” – to deny our individual subjectivity would deny our basic human nature, however, individual subjectivity should not overrule the need for collective objectivity. It is unlikely that there is ever only a single strategy available therefore one should determine that which is mutually considered the most effective. Notwithstanding, openly considered diverse views strengthen any decision subsequently made.

Achieving decisions that can be implemented

For a decision to be successfully implemented there must be acceptance by the responsible parties. The decisions with the best chance of implementation are those which the most powerful individuals collectively endorse, however, this is not always possible. When consensus is not reached, the organisational leadership will be obliged to fulfil the role indicated at the start of this article, ensuring a decision is in fact made, and that such decision is congruent with the primary purpose of the organisation. ♦