IT MANAGEMENT FROM USER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

When IT today can move and think beyond just a rigid technology which was only focused to drive business growth and create competitive advantages. Top managers /IT Decision makers need to understand information Technology as a strategic tool which is capable of achieving QAAS (Quantifiable business values, Agility, Alignment & Service oriented architecture) for business process. It is in this context that understanding user and its perspective for IT adaptation acquire critical importance. This study is a major effort to arrive at a framework by which IT decision makers can understand the cited key challenges and ponder on the possible ways to address them.

This paper concentrates on providing few important results for framing of IT polices by taking into account different user perspectives for the benefit of the organization and shall also benefit the IT implementation partners in framing their design and implementation policies for IT application in different organizations.

Key Words:
Agility, Alignment, Service Oriented Architecture, IT Management, QAAS

1. INTRODUCTION:

"Strategy is about stretching limited resources to fit ambitious aspirations"

C.K. Prahalad

"Few companies that installed computers to reduce the employment of clerks have realized their expectations. They now need more and more expensive clerks even though they may call them "operators" or "programmers".

Peter Drucker

IT is still looked at as tool to replicate the ongoing business process in many companies in India and the developing countries. On the contrary , IT can be used and has been used as a strategic business tool that not only gives competitive advantage to its user organizations in the short and medium term, but also opens hither to unknown or new avenues. This applies to both the ways of doing the current business and launching a new business.(Ives, B. & Learmonth, G.P. , 1984).

Going by the definition of IT , it revolves round the acquisition , storage , processing and intelligent use of information with the help of technology . Thus technology is not an end to itself. It is just a means to manipulate information to gain certain advantages (Mcfarlan, F. 1989) . Thus the focus has to shift from technology to better use of information, i.e. business information, with the help of technology. It is in this context that IT management from user perspective acquires critical importance.

What is your philosophy on the IT department's primary roll in the organisation?

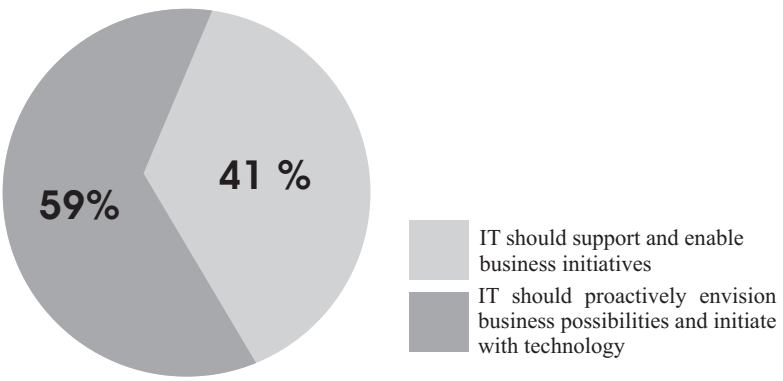

Figure1 :

In the name of latest technology one finds many IT decision makers ending up as "technology terrorists" to the users. The latter thus remain largely awestruck and unfriendly to the idea of integrating their day to day behavior or business process with technology. No wonder, many IT implementation projects turn out to be disasters in the ultimate analysis. Top IT Decision makers need to understand the business processes and identify business services which may be utilized to determine the best suited policy and practice for IT adaptability (Chandrakant Singh, MIS Quaterly 2001).

The evolution of Information Technology is reaching its critical juncture. Thanks to recent technological advances, IT today can move and think beyond just a rigid technology which was only focused to drive business growth and create competitive advantage. Today when organizations are demanding not just immediate cost benefits but increased QAAS i.e. Qualifiable Business Values, Agility, Alignment & Service Oriented Architecture, the challenges poised in front of the industry are big. Looking at from user perspective, the challenge is even bigger. User has to drive a kind of right mix which is able to address needs, adaptability, technology, cost & business integration. For a user it has become a critical affair as war has to be fought at multiple fronts – Internal, External & Technology Obsolescence. Lack of vision, understanding and proper planning can choke the whole system landing up in the increased end user cost.

2. THE IT MANAGEMENT DILEMMA:

The biggest dilemma of Information Technology Management is that it is perceived more as 'Technology Management' rather than as a tool to 'intelligently manage information with the help of technology '. It is so because IT users are not playing the key role in the whole IT management process. IT users though play important role in the initiation of the project; it generally lands up in the hands of IT decision makers who are not usually able to create right mix of the technology and requirement. IT users ultimately land up playing the role of an application user of IT solutions provided to him, though , right from the system requirement study (FRS) stage, through implementation and study of the impact of the new systems, his participation acquire a practical importance. The other reason could be the excess dependence of the IT decision makers on the IT setup/organizations to form a frame of the future perspective of the business though it is primarily the domain of the IT users because of their innate understanding of the business process of their respective organization.

It is in this context that users at different levels of the organization need to have an interactive interface with the IT solution provider. The later may pick up some user champions to train them into the technical aspects of the new system in place. Such user champions easily gain confidence of their peers by reducing the threat perception levels. This helps in gaining business benefits of the new system without much obstruction from technophobic users. This also includes the users who are resistant to any kind of systematic changes.

Another critical issue is pointed by the data that suggests that more than 75-80% of the time of the IT decision makers is spent on non-IT issues. This points to key questions – where and why? (Nishith Takia, MIS Quarterly July 2001).

IT management is to the tune of 80% management of the users and only 20% or so management of information technology. Even in the 20% the role of information management is much more crucial than management of technology. (Gartner Summit, "Exploiting IT for business Transformation", 2001).

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Gartner reports that "On average, $8 out of every $10 spent in IT is 'dead money' – not contributing directly to business change and growth." Gartner also stated, "In fact, some enterprise spend 90% of their IT budgets just to keep standing still." The problem is the complexity of managing today's operation: heterogeneous environments, silos of management with limited integration, the introduction of new technologies that need to work together with established technologies, lack of standard processes, and poor visibility into costs and global resources. (Mark McDonald and Tina Nunno, 2006, 2007: Gartner Research). This indicates the non alignment of the IT to the main business objectives which directly or indirectly has need to study the users perspective at different levels. By simple adoption of new sophisticated Technology, we may not get the desired results. The other factors such as process, systems, culture and people play a very important role.(S.K. Upadhyay et al , 2001) .

In today's business environment, successful information technology applications are expected to grow and adapt to new market conditions. IT vender touts their new products as having such characteristics as open source code and multiple platform adaptability (Douglas E. Turner and William M. Lankfort, 2005). This again reflects that frequent shift of user perspective lays new challenges ahead for the IT companies which are forced to adopt the new products with open source and multiple platforms adaptability. According to Vice President and Research

Director (Gartner Group, 2005) " To truly manage application and device performance and availability in today's distributed IT infrastructure, you must have the ability to collect an array of performance metrics from the end –user advantage point."

Systems thinking in management is getting increasingly popular throughout the world. Management of information technology in an industry or an organization assumes a lot of importance in view of tough competition, globalization and emerging of new technologies very fast across the globe. In view of management information technology will help an industry to gain competitive and advantage. The importance of information technology in the organization, technological lockout, adoption of new information technology etc. (Manni K E and Cavana R Y, 2000).

The huge impact on society by the new information technology is statistically related to many of the inherent benefits those are encompassed with the net. Many these technologies need serious consideration in deploying and developing to enhance organizational efficiency. The high speed internet age as on today has added e-flavors to many things (S K Upadhyay et al 2001). In near future the modern internet will scroll over almost on everything with its supper e-prefix generation in all parts of the society.

Regarding web services technologies in enterprise IT management (Guy Yohanan and Jay Hahn-Steichen, 2006) said that to demonstrate how an automated, end-to-end manageability framework can be easily designed using emerging IT management standards. Intel IT conducted a proof of concept based on the web services for management specifications and produced a self managing infrastructure that demonstrated an effective, well-behaved manageability framework that maps directly to business rules and processes.

The use of information technology as a component of corporate strategy has been popular for sometime (DeMeyer, 1989), (Harrigan, 1983), (Shank et al, 1985). In some business settings the use of information management in strategy has become a necessity as the operating environments change with greater volume, shorter duration of effect and increased complexity (Conner, 1993). This may be due to imparting of the increased access to information channels by consumers, where an increase in the knowledge of a firm's rivals occurs resulting in the firm's need to pay a greater amount of attention to those consumers need. It is well believed that the importance of a well defined IT infrastructure contributing to a firm's continual success can not be over stated. In (Brancheau et al. 1996) review of the key success in management information systems, they found that the predominant item of interest amongst survey participants was that of building a responsive IT infrastructure.

In the long run, what is needed to have a complete Business Process Reengineering (BPR) that would confirm to the best practices the world over. This would require a discipline in work-flow and the transactions within and without (MIS, Feb, 2001).

4. POINTS TO PONDER:

This study points to some of the critical challenges in the field of IT management which need to be addressed. Therefore my objectives are to address laid challenges and look for the possible ways to overcome:

Understanding the key role of the IT user in the IT decision making process. Understanding IT management more as intelligent use of technology to manage information. Identification and implementation of the role of information management in Information technology. Identification of consistency in the business services in respect to business operations. Analyzing

the dependency on legacy systems that are in place and operational at present and migrating to the best possible solution to overcome the problem. Understanding the Technology obsolescence fear and ways to overcome. Understanding and managing the mindset of the people in organization specially the ones with strong perception of Job insecurity. Understanding Management of the Top Management.

Moreover, a system dynamics approach for IT system will be implemented so that we could make a cause and effect relationship (causal loop) among the various variables of IT system. On the basis of this causal loop, we will develop a System Dynamics Model, which will enable us to predict about the shifting behavioural pattern of users for IT and to also help organizations in framing policies for IT implementation.

As per the process chart given below the practice should be: The user provides the basic operational data and information regarding the system to be developed and then an operational feasibility report gets prepared, after that IT Department which is already working as an intermediary in between of various departments, prepares the checklist of technical data and then technical feasibility reports takes its shape. Finally Finance department evaluates the workability of the proposed system and ROI and conducts an economic feasibility.

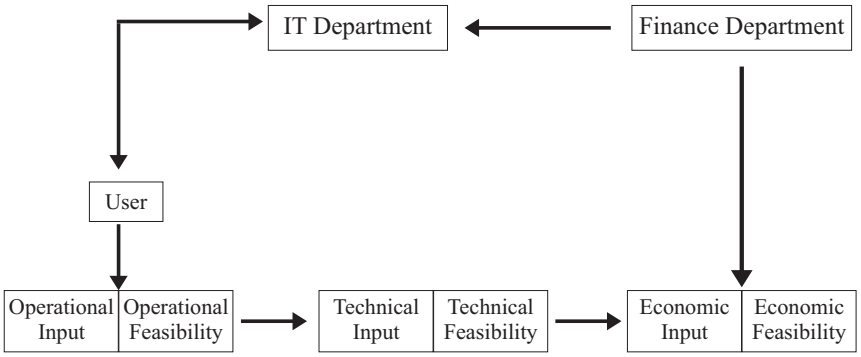

Figure 2 :

5. WHERE IS THE GAP? WHY USER PERSPECTIVE IS MISSING?

This was a challenging question in front of the authors that even after taking at most care of end user, why the software solutions are still considered to be too far from that of user expectation. A systematic study has been conducted in Delhi/ NCR using a questionnaire to get the answer to 3 big questions:-

What is the degree of a user's role during different s/w development phases?

How much are they being involved exactly?

To what degree their involvement is expected for a good s/w solution?

To our utter surprise, there is a big difference between the actual involvement and the expected involvement of the user, during various phases. That's why at the end, user perspective gets blurred totally. After having a closer look into the summarized data it is clearly visible that Phase 1, 2, 3 & 5 are having a great difference between the actual involvement and the expected involvement due to which somewhere continuity breaks in between and ultimately the end product which gets delivered is again a technical gizmo which instead of facilitating the user creates a nauseating scenario.

User	Conceptua-lization	Feasibility Study	Planning/ Modeling	Development & Testing	Implemen-tation	Functionality
Role	80%	80%	30%	60%	20%	90%
Involvement	60%	40%	5%	40%	5%	80%
Expected	100%	60%	90%	50%	50%	100%

Table 1

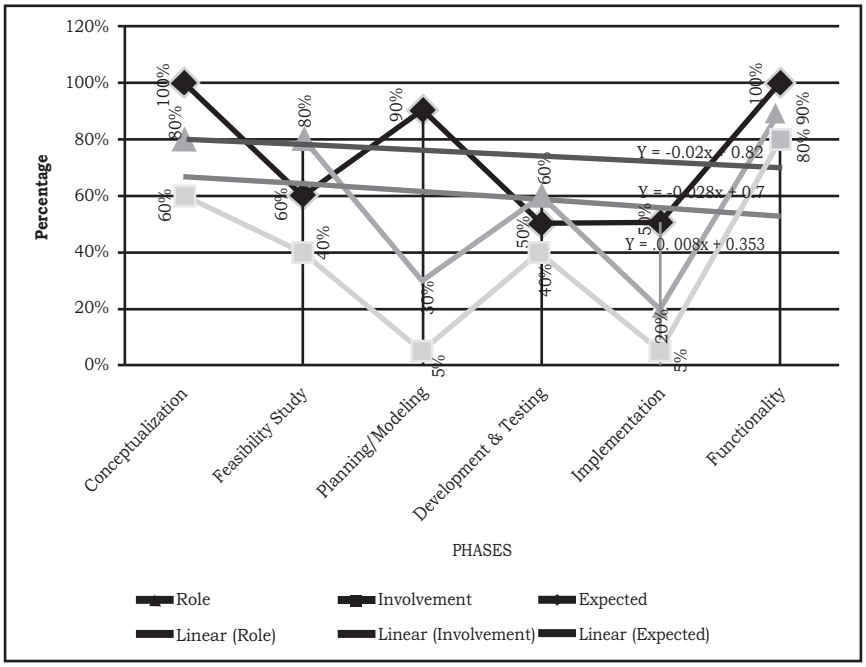

Figure 3

6. FUTURE RESEARCH SCOPE:

Methodology of this proposed research work would be based on surveys conducted in different Companies/Organization from three major categories: Non-Profit organization, Public companies and Private companies, employing IT. Surveys will be based on questionnaires containing qualitative as well as quantitative questions. This qualitative and quantitative data will be analyzed using some statistical tools and techniques like Correlation, Regression, and Central Tendency. This analysis will provide us important results for framing of IT polices by taking into account different user perspectives for the benefit of the organization and shall also benefit the IT implementation partners in framing their design and implementation policies for IT application in different organizations. Moreover, a system dynamics approach for IT system will be implemented, so that, we could make a cause and effect relationship (causal loop) among the various variables of IT system. On the basis of this causal loop, we will develop a System Dynamics Model, which will enable us to predict about the shifting behavioral pattern of users for IT and to also help organizations in framing policies for IT implementation.

This analysis will provide us important results for framing of IT polices by taking into account different user perspectives for the benefit of the organization and shall also benefit the IT implementation partners in framing their design and implementation policies for IT application in different organizations. Also, System Dynamics Model, will enable us to predict about the shifting behavioural pattern of users for IT which will help organizations in framing policies for IT implementation.

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