

Book Review

Strategic planning for information systems

John Ward, Pat Griffiths and Paul Whitmore. John Wiley Information Systems Series, Chichester 1990. ISBN 0-471-92002-9, 450 pages (hardback).

This book is premised on the view that the increase in availability of Information Technology raises fundamental questions about the guiding of technological innovation, measuring organizational and managerial productivity, and establishing strategic advantage.

The overall purpose of the book is to demonstrate that strategic planning for information systems is both essential and feasible. A core concept of the book is the use of the portfolio management approach: this enables management to ensure that each investment is managed according to its expected contribution. The first four chapters deal with planning methodologies. The second half of the book considers how this portfolio of requirements can best be satisfied in terms of 'supply' management strategies which can bring together the means by which the plans are to be achieved.

The major strength of the book is that accessibility and clarity of purpose is maintained throughout.

However, something is lost in the treatment of the innovation process and strategic choice. The authors speak the language of IS policy rather than strategic innovation and IS issues are much better handled than strategy issues. The inherent 'messiness' of the innovation process is acknowledged and an attempt is made to promote a social and behavioural approach. But, the treatment of decision making process and organizational change is narrowly rationalist, providing little sense of the historically entrenched practices and modes of organization which coexist with technical change. The question of organizational culture is hardly touched on. In this sense the claim to a social and behavioural approach is misplaced.

The book sets out a competent framework for IS policy making, but says little new about the links between IS and the wider social and organizational factors which impinge on the management of technical and organizational change. It should, therefore, be regarded as a coherently presented introduction to the subject rather than a path-breaking study.

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