ICT-driven change: aligning thinking and action

Terry Prime

Abstract
Large scale ICT implementations are a fact of organisational life. However, because of the arcane technical nature of ICT, businesses often make ICT experts responsible for determining the needs of the business and driving the design and implementation of the new system. Although ‘stakeholders’ are likely to be consulted as part of the development process, the determination of business needs and system features can be affected by the definition of a ‘stakeholder’ and also by the way in which they are consulted and their ability to focus on future as well as current needs. There are also major issues when differences in the values, beliefs and assumptions (mental models) of staff, key decision makers and ICT staff are not articulated and resolved. This case study provides a context within which to explore the implications of these issues, and describes the impact of an approach to stakeholder consultation that helped to align mental models and decision making through the development and exploration of a shared vision.

The study describes the development of a business case to attract funding for a new Student Management System within a large public sector vocational institution. It explores two aspects of the process - the way in which the organisational structures and systems made it possible for the project to operate independently of the business it was supposed to support, and the impact of a new consultation process on the eventual outcome.

Using the five levels of perspective (Senge/Kim et al) as a conceptual model, the author will describe how he assisted the organisation to develop a shared vision of where it intended to be in ten years’ time, broadened the original stakeholder consultation base and designed a process that enabled staff and students to bring the vision to life, walk around in it and put some meat on the Vision’s bare bones. This shift from a focus on current to future needs made a difference to the features identified as essential for the new ICT system. It had a significant impact on the level of interest and support for the proposed vision by staff who had been characterised by management as ‘change weary and ‘resistant to change’ – and it raised awareness of the structural issues that had conspired to allow the ICT area to operate in glorious isolation from the rest of the business.

Format
I can either provide a 20 minute presentation or conduct a 45 minute workshop. The workshop option would give participants an opportunity to trial an aspect of the consultation process so that they could get a sense of the impact of this kind of approach. I will provide a short paper and examples for either option.
Biodata


Terry is a systems thinking practitioner with a strong interest in the development of learning organisations and communities. He trains clients in the skills required to identify the unintended consequences of proposed solutions – and to look for alternatives that may achieve the desired outcome without the drawbacks. He is particularly interested in applications of this approach to environmental issues, and to the design and implementation of new technology into organisations, and is currently completing a Masters in Information Management to better develop his understanding in this field.

Terry has extensive leadership and project management experience, and has established and built up several businesses, including a successful eco-tourism business operating in the Indian Himalayas. He has presented at International Thinking Conferences in Boston, Singapore and NZ and also at several international Systems Thinking Conferences.