

Information Systems And Outsourcing: Studies In Theory And Practice

Critical Success Factors for Information Systems Outsourcing Management: A Software Development Lifecycle View

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ABSTRACT

Information systems (IS) outsourcing is a serious commitment – a formal relationship underpinned by a contractual agreement, with long-term consequences among two or more organisations. Many organisations end up frustrated as they learn that their attempts at IS outsourcing have failed. However, some failures could be avoided with knowledge of common pitfalls and critical success factors of such IS outsourcing contracts. This paper investigates essential aspects of IS outsourcing management during the software development life cycle. The survey results are reported in conjunction with findings in the literature of similar studies in other markets, and unique contributors to IS outsourcing in this particular context in the South African corporate market, are identified.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.1.1 [Information Systems]: Models and Principles; Systems and Information Theory; Value of Information

General Terms

Management, Documentation.

Keywords

Information systems outsourcing, outsourcing critical success factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Outsourcing as a business practice is flourishing in almost every domain. Organisations are outsourcing software development, innovation and even functional areas such as marketing, human resource administration, finance and accounting [42]. Outsourcing of knowledge intensive and white-collar work is also increasing and it takes place in

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organisational core competency areas such as research and development – an area that is potentially a key differentiator between an organisation and its competitors [6, 48]. The rationale behind outsourcing in knowledge intensive environments is to form alliances with, and take advantage of, the added value of mature practices of outsource partners [42, 56] and to benefit from the complimentary skill sets of outsource suppliers [6, 48].

As the information technology field matures and the outsourcing trend gain momentum, a variety of reasons for initiating outsourcing decisions transpire in an environment of hyper competition, acquisitions, stagnant economy and corporate debts [3, 5]. In an environment where survival depends on cost-cutting and downsizing, information systems (IS) becomes a probable target for outsourcing due to the fact that it is difficult to measure the direct organisational contribution of the IS function if performed in-house [9, 17]. For an organisation in which IS is not a core competence, outsourcing IS services or functions is a possible route to dealing with continuous, technological evolution and institutional pressures [2, 3].

However, there is evidence to suggest that organisations are not achieving the desired benefits from IS outsourcing as found by Lacity and Willcocks [31]. They conducted case study research in the IS outsourcing context in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, using data from senior IS managers who were asked to rate their overall success with IS outsourcing. They established that 50% of the 192 respondents rated their overall satisfaction as a 5 or above out of 7, while 29% indicated that their organisations were dissatisfied with their IS outsourcing arrangements with a score of 3 or below. A survey conducted by PA Consulting Group [35] found that only 5% of organisations surveyed achieved high levels of benefits from IS outsourcing.

Irrespective of the outsourcing decision, the IS outsourcing lifecycle is made up of several processes and sub-processes [7, 31, 26]. One of the most widely used models of developing new IS systems is a project following a software development lifecycle (SDLC) with stages such as project definition, business and system analysis, system design, programming, implementation and post-implementation support. Exercising proper control over a project enables a

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