INFORMATION SUPPORT FOR THE SENSE-MAKING ACTIVITIES OF MANAGERS

PhD Thesis Executive Summary

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This thesis addresses the problem of how computer technologies and associated systems can be used effectively to provide information, in particular organisational performance information, to support managers in their strategic activities, with particular reference to managers in public, professional bureaucracies such as universities.

The objective of the thesis is to answer the following questions:

1. What do different disciplines and bodies of knowledge currently say about this problem?
2. Is there a theoretical approach that can provide a holistic contextual and dynamic understanding of this problem?
3. Can this theory be used to develop a holistic, contextual and dynamic model of the problem?
4. Can the model provide guidelines or methodologies that can be of general use to real organisations faced with this problem?

The approach taken is one of a qualitative, interpretive epistemology and the theoretical basis is that of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) based on the work of the Russian psychologists Vygotsky (1978) and Leontiev (1981). Following a review of the literature, a study was conducted of five projects aimed at the provision of information to management at a single site. This study used the historical research methodology of Mason et al (1997). From this study a new holistic model is developed of the use of computer technologies and associated systems in providing information to support managers in their strategic activities. This model is contrasted with a model of the same problem based on the current literature. Both models are reproduced on the following page.

The new model is augmented by a description of CHAT concepts that relate to the model and which are necessary for a full understanding of the richness of the model. A framework, derived from the model, is presented. This framework can be used to guide enterprise information system’s development in organisations, which have complex information requirements.

The new model and framework was applied to a project concerning the creation of a prototype enterprise information system for research output performance in a university. This project, guided by model, captured the imagination of management and is a significant improvement on previous attempts, thus verifying the validity of the model and the CHAT approach.
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A model of the Research Problem based on the current Literature (Figure 2.6)

A model of the research problem resulting from the work of the thesis. (Figure 6.4)