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Closing the Business-IT 'Gap': A Trust-Building Approach

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that inadequate levels of trust underlie the poor relationship between cross-functional groups, such as business and IT in organizations and suggests trust-building guidelines for tackling persisting issues of cross functional conflict to leverage organizations productivity and performance. The paper begins with re-interpreting existing literature on the business-IT 'gap' to highlight why it is sustained by an underlying issue of trust deficit in the relationship and why a trust-building approach is appropriate for creating sustainable change in the system. It then critiques available trust-building advice and suggests an alternative approach to trust building. The paper builds on this by providing guidelines for action aiming to close the Business-IT 'gap'.

Keywords

business – IT 'gap', trust, trust-building, change management.

INTRODUCTION

The business/IS *'gap'* refers to the persistent conflict between business and IT professionals in organizations and manifests as discontent regarding with the ability and motivation of internal IS functions to meet business expectations. The 'gap' is widely recognised by both practitioners (Miller, 2008; Rendon, 2003; Zolkos, 2006) and academics (Peppard and Ward, 1996; Peppard et. al, 2005). In IS literature the 'gap' can be attributed to a variety of reasons:

- the distinctiveness between the professional sub-cultures (Grindley, 1991; Orlikowski and Gash, 1994; Raymond, 1999; Walsham, 1993; Ward and Peppard, 1996) Though culture has 'the power' to unite people who aspire and adhere to its values, it also separates them from others who don't. Perceptions of difference along with attitudinal biases common in social life, i.e. that my referent group is better than others tend to give rise to inter-group conflict that may escalate or withstand to create the notion of a gap.

- differences in professional languages, cognitive style, tolerance for ambiguity, emotional intelligence, solutions orientation, and mental capabilities (Roschester and Douglas, 1990; Walsham, 1993; Ward and Peppard, 1996) are also cited reasons. Much alike race or religion, any factor that creates perception of dissimilarity and reason for favorable or unfavorable comparisons across groups that may lead to inter-group conflict and the perception of a gap.

- the structural and operational separation between departments that has resulted in different sets of evaluative criteria, goals and objectives (Maes, Rijsenbrij et al., 2000; Reich and Benbasat, 2000; Roschester and Douglas, 1990; Ross and Feeny, 2000; Ward and Peppard, 1996; Peppard and Ward, 1999) creating conflict across groups about prioritisation and comparisons of professional achievement and status.

- the increasingly central role of technology and the resulting competition for professional status and conflict regarding the management of company resources between business and IS staff (Avison, Cuthbertson et al., 1999; Galliers and Sutherland, 1991; Ross and Feeny, 2000; Ward and Peppard, 1996)

- the lack of clarity and contention of the evaluation processes, criteria and measures for assessing the value of IS for organisations (Dedrick, Gurbaxani and Kraeme, 2003; Irani and Love, 2001; Willcocks, 1994) on which professional achievement and status can be based.

- the implicit IS user or 'sponsor' expectations (Orlikowski and Gash, 1994) and assumptions about what the system is expected to fulfil which form the basis for misunderstandings and betrayal of business people's expectations from

technology. This may also be because implicit expectations are forming throughout information systems development and thus are ever-changing and unclear; and, are unexpressed, and thus not negotiated, which may cover potential disagreements between the two groups (Paul, 1994). The lack of fulfilment of these expectations have led business people to define IS and their relationship to IS colleagues as failure (Boland, 1979; Checkland, 1981).

Adopting his latter view (Boland, 1979; Checkland, 1981; Jones and Walsham, 1992; Orlikowski and Gash, 1994; Paul, 1994; Stage, 1991), this paper argues that although the 'gap' is a 'reality' for business and IT people who view their relationship as failure. It is nevertheless a 'reality' constructed by them through social processes of ineffective negotiations of implicit expectations, and the resulting lack of fulfilment of these expectations. It argues all other *factors*[1] mentioned above [i.e. bullet points 1-5 and The cultural 'gap', in particular, (Peppard and Ward, 1999)] have been proffered as *rationalisations*[2] business and IS staff to legitimitize such construction. Yet, it argues that although these factors are raised as *issues*[3] that create tension they the two groups *choose to* raise them as issues rather than collaborate to address them. For example, it does not explain why business and IT people do not organise themselves to develop mutually accepted professional standards to regulate evaluation processes and their criteria to address the lack of clarity regarding the value of IS for organisations (see bullet point 5). Neither it explains why businesses do not restructure themselves to diminish the structural and operational separation between departments resulting in conflict (see bullet point 3). Such *issues* are well within the remit of human discretion and could have been addressed. Yet, these issues are sustained in the detriment of organisational performance and relational attrition for so long, which seems irrational. How can we then explain such (conscious or perhaps subconscious) choice?

Human choice could be explained by analysing the social processes that give rise to the 'gap'[4]. Yet, on this front most literature is descriptive, fragmented, static, focusing at organizational levels of analysis, and largely lacking a practical orientation to guide further action (see Peppard, 2001 for exception). On the other hand, prescriptive literature tends to be insensitive to related cultural, contextual and political factors, preoccupied with strategic and structural issues and focused on the sovereignty of management (Maes et al., 2000). In addition, lack of integration between these threads of literature, sustain ambiguity regarding the interplay between the various factors that construct the 'gap' over time. In broad terms, literature fails to explain the mechanisms of how problems between business and IS people evolve and lacks a dynamic, practical perspective.

Lacking intelligibility, the foundations of theoretical and practical solutions to tackle the 'gap' are subverted. As a result, the 'gap' has strengthened, becoming a taken-for-granted, necessary evil that erodes the relationship between business and IS groups, and stifles its potential. Clearly, it is in the interest of both business and IS people to understand and unlock the potential of their relationship. Yet, to date, advice on how to tackle the business/IS 'gap' has been largely unsuccessful, as notions of the 'gap' still pertain. This paper proposes to reconceptualize the 'gap' as trust deficit and suggests a novel approach to tackling it. The following section explains why the 'gap' is a matter of trust deficit.

THE 'GAP' AS TRUST DEFICIT

Orlikowski and Gash (1994) suggest that different perceptions and values by business and IT people lead to different expectations from technology, which form the basis for misunderstandings, and may partly explain the perceived betrayal of business people's expectations from technology. Repetition of such incidents when blamed on the capability and motivation of people managing IT, as they often do, give rise to negative social judgements of IT colleagues. On the other hand, user and manager expectations are ever-changing, unclear, and unexpressed, and often not negotiated (Paul, 1994). There may be latent disagreements therefore between the two groups. Indeed, literature on IS evaluation suggests that dissatisfaction with IT and IT people may be a function of the lack of clarity and agreement about the impact of technology on the business, the evaluation measures, processes and criteria (Dedrick et al., 2003; Irani and Love, 2001; Willcocks, 1994). Hence, on the one hand the evaluation of IS is susceptible to biases, subjective interpretation and contention, and prejudice, on the other hand business people's expectations are susceptible to betrayal.   This paper then argues that the 'gap' is a reflection of the

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[1] Factor is defined as "anything that contributes causally to a result" (www.onelook.com)

[2] Rationalisation is defined as "the cognitive process of making something seem consistent with or based on reason" (www.onelook.com)

[3] Issue is defined as "an important question that is in dispute and must be settled" (www.onelook.com)

[4] It is worth noting and reiterating here that the 'gap' exists in the eyes of the beholders (business and IT people). As a reminder of the perceptual nature of the 'gap' the term will be kept within inverted commas throughout the paper.

(mutually) perceived *'trust deficit'* – insufficient level of trust – between business and IS colleagues, and proposes a deeper understanding of the roots of the issue and a trust-building solution to the problem of construing the 'gap' in the relationship between business and IT functions. So what does trust has to do with the 'gap'? Let's start with explicating some basic assumptions.

Trust is defined here as the social state in which individuals are willing to be vulnerable – under conditions of risk and interdependence – to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor[5] irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party based on Mayer et al. 1995 (p.712) and Rousseau et al., 1998 (p. 395).

Firstly, such conditions are typical in the business-IT relationship, which has been described as increasingly interdependent and highly consequential for organizations as described in contemporary literature (Enns and Huff, 1997; Luftman, Papp and Bries, 1999; Maes, et al., 2000; Iacono, Subramani and Henderson, 1995; Ross and Feeny, 2000), and popular media (CIO, 2004; Zaino, 2004), as well as being evident in everyday accounts from business and IS professionals. High degrees of mutual interdependence between business and IS colleagues manifest as heavy reliance of business colleagues on information technology to achieve competitive advantage (Dennis, Nunamaker and Paranka, 1991; Dedrick, et al., 2003), and of the IS staff on the business to ensure employment and career advancement (Peppard and Ward, 1999; Ward and Peppard, 1996). The behavior of IS staff is perceived to carry serious implications for obtaining competitive advantage, thus determining organizational and personal benefits for business people. The behavior of business staff is perceived to carry serious implications for the provision of means of doing one's job effectively and ensuring career progression, thus, determining the capability of the IS function and the personal career benefits accruing from it (Walsham, 1993; Ward and Peppard, 1996). This significance of the actions of the other party for the attainment of one's own goals determines the dependency of each party on the other and exposes each party to risks stemming from the other's behavior, thus raising the need for trust.

Secondly, trust is mainly construed as the outcome of some sort of rational assessment of risk, which results in "mutual confidence that no party […] will exploit the other's vulnerability" (Sabel, 1993, p.1133). Yet, such willingness to accept vulnerability may be based on emotive reasons, such as liking, admiration, respect and acceptance (Bonoma, 1976; Jackson, 1985; Swan, Trawick and Silva, 1985; Childers and Ruekert, 1986); one's "faith to humanity" and "trusting stance" (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1998, p. 475), own biases, fears and insecurities, levels of altruism, secret hopes and needs, risk-orientation and need for attachment which may lead to particular perceptions (or misperceptions) of others.

No matter how rational (or not) the sources of trust are, trust is strongly associated with the facilitation of social processes, such as economic exchanges and work coordination, and is anchored to task outcomes, such as productivity. Trust is considered a fundamental resource for creating and, particularly, for consolidating social relationships that positively affect creativity, innovation, conflict resolution and collaboration that improves the quality and efficiency of strategic decision-making and implementation (Cohen and Prusak, 2001; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). In the context of this study, trust between business and IT professional could be expected to result in positive expectations and perceptions about the enactment of each party's roles, facilitate the fine-tuning of mutual expectations and foster perceptions of togetherness that promote collaborative attitudes and behaviors between IS stakeholders. For example, trust may improve creativity and innovation during IS development phases, such as requirements definition, or during IS strategy definition where improvisation is necessary for overcoming apparent limitations and ambiguity. Moreover, trust may facilitate and speed-up decision-making processes by removing unconstructive conflict, promoting information-sharing and perspective-taking.   Trust is known to increase collaboration and work coordination by allowing people to use informal language and other communication channels to overcome bureaucracy (Das, 2001; Misztal, 2001).

In contrast, distrust presents obstacles to such social outcomes. Distrust is defined as a lack of confidence in others based on concerns that others may act in harmful ways out of indifference or hostility, often fuelled by mistrust or suspicion (Fein and Hilton, 1994). Although some types of suspicion may lead to vigilant information-seeking and -processing that can be beneficial for a social system, others, in particular those based on stereotypes, produce biases that maintain negative judgments despite the absence of negative evidence or even the presence of positive evidence (Kramer, 1998). This may explain why labeling IT people in particular ways with respect to their cognitive style, tolerance for ambiguity, emotional intelligence, solutions orientation, and mental capabilities (Roschester and Douglas, 1990; Walsham, 1993; Ward and

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[5] The term 'trustor' and 'trustee' are used in this paper as in Mayer et al. (1995). The term trustor is used to denote the role of those who need to decide whether to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, termed here trustee. It is worth noting, however, that the terms characterise roles and not individuals in this thesis. Thus, in relationships each individual can assume the roles of both trustor and trustee.

Peppard, 1996) may have contributed to creating a stereotype as 'a special kind of beast'. This, in turn, has facilitated their stereotyping resulting in the 'gap' becoming an unquestioned status quo propagating distrust. Distrust in the relationship between IS stakeholders leads to vigilance in IS decision-making, but also to unrealistic negative judgments about each other that hinder collaboration and communication. Decision-making may suffer delays from excessive scrutiny, limited information-sharing, polarized conflict and resistance to decisions taken (Poitras and Bowen, 2002). Innovation may suffer from indifference or fear of contributing new ideas, and from risk-averse attitudes. Work-coordination will be restricted to formalized accountability rules and norms that are rarely well thought out.

The above 'symptoms' are typical of the business/IT *'gap'* and may explain the emergence and persistence of communication and collaboration flaws in the business-IT relationship. In particular, those aspects relating to the discontent regarding the ability and motivation of internal IT people to meet business expectations, the lack of full understanding of each others' principles, reasoning and overall value are not addressed by IS development methodologies and ignored by strategic information systems literature. An understanding of the evolution of trust in the professional relationship between business and IT functions could therefore explain the emergence and persistence of the 'gap' at an interpersonal and inter-group level. It can help us work out how trust/distrust between business and IS colleagues might change, and it can also help managers to design, assess and explain their impact on the business-IS relationship.

Having explained why the business IT 'gap' may be a trust issue the following section turns its attention to solving the issue via trust-building interventions. The paper reviews and critiques existing literature on trust-building advice and then proposes a novel approach.

CLOSING THE BUSINESS-IT 'GAP': A TRUST-BUILDING APPROACH

Before we contextualize advice on how to use the trust-building advice to close the business-IT 'gap' proposed in this paper, it is worth reviewing literature existing advice on trust building to make clear the distinctiveness of the approach. Despite the plethora of trust theory, trust interventions have been scarce and largely unsatisfactory (Whitener, Brodt, et. al, 1998). Some even suggest that managing trust is paradoxical, leaving no leeway for developing interventions that aim to develop trust (Grey and Carsten, 2001). This paper also contents that some of the existing trust-building approaches are indeed paradoxical, but that an appropriate trust-building intervention may pay dividends in terms of closing the business-IT 'gap'.

Theory and research on interventions aiming to alter trust have been scarce and inconclusive (Bigley and Pearce, 1998; Moln, Takahashi, and Peterson, 2000). Interventions relating to trust, especially those within economic and sociological traditions, assume that working relationships are based on rational choice and have attempted to influence two social preconditions determining trust –interdependence and risk– in order to make trust a reasonable choice. As defined above, trust is as a social state, in which two or more *interdependent parties* are willing to be vulnerable to the acts of the other, under *conditions of risk*, based on positive expectations, that others will act in beneficial ways, *rather than exert power to control them*. It is argued here that reducing the interdependence between members of a relationship decreases the relevance of trust for a social situation, whereas introducing control mechanisms infringes on the principles of voluntarism and pre-conditions of risk core to the concept of trust. The following two paragraphs illustrate the point.

Decoupling social relationships to increase trust is premised on decreasing the reliance of a party on a specific other. This tactic hedges potential risks thereby decreasing parties' vulnerability to the actions of a specific other. Therefore, by decreasing the degree of dependence, one reduces the vested interest in a relationship, making it a reasonable 'bet' to trust another. In the context of the IS area, for example, decoupling between business and IS colleagues can be observed in the IS outsourcing trend, where business people attempt to reduce their reliance on internal IS functions by seeking collaborations with external organizations that satisfy their need for the supply of IS technology or services. It is questionable, however, whether this strategy can be considered an intervention aimed at increasing trust between business and IS colleagues, because decoupling social relations does not increase the willingness to be vulnerable but does decrease the stake at risk. Therefore, it violates one of the social preconditions that determine the relevance of trust in social situations, namely vulnerability. Moreover, the degree of interdependence is often externally-determined in the short or medium term, thus it is not within the leeway of the parties involved, which may be disempowering. Not only is social decoupling inappropriate as a trust intervention, but it would be unsuitable for the relationship between given IS staff, users and business managers.

Risk management interventions, on the other hand, seek to minimize risk and are premised on the assumption that trust is a rational decision to social circumstances through which actors aim to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs. These interventions suggest the negotiation of terms of conduct and the introduction of behavioral or output control mechanisms that bound relational risk and increase confidence that the other party will behave in particular ways. Although

some have suggested the beneficial role of interventions, such as terms and conditions as recordings of the implicit expectations about appropriate conduct (Fort, 1996), others suggest that such measures maintain uncertainty regarding others' motives and, thus, restrict the opportunity for trust to develop between interacting parties (Moln et al., 2000). Such interventions do not raise the willingness to be vulnerable based on positive expectations about others' behavior, but rather demonstrate unwillingness to be vulnerable by using forms of potential sanctioning to elicit benign behavior and thereby convey suspicion, highlight dissimilarity, introduce formality and promote power differentials. Thus, it conflicts with the emotional or the 'arational' aspects of trust based on familiarity and attachment, which empirical research suggests are often associated with desirable social outcomes, such as team commitment, information sharing and the like (McAllister, 1995; Moln, et al., 2000; Yamagishi and Yamagishi, 1994). Thus, risk management is a risky strategy not only for trust development, but also for change management interventions. Risk management gives change management interventions a controlling and monitoring role that clashes with existing line management roles, increases overhead costs and fails to improve social outcomes that lead to IS success.

Hence, this paper proposes an alternative stance. It argues that effective solutions to trust building need to increase parties' motivation to trust, irrespective of the existence of risk and interdependence that are often inherent and unavoidable in social relationships, particularly when stakes are high. To this end, the paper proposes three principles on which interventions should focus in order to increase trust between business and IS colleagues (see table 1):

Cognitive Accuracy	Improves parties' accuracy of assessing risks by avoiding stereotypes and preconceptions caused by historical and cultural factors
Behavioural Flexibility	increases parties' flexibility in responding to each other
Compatible Trustworthiness	enhances compatibility in demonstrating trustworthiness between parties, in order to motivate all parties to behave in trustworthy ways and trust each other

Table 1. The Three Principles of Trust-building interventions

First, it is assumed that increasing accuracy in assessing social situations will enable interactants to feel safer under conditions of interdependency and risk, decreasing stress and negative feelings, even if the outcome of these assessments is undesired. To increase the accuracy of assessing social situations and to avoid inflexibilities in fine-tuning their perceptions of others in the light of new evidence, interventions should help trustors to develop awareness of their own biases and cope with the emotional responses to risk. Often these inflexibilities arise from a variety of fears associated with one's image and self-esteem, such as fears of showing weakness and naivety, fears of being considered risky, unrealistic, untalented, or deviant or an overall fear of being ridiculed (Marshak and Katz, 2002). To exorcise their fears inevitably means facing one's own insecurities and developing an orientation towards accuracy. Consultancy approaches such as the 'acceptance style' (Cockman, Evans and Reynolds, 1999) help trustors to explore their feelings, discuss their inflexibilities and their dispositional responses to perceived relational risk. The purpose of this consultation style is to reflect back to the clients "what they are saying", "what they are not saying" and what they "cannot bring themselves to say" (Cockman, et al., 1999, p.85). Moreover, interveners can educate trustors on common cognitive biases and their dynamics, in order to normalize their expression and help self-reflexivity. For example, in-group biases, perceiving one's own group as distinctively better than other groups on valued dimensions, often results from a motivation to increase self-esteem (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), justify the status quo, or confer orderliness and predictability (Moreno and Bodenhausen, 1999). Building awareness of this bias may make trustors more reflective, sensitive and observant of their own responses. One of the risks of this style is that it raises the potential for denial or defensiveness that may manifest as inactivity in changing one's behavior. Another complication is that this approach has traditionally been used in one-to-one counseling environments that may be very difficult or expensive to implement in organizations. Moreover, there is little information about applying this style at a group level. Common-ground dialogue workshops, a group-level alternative, is increasingly taking place in the area of regional and social development, often within the realms of developing social capital (Bradshaw, Butts, et. al., 2002; LeBaron and Carstarphen, 1997;)

Second, it is assumed that increasing flexibility in responding to social information will enable interactants to feel more competent in dealing with risk. Moreover, due to social norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), flexibility becomes a first step

towards breaking negative distrusting patterns possibly because it gives off an impression of willingness to change (Goffman, 1972; Jones and George, 1998). It is suggested that changing one's perspective from retaliation and punishment to collaborative conflict resolution, in which parties work together to resolve potential breaches of trust, can make people work collaboratively on their relationship to be based on trust (Marshal, 1999).

Third, it is assumed that facilitating trustors to present themselves in appropriate ways will empower them to elicit desirable, and often deserved, responses from others, decreasing felt helplessness. To help trustees raise their social attractiveness and trustworthiness, interventions should motivate and assist trustees to associate in ways compatible to those of trustors. Signaling dissimilarity; difference, lack of faith, lack of commitment, and disapproval may stem from an unwillingness to associate or identify with members of another group, or an inability to express one's views in compatible ways - a problem often referred to in IS literature (Reich and Benbasat, 2000). Unwillingness to associate may stem from perceptions of others' inferiority across valued dimensions, defense of one's own self-esteem though membership of a group, fear of peer-group sanctioning and loss of the sense of belonging which is often important to individuals (Marshak and Katz, 2002). An 'acceptance style' and education on relevant biases, as described above, can be utilized to explore these agendas, which often tend to be covert. If willingness is not the issue, it is likely that trustees do not have a common verbal and non-verbal repertoire to signal similarity and likeness, faith, commitment, or regard. Converging verbal and non-verbal repertoires can be established by interveners' acting as a catalyst to encourage dialogue (Cockman, et al., 1999) in business and IS interactions. Dialogue is about assuming that others have pieces of the answer, finding common ground, expressing one's assumptions for reality-checking and discussion, admitting that others' thinking can improve one's own and discovering new possibilities and opportunities (LeBaron and Carstarphen, 1997).

The role of the intervener in this case is to observe adherence to dialogue principles such as listening to understand and find a basis for agreement, re-examination of all points of view, and searching for strengths and value in others' positions (Bradshaw, Butts, Connolly, Conzelman, Davies, Dobek, Evans, Geary, Givens, Angus, (Don) Green, Hawkins, Healy, Houy, Clerk, King, Miller, Parker, Rowley, Smith, Sparks, Tobias and Willison, 2002). Moreover, interveners should provide an exemplar of good dialogue practice and encourage active listening (i.e., listening to understand not only the factual information in others content, but also their attitudes and personal feelings towards a discussed issue) (LeBaron and Carstarphen, 1997). This will help to break down stereotypes, reveal individual complexity, common experiences, shared concerns and values, and foster trust and empathy.

The main goals of the common-ground dialogue process are reconciliation, trust building and empathy. Reconciliation processes focus on the emotional and experiential aspects of conflict to enable healing and rebuilding relationships. The principle is that "personal experiences and feelings are not subject to argument, agreement, or disagreement. They simply are" (LeBaron and Carstarphen, p. 350). Trust grows from familiarity and respectful listening that can be fostered by a trustworthy facilitator and a process of dialogue. Sharing experiences fosters mutual concern, gives parties a more reflective view of themselves and of others, and strengthens a sense of connection that moderates exaggeration and negative social stereotypes. Hence, the common ground process builds a shared culture between the opposing sides (LeBaron and Carstarphen, 1997).

GUIDELINES FOR TRUST-BUILDING INTERVENTIONS: A NOVEL APPROACH

Drawing on advice from social constructionist approaches to organizational change (such as Hosking and Bass, 1998; McNamee and Gergen, 1999; Hosking, 2002), this paper suggests that interventions change the assumptions or patterning of communication (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Fairclough, 1989). This is expected to change how people think, feel and respond to others and that this will have a positive impact on increasing cognitive accuracy, behavioral flexibility, and compatible trustworthiness; the three principles of trust-building interventions proposed above (see table 1). Respectful listening, for example, builds common ground between opposing sides (LeBaron and Carstarphen, 1997), which may increase cognitive accuracy and therefore trust.

Following the discussion above, this section provides two sets of specific guidelines for trust-building interventions. Based on the assumption that different actions foster trust and dissuade distrust, the paper proposes seven 'fostering trust' and seven 'dissuading distrust' guidelines which to move a relationship towards a more satisfactory and productive state. The following paragraphs describe each one further, while making reference to how each satisfies the principles presented in table 1.

Guidelines for Fostering Trust	Guidelines for Dissuading Distrust
• Joint action	• Victimizing
• Sharing contextual understandings	• Focus on consensus of single understandings of problems
• Inspiration for future action	• Defense of the past and present
• Information/knowledge sharing	• Speculation and stereotyping
• Direct commitment	• Polite avoidance
• Open expression of intent	• Analysis and speculation
• Acceptance of difference as feedback	• Conception of difference as threat

Table 2. Intervention practice guidelines

Guidelines for fostering trust

1. *Foster joint action.* By fostering joint action, it is argued that interventions can enable the sharing of reflections on the joint action and invite the sharing of perspectives. Such perspective-sharing can avoid misunderstandings about the views of 'reality' and the interests of different parties. In effect, this will increase *cognitive accuracy* about the situation at hand and at an interpersonal level will converge ideas about how trustworthiness should be assessed *(compatible trustwothiness)* in the relationship, which can form the basis for future joint action.

2. *Foster sharing contextual understandings.* Interventions can help business and IS colleagues to explore their views and understanding of their situation or interactions in order to share contextual understanding. This often forms the basis of both positive and negative attitudes towards them. This may help parties to clear misunderstandings and get a more accurate view of their situation, increasing *cognitive accuracy*.

3. *Foster inspiration for future action.* Focusing on the future instills optimism and the motivation to identify with others (Lord and Brown, 2001). By helping business and IS colleagues to focus on what can be done in the future, interventions can instill a positive relational climate in which people are more willing to collaborate. In effect this increasing their *behavioral flexibility*.

4. *Foster information/knowledge sharing.* Information and knowledge sharing carry a symbolic weight of openness and giving (Eggins and Slade, 1997). Thus, by creating opportunities in which people can share information and knowledge, interventions can help business and IS colleagues to demonstrate their openness towards each other, thereby increasing not only their *behavioral flexibility*.

5. *Foster direct commitment.* Direct commitment is the product of full participation of parties in decision-making, so that decisions taken are desired by all parties. By instigating such participatory processes, interventions can help all parties' experienced attachment to others and commitment to agreed goals that foster trust (Korsgaard, Schweiger and Sapienza, 1995). Often strategies fail to be implemented due to the lukewarm support of the people who need to implemented. Technology acceptance for example has been a serious issue for technology implementation. Voicing such views up front may lead to a better understanding of each other's positions and an explicit negotiation of concerns and interests. Thereby increasing both *compatible trustworthiness and behavioral flexibility*.

6. *Foster open expression of intent.* Open expression of intent encourages parties to talk openly about what they want and therefore allows them to be creative in finding new ways of relating to and achieving their goals. Thus, by fostering open expression of intent, interventions mobilizes new ways of relating that will change the dynamic between parties that may result in maintaining or dissolving a relationship. Honesty about intent decreases suspicions about hidden agendas promoting open negotiation, thereby increasing both *compatible trustworthiness and behavioral flexibility*.

7. *Foster acceptance of difference as feedback.* By instilling appreciation of differences, as feedback, interventions may create a positive climate on which constructive action can be based. Through a catalyst style, interventions could promote respectful dialogue in which each party assumes that others have pieces of the answer, seeks to find common ground, expresses one's assumptions for reality-checking and discussion, admits that others' thinking can

improve one's own and aims to discover new possibilities and opportunities. This is likely to signal willingness to associate, and to promote parity, self-esteem, faith and honesty, despite differences of opinion, thereby increasing *compatible trustworthiness*.

Guidelines for dissuading distrust

1. *Dissuade victimizing between business and IS people.* By dissuading victimizing, interventions can create a momentum towards questioning and reflecting upon held views, opinions and feelings, thereby realizing inaccuracies in assessing the social situation. This will enable both groups to increase their levels of *cognitive accuracy.*

2. *Dissuade focus on single understandings.* Setting the idea of a single understanding as an imperative can lead to the perception of differences of opinion as threat to an already-set position and create conflict-averse attitudes. By deflecting from the idea of a single understanding and allowing the exploration of multiple views, interventions can help others to respect these attitudes (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard and Werner, 1998), which can then be addressed by common ground dialogue (LeBaron and Carstarphen, 1997). Appreciating the different ways of understanding a situation may help people not only be more flexible in how they respond to others (*behavioral flexibility)* but also how they choose to present themselves to them (*compatible trustworthiness).*

3. *Dissuade defense of the past and present.* Interventions can create a momentum towards questioning and reflecting upon the pros and cons of held stances in the past, the ideology that supported them and the feelings associated with certain past or present conduct. This can help parties reflect on the ideology, history and conduct that has created and sustained a certain status quo. It may also help people not only be more flexible in how they respond to others (*behavioral flexibility)* but also how they choose to present themselves to them (*compatible trustworthiness).*

4. *Dissuade speculation and stereotyping.* It is proposed that interventions can create a momentum towards questioning and reflecting upon held views, opinions and feelings, thereby realizing inaccuracies in assessing the social situation. Decreasing stereotyping increases *behavioural flexibility* because it decreases mis-attributions of intentions.

5. *Dissuade politeness*. By dissuading politeness, interventions can avoid the ambiguities and reticence of polite conduct. It is worth noting that politeness here is taken to mean respect for the conventions of the conduct between roles embedded in a situation, rather that respectful social conduct, which interventions is expected to promote. Respecting conventions developed historically, means habitually re-creating such conventions, hence reducing *behavioral flexibility.*

6. *Dissuade analysis and speculation.* Analysis and speculation may deter from actual information seeking and forward-looking, thus creating and sustaining stereotypes and inaccurate perceptions of the situation and others. In effect, this deters from *cognitive accuracy.*

7. *Dissuade conception of difference as threat*. By promoting respectful dialogue in which each party assumes that others have pieces of the answer, interventions can mobilize the conception that difference is not a threat towards one's goals and positions, but a means to improve one's own understanding and discover new possibilities and opportunities for action. This can help to maintain perceptions of others who disagree as moral agents – able and willing of moral action. This can maintain one's own willingness to associate, promote parity, and maintain self-esteem, faith and honesty, despite differences of opinion (Govier, 1998). Once difference is not threatening to (often) self-esteem, people tend to be more open and accommodating (*behavioral flexibility).*

CONCLUSIONS

This paper suggested that the business-IT 'gap' is underpinned by trust deficit in the relationship between the two groups, which impacts the performance of the IT function and IT systems in organizations. The paper explained why the business-IT 'gap' is a trust issue and why a trust-building approach is appropriate for creating sustainable change. Having critiqued traditional trust-building approaches for being risk-management oriented and aiming to control risk, it suggested an alternative approach, explicating guidelines for action. This approach focuses on the facilitation of trust-evolution through changes in the assumptions or patterning of communication (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Fairclough, 1989) between business and IT professionals, to alter the perceptions and behaviors of interactants. One could argue that the ultimate success of the intervention will manifest by efficient Information Systems development processes and effective Information Systems that add business value to organizations. Many have asserted the link between cohesive, participatory organizational networks and organizational performance (see, for example, Lesser and Storck, 2001). They explain this link in terms of the pro-social working behaviors which positively influence the way that people interact and organise work (Lesser and Storck, 2001).

It is worth inventing, however, appropriate measurements for checking progress along the way to ensure that constructive feedback and enable fine tuning of the change management approach and effort. This paper, therefore, suggests that future work should seek to establish means to measure the success of such interventions to ensure management buy in. Measuring the effect of change management interventions have been a contentious issue (Skinner, 1994), but we suggest that the impact of the intervention on the social system is expected to manifest in the way business and IS colleagues make sense of their relationship. In that sense success could be measured by the extent to which there are: (a) more accurate perceptions of the situation and others; (b) more flexible responses to perceptions of risk; and (c) more compatible expressions of trustworthiness and demonstrations of acceptance, confidence in and support of others. By fostering cognitive accuracy, behavioral flexibility and compatible trustworthiness, interventions can mobilize business organizations to resemble organization modes, such as communities of practice, which have been associated with minimized misunderstandings and suspicion and increased human and social capital in organizations that is sustainable and robust (Dedrick et al., 2003; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The practices above are set up to enable parties to get away from replicating dysfunctional patterns of interaction, under conditions of interdependency and risk, and decrease stress and negative feelings. They are set up to enhance mutual perceptions of trustworthiness to make each party better understood by the other, to elicit desirable and often deserved, responses from others, decreasing perceptions of helplessness. By forming a catalyst, such interventions facilitate common-ground dialogue, while the appreciative acceptance of each party's perspective enables the exploration of personal biases and feelings which can mobilize social dynamics that alter states of trust or distrust.

Another issue to be accounted for is the reliance of the system on the change agents themselves. It is important that interventions and interveners do not take credit for the *content* or *outcomes* of facilitation, but solely for the mobilisation of relational processes. This is important because trust relies heavily on attributing benevolent acts to the trustworthiness of others and lack of benevolent acts to lack of trustworthiness. Thus, trust and distrust outcomes of those processes should remain within the sphere of control and discretion of the parties to allow trust attributions toward each other. Otherwise, there is a risk that such outcomes will be attributed to the interventions intervention itself. So, when measuring the success of the intervention it is worth measuring and accounting for the reliance of the social system on the change agents.

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