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PANEL 11

REENGINEERING: FULL SPEED AHEAD OR ARE WE SURE THAT WE KNOW WHERE WE ARE GOING?

Panel Chair: Leslie R. Porter, California State University at Northridge

Panelists: Leslie D. Ball, CSC/Index
Kathleen Foley Curley, Northeastern University

In the 1980s, the cry of many working with information technology was for competitive systems. In the 1990s, the cry has become for organizational redesign or reengineering. The proponents of reengineering protest that the organization structures developed by Ford and Sloan are no longer appropriate for managing organizations in today's highly competitive, fast changing and information intensive marketplace. Reengineering, as defined by Brant Allen, is:

Enabled by information technology, the achievement of dramatic performance improvements through the fundamental analysis and radical redesign of business processes and the supporting management processes, job definitions, and organization structures.

Clearly, the goal is admirable but the question remains: Is it achievable? The press is replete with examples of companies that have been redefined successfully. The interest in reengineering has turned into a groundswell of enthusiasm with many of those working in information technology policy and strategy focusing their efforts in this area.

The theme of dramatically improved bottom line results, especially in these economic times, has hit a responsive cord with managers across industries. However, evidence is beginning to surface that suggests that the headlong rush to embrace this latest solution is creating as many problems as it is solving. Many are picking up the buzzwords and using them to repackage "business as usual." Jim Short of the Center for Information Systems Research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, among the first to raise a cautionary note, has observed that there is a growing sense among managers and professionals alike, even those in the companies that have been written up as outstanding examples of success, that this is "not all goodness and holy water but just another rouse by management to get them out of their jobs. There's a lot of gloss here. Without thoughtful analysis and careful implementation this will be, at best, an infield hit which none of us will be talking about next year."

So, is it full speed ahead or is now the time to exercise some caution? Should we move to take advantage of these opportunities before our competitors do or should we pause now to take stock and determine what is hype and what is real? Toward the solution of these concerns, this panel will explore a number of questions, including:

- Is reengineering just the consulting flavor of the month?
- If it is not the flavor of the month, what is different about it?
- What are the criteria that predict success?
- How can we identify potential pitfalls and what should we do to avoid them?

The panel will start with Les Ball stating his position that reengineering is the route we must take if we are to be successful. In his discussions, Ball will relate his experiences as an active practitioner. This will be followed by Kathy Curley raising issues of concern with the concept and practices and discussing potential pitfalls based on her work in the area. Ball will then be given time for rebuttal following which Curley will have time to respond.

The panel will conclude with a question and answer period in which everyone is invited to participate.