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PANEL 4

INFORMATION ARCHEOLOGY: EXCAVATING LESSONS FROM PAST SUCCESSES

Panel Chair: Dick Mason, Southern Methodist University

Panelists: Walter Carlson, IBM, Retired
Duncan Copeland, Western Business School
Jim McKenney, Harvard Business School
Ted Withington, ADL, Consultant

There has been an enormous publicity push for the dramatic force of IT as a means of business transformation as a new and dramatically different phenomenon. The panel will discuss the results of a six-year analysis of six organizations that, in fact, transformed themselves. In the process they developed an innovative IT design that so dominated their industry that firms either adopted or lost shares. One of the transformations occurred between 1956 and 1959, two in the 1960s, and three in the 1980s. The process typically required five to six years. A common thread of all these organizations is that today they are still leaders in the use of IT and they are extending their competitive edge through IT innovations. Most of the companies are well known for their exploits: American Airlines, American Hospital Supply-Baxter Travenol, USAA, and Frito-Lay. The sleeper and earliest innovator is the Bank of America. We have recently completed a Federal Express saga.

The research program was developed and executed by the members of the panel, which included Dick Canning, former publisher of *EDP Analyzer* and early IT consultant; George Glaser, consultant; and McKinsey & Co. They conducted an historical analysis of the six firms from their early use of IT to their present usage. They operated as a team with a mix of academicians and leading practitioners. Members of the team have interviewed over three hundred executives, IT managers, and specialists. In addition, they have collected and analyzed several file cabinets of internal documents and published information.

The analysis of the early studies disclosed three critical roles of the CEO, Maestro/CIO, and strong technologists that grew in competence over time. The importance of these roles was demonstrated by the shift in the use of IT, owing to the change in either the CEO or the CIO. The roles were not surprising and there were similarities and differences in their execution. This led to a fleshing out of yet another sequence of management actions in guiding the use of IT. A unique aspect is the early involvement of the CEO in the search for an IT solution of a business crisis and their growth in competence to manage the development of an innovative set of IT designs. Further, these actions persisted over an extended period to exploit the potential of IT for improving service as well as adroitly changing the organization to reduce costs and strengthen the management control. The discussion will focus upon the similarities and differences in the situations and responses of the managers as well as the forces that influenced changes in tactics that caused a loss of momentum. In all cases, the eventual design emerged with experience after a period of years of striving to solve critical problems.

The discussion will be moderated by Dick Mason. Jim McKenney will outline the roles; Ted Withington will delineate the Cascade of events; Duncan Copeland will talk about the early innovators; and Walter Carlson will describe the recent leaders.