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Carte T.A

University of Georgia, carte@mgmt.cba.uga.edu

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A Comparison of Public Versus Private Sector Development and Operation of Executive Information Systems

[T. A. Carte](#)

University of Georgia
Department of Management

Athens, GA 30602

Phone: (706) 542-1294 E-mail: carte@mgmt.cba.uga.edu

Introduction

Academic research in the field of executive information systems (EIS) has explored the features, benefits, development methodologies, implementation factors, data management issues, and success factors of these systems (Watson, Rainer, and Koh, 1991; Mohan, Holstein, and Adams, 1990). Watson, et al., (1991) provided a framework for understanding the development and operation of an EIS. They suggested that the decision to build an EIS should be driven by a specific business, and an executive sponsor should: champion the project, allocate the required resources, participate in the system's design, and handle any political resistance.

While previous research has rigorously addressed many issues, the managerial prescriptions offered have been generic. Few EIS researchers have investigated the role an organization's environment may play in developing and operating these systems. Lederer and Mendelow (1990) developed a theoretical model which suggests that contingencies in the environment impact the management of information systems. As a result, managers develop strategies to manage their dependence on environmental resources and reduce the extent of environmental control.

Bozeman and Straussman (1990) argued that strategic activities are impacted by sectoral differences generated by political authority. Because strategic activities largely falling into the domain of executives and other upper-level managers, these differences may not be evident in lower- and middle-level management activities. If this distinction is accurate, the impact of political authority would be evident in the activities for which EIS are specifically developed and used.

The purpose of this study is to begin to incorporate environmental factors, specifically sectoral differences, into EIS research knowledge and subsequently into managerial prescriptions. The question answered by this research is: *What are the differences between the private sector and public sector regarding EIS development and operation?*

The differences between private and government organizations are at the core of public administration theory and have been the topic of an on-going stream of research. Differences have been found, for example, in personnel management, decision making, and information systems (Bretschneider 1990). These differences often have their roots in environmental factors, organization-environment transactions, and internal structures and processes (Rainey, Backoff, and Levine 1976). Growing literature in management (Perry and Rainey, 1988) has argued that business organizations face a different environment than government organizations, thus leading to observable differences in organizational behavior and management. Some of these arguments have been applied to the management of computers (Bretschneider, 1990).

A second argument for focusing on sectoral differences is that the existence of sectoral differences has not been readily acknowledged as an important issue by many management scholars, resulting in a need for further empirical evidence on the nature and extent of such differences (Bozeman and Bretschneider, 1986).

Research methodology

The major objective of this study is to identify sectoral differences in EIS development and operation. To this end, a multi-phase study will be conducted. A different research method will be used at each stage. Stages one and two have been completed.

In stage one, the literature was reviewed to begin to identify as many potential sectoral differences as possible. In stage two, the relevancy of the identified sectoral differences was investigated in the context of EIS. This was accomplished using telephone interviews. Based on the findings from the telephone interviews a series of research propositions were developed. The research propositions will be empirically tested in stage three using a self administered questionnaire.

References are available from the author upon request