

## **The need for a new planning method**

Comprehensive planning methods provide clear steps for planning a new IS strategy. Such methods make it easy for a practising IS manager to make a step-by-step plan for a comprehensive IS planning study. The risks associated with large special studies are, however, well documented in the IS planning literature.

Incremental planning literature doesn't provide similar methods to guide an incremental IS planning process. Even the continuous strategic alignment model by Venkatraman et al. (1993) is fairly general. While it identifies five different administrative processes, it doesn't provide detailed instructions for their implementation. There are, however, reasons why explicit formal planning methods might be useful, even in incremental planning. Although managers are likely to accept the principles of incremental planning, they may find it difficult to apply them in practice. Particularly in organisations, where managerial knowledge and experience about IS planning is low, methods can help in setting up a planning system. One recent case study (Cerpa and Verner, 1998) reported that methodologies such as CSF provided the means to set up a planning framework and to aid in evaluating the IS strategy. Also, if the general planning style in the organisation is formal, an IS manager may find it difficult to rely on a very informal IS planning process (Pyburn, 1983; Earl, 1993). Hence, a formal IS planning structure may be needed simply because the senior and business managers are accustomed to such planning. For instance, Quinn (Quinn, 1980) reported that even if total enterprise strategy is formulated informally and incrementally, top executives still required periodic updates and reviews from different subsystems. Lower level planning also relied on the use of formal methods and techniques. Hence, a formal IS planning structure can make it easier for senior management to integrate IS/IT projects with the events and plans in other subsystems and vice versa. Finally, explicit methods are also needed in IS planning research, particularly if action research is used. One of the principal guidelines for conducting action research is that researchers should make their reasoning explicit and organise it in such a way that it is testable (Susman and Evered, 1978). Thus, explicit methods can make it easier for researchers to apply, test and improve the methods in a convincing manner.