Tool 45 – IS Management Coordination Structure

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Introduction

This e-paper regards tool number 45 from the E-strategizing syllabus from T.A.M. Spil version 2006. The tool is written by Rutger MacLean and is about how to consider an information systems management structure.

How to use

When an information systems project is started or already underway, structure usually matters. We say usually since it can be the case that the project is too small. For instance, when there is only one manager involved, he alone can coordinate the project. So, the structure we are referring to is about communication en coordination among managers of a project. In order to create a good structure, one can use the flowchart of this tool. Almost every block will have an own table you can fill in using the interactive tool in appendix A. Before that can be used, an explanation of every block will be given.
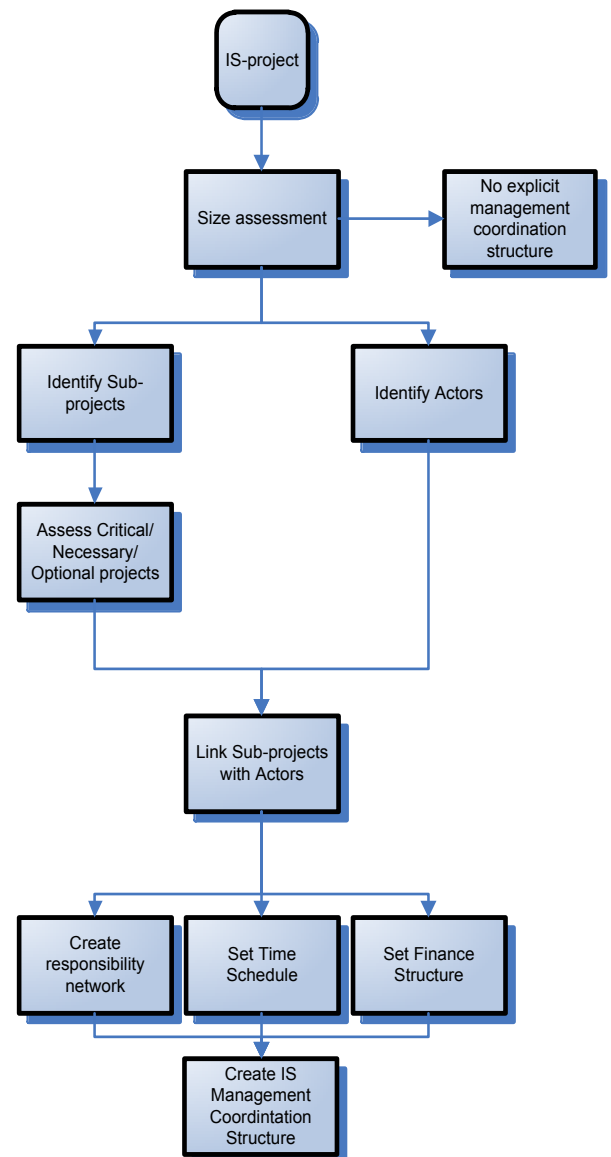
IS project

Although it says IS-project as input, it does not always have to be a project. It might as well be a current situation concerning IS, which needs to be revised or updated.

Size Assessment

When deciding upon the desirable coordination structure, the scale of the project is important. A coordination structure consumes time and effort and is only profitable when at least two managers are concerned. Otherwise a more clan-like management style is desirable. If from a simple size assessment is derived that the project is too small to make a structure affordable, further implementation of this tool will not lead to better results.

Identify Actors

For an efficient Management Coordination, first all relevant actors must be identified. In this case only managers are relevant actors. Still, first line workers are important and should not be forgotten. However, for determining a management coordination structure they have little influence. The actors to be selected are all managers with a certain interest in the project, starting with the top-manager and all the way down to operational management.

Identify Sub-projects

Each IS-project has a lot of different, smaller sub-projects. These projects tend to address sub-needs of different types of end-users. All these projects have to be identified and reduced to that size where a manager can take full responsibility for such a project. If the whole project can be done by a single manager, the project is too small and should have been eliminated as not-feasible in the previous stage.

Assess Critical/Necessary/Optional projects

All projects somehow interlink with each other. This creates the possibility to identify critical sub-projects. These sub-projects are essential to the success of the entire project. For example, the creation of an IT-infrastructure, without that infrastructure an entire project would fail, even if all other sub-projects would be successful. Less important are the necessary sub-projects. These sub-projects are important to complete, have a important functionality, but aren't critical to the rest of the project. Without these functions, the project would lose much of its value. Finally, optional projects have a certain added value, but the project will be fine without them.

Link Sub-projects with Actors

All projects should have someone who is responsible for them. In general sub-projects should be linked with actors who have a specific interest in that project. If possible it is wise to assign critical projects to managers who meet their deadlines, necessary projects to managers who have a good idea of end-users' wishes and optional projects to managers who meet their budgets.

Create responsibility network

A responsibility network is a chart in which all managers are linked to higher or equal managers. They have to justify their actions always to their own superior, and if a project is vital to the well-being of another project, then they also have to justify their actions towards the manager who is responsible for that other project. This can be an equal, or even a lower manager.

Set Time Schedule

As projects grow bigger, so is the need for a firm time-schedule. Since IS-projects tend to never meet the deadline, some powerful management and awareness about IS-reporting is needed. Certainly for the most essential sub-projects, which have other sub-projects waiting for their completion, this can be higly frustrating.

Set Finance Structure

As all projects, IS-projects have to be financed, one way or the other. Often IS-projects not only finish late, but also take up far more resources than planned. Certainly for optional projects, which have little added value, this can be frustrating. When concerning Finance Structure and Time Schedule, keep this in mind as a rule of thumb.
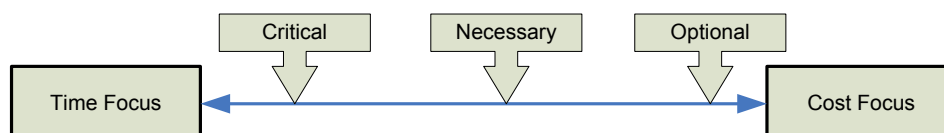
Create IS Management Coordination Structure

When all necessary information has been gathered, a schedule can be made in which the following aspects are considered.

- Due Date (When)
- Report from which manager, to which manager (Who)
- Project & Objective(What)
- Importance (Why)
- Cumulative Budget (How Much)

This can all be filled in the interactive Excel sheet in Appendix A. Here is an example of a possible IS Management Coordination Structure based on the data in the example.

When(date)	From (Actor)	To (Actor)	Project	Priority		Budget	Objective
IS Management Coordination schedule							
31 december 2010	H. Jones	P.R.G. Nelson	[Sub-project name 1]	Critical	€	50.000,00	Schedule
1 februari 2011	A.J. Smit	P.R.G. Nelson	[Sub-project name 2]	Necessary	€	45.000,00	Funding
1 maart 2011	S.R. Collins	H. Jones	[Sub-project name 3]	Optional	€	20.000,00	Complete

Appendix A – An interactive Excel sheet

In the Excel sheet you can fill in all the above aspects to create an Information Systems Management Structure. In the ISMC Data sheet you can describe the project and subprojects in the blue fields including their names, budgets, priority, etc. In the red field with 'List of actors' as title you can fill in all the managers. These will be counted and when there are too few managers for this tool, it will display this to the user. Finally, all this data will be automatically imported in the green table in the ISMC Structure sheet. This is the Information Systems Management Structure. A screenshot is provided below.

Size assessment		[Name of the project]			
# of managers:	5	- Time due:	1 maart 2011		
		- Total budget: €	115.000,00		

[Sub-project name 1]		[Sub-project name 2]		[Sub-project name 3]	
Priority:	Critical	Priority:	Necessary	Priority:	Optional
Actors:	H. Jones	Actors:	A.J. Smit	Actors:	S.R. Collins
Reports to:	P.R.G. Nelson	Reports to:	P.R.G. Nelson	Reports to:	H. Jones
Time due:	31 december 2010	Time due:	1 februari 2011	Time due:	1 maart 2011
Budget: €	50.000,00	Budget: €	45.000,00	Budget: €	20.000,00
Objective	Schedule	Objective	Funding	Objective	Complete

List of actors
A.J. Smit
H. Jones
R.S. Thomson
P.R.G. Nelson
S.R. Collins

References

Daft, R.L. *Organization Theory and Design*, 2001, Thompson Learning, pp. 240-266

Salmela, H & Spil, T.A.M. Dynamic and emergent information systems strategy formulation and implementation. *International Journal of Information Management* 22, 441-460.