Book Review:

What Is E-Business? How the Internet transforms Organizations

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Book Information

BOOK REVIEW

In this book Feng Li provides a timely review of the "state of e-business" at the beginning of the 21st Century. At a time when we are still coming to grips with the reality of what e-business means not only to organizations but also individuals, communities and services Feng Li's contribution creates a comprehensive starting point for both academics and scholars of e-business. By providing a clear grounding of the reality of e-business transactions within both the organisational environment and the community at large, we can begin to understand how internet technologies are influencing business processes.

What is an ever-changing and turbulent world of information technology requires a firm grip and understanding of what this means to the many stakeholders involved in the e-business transaction. Feng Li's definition of e-business (which he regards as a wide and encompassing entity) is both intriguing and thought-provoking and sets the scene for the ensuing discussions, scenarios and cases throughout the remainder of the book. Both the use of real-world examples and relevant and timely newspaper and magazine references makes the material accessible to both the novice and experienced scholar in many cognisant fields from e-business and information systems to management and commerce.

Part I provides a clear overview of the background within which e-business operates, applying the concept to three distinct but interrelated areas. First, the information economy in which we operate and the underlying themes within this, helping the reader to understand the interactions and connections between increased network connectivity, the rapid pace of technological change and investment, and our increasing reliance on information. The adage "Information is Power" grows continually in its relevance. Following this the ten rules of the network economy open our eyes to the myths and realities of the environment in which we operate. This section is consolidated by recognising what this means to the business world – how e-business actually takes place and the implications therein. I particularly liked the range of assignment options which were given throughout this section, which will enable any scholar to select and review an enticing topic.

Part II reflects upon the important role of strategy in the workplace, and recognises that business strategy has had to adapt and change to embrace the technological culture. Herein lays the paradox: although web-based systems require a strategic plan, the emergent result is often disruptive to the environment in which they operate. This section identifies many of the key disrupters of modern business practices, and recontextualises strategy as a process. It finishes by evaluating key models of e-business. These reflect the latest thinking in the field, by authors such as Timmers, Rappa, Afuah, Tucci and Osterwalder, and with the help of Feng Li's critical review the reader can use these models to interpret and understand the complexity of e-business.

The book finishes, in part III, by focussing on the growing field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the infrastructure within which e-business has been able to operate and grow. The first three chapters focus upon internal processes which enable organisations to use e-business systems to make an impact upon efficiency, while the final chapter extends this to the external environment. The role of ICTs in organizational change is explored through the use of positive examples of ICT's influence on the change process, for example, brining functional information closer together, while being aware of the political and cultural changes necessary to facilitate these efficiencies. ICT's role in innovation, and specifically Business Process Reengineering, is reviewed. Finally, internal processes relating to the role of teleworkers and virtual teams are explored, demonstrating not only the business benefits but also the advantages to the employee, while simultaneously being aware of such issues as alienation. From a communications background, I would like to have seen further review of the "soft" skills needed to complement the alienation potential within e-business processes, but this should not take away from the comprehensive nature of the book.

The assignments and discussions points contained throughout are consolidated by the appendices which provide three comprehensive examples of assignments which could be set for students. These draw upon many aspects of the work covered in the book and, in my opinion, would enable scholars to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of e-business. These obviously come from a dedicated educator.

From the reader point of view I found this book straight-forward to understand and felt that a wide range of issues relating to the impact of internet technologies on business were scoped out and made relevant to many business-related fields. This book would be ideal for the post-graduate market, as well as academics and practitioners, providing a high level of academic and business relevance. From the clearly identified wide-ranging impact of technology, facets of the book would also be relevant on communications, strategy, change and other business modules, as well as engineering and sociology.

To summarise I would highly recommend this book with its clear academic justification, its beautifully outlined examples and its creative and relevant assignments which could easily be adapted and implemented in many different fields. The book is well presented, and the layout and structure easy to follow. It enables readers to "dip" in and out of relevant sections and apply these to the field in which they are interested. In What is E-Business?: How the Internet Transforms Organizations, Feng Li has produced a book which will be a wonderful resource for anyone trying to understand this growing field, and should be a required text in any e-business or e-commerce course.