

***The Strategic Application of Information Technology in Health Care Organizations*, by John P. Glaser**

REVIEWED BY BILL PASCAL

“The battle to prove that IT is vital to business operations is still being fought within the enterprise.”¹

“Fewer IT managers believe bosses are able to make strategic use of technology.”²

These two statements come from recent surveys exploring the views of executives and IT managers on the value of IT investments for their organizations. I am personally not surprised by these findings. I have been on both sides of the equation during my career and have come to the conclusion that, in large measure, a lack of alignment between the strategic orientations of an organization and the IT investment portfolio has perpetuated the disconnect.

Recently, on the recommendation of a colleague, I read a book by John P. Glaser entitled *The Strategic Application of Information Technology in Health Care Organizations*. Glaser is currently the Vice President and CIO for Partners Health Care System, Inc., and has had a long career in the delivery of IT systems in the health sector and in providing consulting services as well. He wrote this book with the objective of improving the ability of leaders of healthcare organizations to invest strategically and thoughtfully in information technology and achieve desired organizational returns.

As Glaser points out in his introduction, healthcare executives have a belief, often tenuous, that information systems will provide some form of competitive advantage and will be a major contributor to organizational strategies and plans. However, it is difficult for most executives to point to a large number of prior information system investments that have led to significant and unarguable returns to the financial performance of an organization.

This is a book oriented to decision-makers in a healthcare organization (such as the CEO,

CIO, CTO, CFO or CMO), who have to shape the strategic focus of their business. It provides a wealth of advice and counsel on how best to marry the interests of an organization's business orientations with supportive IT investments. This book does not focus on the “how to” aspects of IT management (such as application system selection, project management or development of IT service levels).

The book is very readable because it combines management theories and concepts and their application to real situations, and it highlights the lessons learned about the nature of IT planning. Given the U.S. context for the book, there are a number of parts that speak to a competitive strategic focus for IT investments. These segments have little applicability in Canada but provide an interesting analysis of taking a specific business orientation and applying the management theories of alignment of strategy and IT investments.

Given the large IT investments already made, committed or being planned in the healthcare system in Canada, there is a clear benefit for decision-makers to spend some time to better understand the linkage between their business orientations and IT. For those leading the IT community, this book provides an abundance of good advice on how to think through an IT investment strategy to ensure a heightened level of senior manager support.

1 Survey by Fujitsu Consulting.

2 Study by Peter Carr, Executive Director of the Centre for Innovative Management at Athabasca University, and Ric Irving, Associate Professor at York University's Schulich School of Business.



The publication of this journal is supported by an educational grant from Hewlett-Packard (Canada) Co.