

# EDI, IT and the Business

Yes, I have talked about this subject before. Yes, I will talk about it again. WHY! Because a successful EDI program can only happen when EDI, IT and their stakeholders all are in harmony.

The reporting relationship of the EDI Manager does not matter in this example. If the EDI Manager reports to the Business, then he/she still needs to have the CIO as a strong partner. If the EDI Manager reports to the CIO, then the CIO must regard him/her as an important subordinate; and not have the attitude that EDI just supports the Business so all I need to do is ensure they have an adequate budget. Note to CIO's: if EDI is important to the success of your corporation, do not "bury" the EDI Manager under a subordinate who also handles a plethora of unrelated functions.

So far what I have described is a "three legged stool". Don't we wish it was that simple! But typically we have more than one Business element involved. Let's say for starters, Procurement and Marketing/Sales absolutely depend on the EDI system. But add in at least Finance and Logistics. Now all these Business elements might not meet organizationally until the top of the chart. So both the CIO and the EDI Manager are going to have to cultivate great relationships with several groups.

Note to the EDI Manager: You must become an expert in the organization of your company. Know what functions are entrusted to each manager. Always learn who is the "go to" person for each area that you interface with. The term "supply chain" may be the most difficult one to understand as it can encompass several functions that might otherwise be free standing departments. But it can and does vary tremendously from company to company. Yes, it usually includes "logistics", but in some companies it includes inbound logistics while outbound logistics may be under marketing. "Supply Chain" is such an important topic that I plan to write about it in the future.

All kinds of things happen in the Corporate World. Here is a simple example: The CIO has plenty of budget, but the CFO won't approve an EDI modeling tool. The EDI Manager had presented the request verbally to the CIO. The CIO easily understood, the value but needed CFO sign off because of "approval limits". What should have taken a couple of days took several weeks of analysis and meetings. Another very common source of break in the "harmony" is the right people not being invited to the right meetings. When these type of situations happen, it is time for both sides to step back and see how they can better the relationship. The EDI/IT side will always say the business doesn't take the time to understand how much effort and skill is required to accomplish the goals. The stakeholders always say they are overwhelmed with carrying out their responsibilities. Sorry, the only answer is for both sides to spend the extra effort and time together and begin to understand each others concerns / problems.

Not in the formal organization chart as such, but lurking somewhere on the executive floor; might be someone who I always identify as the "EDI Champion". This person can and should be your greatest asset. Yes, I know that as an EDI Manager, and sometimes as a CIO; you may have trouble "reaching" this person because of "corporate walls". As a consultant/project manager, I have always been able to figure out how to get around these walls.) Remember, the "EDI Champion" does not usually get involved because no one tells him/her enough to act. But this person sees the overall benefits of EDI and has the clout to remove obstacles.