The Impact of Salient Cultural Practices on the Outcome of IS Implementation

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ABSTRACT

Some information system (IS) studies have adopted organisational culture (OC) theory to investigate IS implementations. The studies highlight that members will reach consensus or agreement in the use of an IS but also experience inevitable tensions and ambiguities in the utilization of the IS. However, literature related to IS implementation/OC has rarely examined the influence that the saliency of specific cultural practices may have on the success or failure of IS implementations. Using a case study approach, we adopted the “soft positivism” research philosophy to collect data, underpinned by Martin’s (1992) integration and differentiation perspectives of OC to study the organisational implementation of an IS. These perspectives served as interpretive lenses through which to explain how members’ salient behaviours towards an IS evolved during the implementation process. Our study augments the IS implementation/OC literature by demonstrating how salient cultural practices influence the outcome of IS implementation.

KEYWORDS
IS implementation outcome, IS success/failure, organisational culture

INTRODUCTION

In many cases, the failure of an information system (IS) is due not to technical deficiencies, but to organisational issues such as user resistance or resistance to new working practices engineered by the introduction of the system (Rivard, Lapointe, & Kappos, 2011; Wagner & Newell, 2011). Thus IS failure may be due to a gap between members working values/practices and the implemented IS, or an organisation’s inability to clearly recognise how its members different operating values/practices impact IS implementation processes/activities or vice-versa. Thus, many IS implementation studies have adopted organisational culture (OC) theory (e.g. Alavi, Kayworth, & Leidner, 2006; Iivari & Huisman, 2007) to explain how members respond to ISs in their everyday work, and how these responses influence the implementation process.

The aforementioned examples of IS-culture studies suggest that culture at the organisational level is delicate and has a strong influence on how organisations may cope with, and adapt to, organisational issues that emerge during the implementation of an IS. These studies have assumed that organisational groups/members will always have the same perceptions of, and behaviours toward, an implemented IS. However, Reinecke & Bernstein (2013 p. 429) argue, “culture does not produce groups of people with uniform codes of behaviour, but creates groups that share similar thinking to some extent,” suggesting that culture is not always homogenous. Therefore, there is a need to address the likelihood
of competing cultures, conflicts and opposing IS outcomes arising among organisational subgroups when an IS is implemented (Ravishankar, Pan, & Leidner, 2011). Organisational subgroup members who have different job functions are likely to have different interpretations and attitudes towards an IS in their attempts to develop and use the system (Koch, Leidner, & Gonzalez, 2013; Wagner & Newell, 2011). Thus, a consideration of culture that is limited to the organisational level may be insufficient to understand the outcome of IS implementation (Rivard et al., 2011).

To facilitate richer interpretations of organisational implementations of IS, studies have investigated culture at the subgroup level to explain how IS development and IS use can be impacted by subgroups that are in conflicting relationships with one another (e.g. Ravishankar et al., 2011; Rivard et al., 2011). We argue that considering OC and organisational subcultures as firmly grounded concepts provide nuanced explanations of how members’ values, beliefs and practices at the organisational and subgroup levels influence the development and usage of IS. Despite the extant literature, indicating the apparent strengths of adopting the organisational and subgroup perspectives of culture to investigate IS implementations, it remains to be seen, the influence the saliency of specific cultural practices may have on an IS implementation outcome – that is, IS failure or IS success (Rivard et al., 2011). Exploring this would facilitate explanations of how and why members’ interpretations and behaviours towards an IS are shaped and may change during implementation processes, and how OC influences implementation outcomes. This view contributes to the emergent view identified by some IS-culture studies that the relationship between culture and IS efforts are continuously evolving and dynamic (e.g. Gallivan & Srite, 2005; Iivari & Iivari, 2011; Leidner, 2010).

We predict that taking the evolving and dynamic view of culture will help advance our understanding of IS implementation, and explain how and why ISs fail or succeed. This will help organisations draw attention not only to organisation-wide practices but also to deviances among subgroups. In turn, organisations implementing IS cannot only take a ‘top-down’ organisational-level approach but also understand ‘bottom-up’ responses to the implementation process, consequently providing a better chance for IS success. We take organisational values to be appropriate to understand OC because the interpretations of values reflect deep assumptions (Martin, 2002). Therefore, our primary research question is: How do salient organisation-wide and subgroup values influence the outcome of IS implementation? To answer this question, we draw on Martin’s (1992) perspectives of OC to examine the impact that integrated and differentiated values may have on the outcome of an IS implementation.

The next sections provide an overview of the extant research on organisational implementations of IS, before briefly reviewing the OC literature with particular reference to the impact on IS implementations. Subsequently, we outline our methodology, followed by our results, discussion, and conclusion.

ORGANISATIONAL IMPLEMENTATIONS OF IS

IS implementation studies focus on adoption decisions and post-adoption activities, to explain the challenges organisations face during attempts to achieve a successful implementation outcome (see Cooper & Zmud, 1990; Zhu, Kraemer, & Xu, 2006). These said studies suggest that to make successful IS implementation, majority of organisational members must use the implemented IS in an effective and efficient manner to facilitate full implementation of the system into the organisational settings. More recently, Burton-Jones & Grange (2012) also highlight the importance of the “effective use”, a concept to helping organisations achieving their goals for implementing and IS. Work of Bagayogo, Lapointe & Basselier (2014) complements Burton-Jones & Grange’s (2012) view of effective IT use. Bagayogo et al. (2014) provide insights into the dynamics involved in user interactions with IS by offering a slightly different conceptualisation to effective use. They introduced the concept of enhanced IS use to explain patterns of feature use that could affect effective use, vital for achieving organisational goals and organisational performance during IS implementation. Nonetheless, Burton-
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