Project Management Method Adoption: A Service Industry Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to understand what aspects of brand-named project management method (Project Management Institute - PMI) have been adopted in a service organization and how. The case context examined demonstrates how a weak-matrix organizational structure and agency interpretation along with project management maturity for IT outsourcing projects can affect adoption of a project management method. An interpretative case study is employed for examining the interplays among key notions underlying project management method adoption in IT outsourcing projects. The case study is framed with a research logic constituting the underlying notions of method adoption: the context, the agency, and the method and its fragments. It is found that the organization realizes 43 out of 47 processes proposed by PMI. It is also observed that the perceived project management maturity level is not aligned with the method fragments adopted. Among other discussion points, the present findings contribute to the existing literature by emphasizing the effects of management control on PM method adoption in IT outsourcing. Furthermore, this case allows us to argue that product-focused orientation in project management method adoption is evident and has several implications. The adoption and adaptation of processes in different types of projects is on the authors’ future research agenda.

KEYWORDS

IT Outsourcing, IT Project Management, Pmbok, Project Management, Project Management Method, Weak-Matrix Organizational Structure

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, academics and practitioners have drawn attention to the importance of information technologies (IT)-based services in service industries in emerging economies. The idea of servitization (Vandermerwe & Rada, 1989) in other industries adds further value to these services. In this regard, one can observe that the advances in IT open up new opportunities and threats for service organizations from strategic and operational perspectives. What remains as an issue is to develop an ability to manage IT projects, which are framed by a flux of complex relations within and outside organizations. In the context of IT-based service development, outsourcing has been promoted as an effective sourcing strategy. This research is concerned with the building and appropriation of project management capability to better manage outsourcing IT projects.

In emerging economies like Turkey, the service industry (e.g., retail, insurance, finance, leisure & travel and IT) has shown significant growth and information technologies-driven business developments are put at the center of this growth (Dursun et al., 2014). As the type and number of projects increases, organizations demand dedicated project management related human resources, principles, and method elements. To fulfill this need, organizations put considerable efforts into
brand-named and/or in-house methods, tools, and techniques to enrich project management capability. It is acknowledged that appropriate use of project management related methods and tools is one of the critical factors in the success of IT projects (Milosevic & Patanakul, 2005).

As shall be discussed later on, a significant number of studies focusing on the effects of project management capability and methods used in IT development projects have often adopted a factor-based approach (that is, exploration of success or failure factors) as a research strategy. In this research, we emphasize the need to understand the rich context where a brand-named project management method is adopted in a service organization. The case context examined is a demonstration of how a weak-matrix organizational structure and agency interpretation along with project management maturity for IT outsourcing projects can affect adoption of a project management method. It is this rich context that determines not only the extent to which project management method aspects are adopted but also the underlying reasons for adopting the method aspects. Thus, the goal of this research is to further understand what aspects of project management method have been adopted, and how this is carried out, in the context of a weak-matrix organizational structure.

An interpretative case study was determined to be appropriate for the conduct of this study. The case organization provides us with various data sources to examine the adoption of an internationally accepted project management method (Rose, 2013; Project Management Institute, 2013; Russo et al., 2013).

This research strategy is complementary to studies using factor-based research (Hanisch & Wald, 2011), which is discussed in the relevant studies section. To present the research logic adopted we provide the research framework and method. Then, the case analysis and findings regarding project management method adoption are presented. We discuss the findings from the rich context point of view and propose open research questions.

RELEVANT STUDIES

One can see various methodology related studies in a number of research domains, but in the information systems (IS) research domain, various schools of thought give special emphasis to methodology related issues. A dedicated sub-research domain is called method engineering (Brinkkemper, 1996), which is specifically concerned with development, use of methods and any coherent part thereof.

The idea of studying method in IS has a long tradition in the sense that the very notion of method is central to the existence of information systems. The evolution of a body of knowledge in research and industry indicate a number of historical phases (Avison & Fitzgerald, 2003). The contemporary and emerging issues regarding effective method use have been addressed as a matter of adaptive use of method in the situation where human agency, method rationale and project context play a critical role. Project context can be described by a number of characteristics including IT product type, the status of requirements, the impact of IT solutions on business performance and organizational change.

The adoption and adaptation of IT project management method is simply needed due to its nature (Aydin, 2006). That is, every project is unique with respect to its peculiarities and there is no way one can take as granted the exposed logic and methodical elements in a given project. Thus, a number of underlying notions for method adaptation should be taken into account. First, it is the project context where the project and its constituents from business, organization, and technology perspectives are framed. Second is the method itself, which is often taken as exposed or recommended. Technically speaking, the very definition of a method questions its perceived value (Introna & Whitley, 1997) and contains fragments of principles, products, process and techniques. But in a practical sense, a method is a collection of guidance, on the fly semi or unstructured codified experience. Third, an agency is involved in the adaptation and use of method fragments. The idea of agency is to signify adaptation competence by which appropriate use of method can be justified by a pragmatic and theoretical account (Aydin, 2006). These three notions provide us with guidance to better frame our research.
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