December 1998

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Suzanne Rivard
École des HEC-Montreal

Marie-Claude Aubin
École des HEC-Montreal

Louis Raymond
UQTR-Trois-Rivières

Francois Bergeron
Université Laval-Quebec

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Marie-Claude Aubin
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Abstract

Information Systems (IS) implementation success has been a concern of both researchers and practitioners ever since firms have started to use computer to process their business data. Over the years, researchers have studied several aspects of IS implementation, be it measuring success or developing and testing models that explain IS project success or failure. However, up to now, very little of the IS implementation research has focused on the role played by the project leader. This paper presents the results of a study of 139 IS project managers. The study examined both the tactics adopted by these project managers to influence people, and their level of decision authority.

Introduction

Over the years, successful IS implementation has remained a concern of both researchers and practitioners. While researchers have studied several aspects of implementation, little of the IS implementation research has focused on the issue of the project leader's role. This paper presents the results of a study which examined the relationship between the influence tactics adopted by project managers, their level of decision authority, and the project's organizational structure.

Theoretical Framework

Influence behavior. Influence behavior is considered as central to understanding how leadership is exerted; it is also seen as a key determinant of managerial success (Yukl and Tracey, 1992). Several researchers have focused on understanding influence behaviors, and attempted to classify them into categories known as "influence tactics". Building on earlier studies, Yukl et al.(1992) developed a nine category taxonomy: Rational Persuasion, Inspirational Appeals, Consultation, Ingratiation, Personal Appeals, Exchange, Coalition Tactics, Pressure, and Legitimacy Tactics (see Table 1).

Organizational structure. Galbraith (1971) proposed a typology of organizational structure, which comprises three categories: functional, matrix, and product. While the functional organization has a functional authority structure, and the product organization has a product authority structure, the matrix organization has a dual authority structure. Organization members then have to report to two superiors: their functional superior, and the project leader. Project management researchers have refined the definition of the matrix organization into the functional matrix, the balanced matrix, and the project matrix (Larson and Gobeli, 1985).

Authority. Authority is defined as the right to make decisions that others are bound to comply with (Yukl, 1989). The amount of authority detained by the various actors is central to the notion of the matrix organization. Most authors agree that as the structure goes from a functional organization to a project organization, the level of authority of the functional manager decreases, while that of the project leader increases (Galbraith, 1971; Larson and Gobeli, 1985).

Without formulating formal hypotheses regarding which influence tactics would be more likely to be used in a given structure, we might argue that the type of influence tactics adopted by project leaders will also be related to the type of organizational structure of the project they manage. Hence our two first research hypotheses:

H1: The more project-oriented the organization structure, the higher the level of project manager's authority.
H2: The influence tactics adopted by project managers will vary across organization structure.

There exists a fundamental distinction between authority and influence: "While authority refers to legitimate power based on formal position, power and influence are broader concepts referring to generalized ability to change the actions of the others in some intended fashion" (Mowday, 1978). Therefore, we argue that the types of influence tactics used will differ along with the level of authority. A project leader with a high level of authority might resort to "hard" tactics such as pressure and legitimating while a project leader with a low level of authority would rather use "soft" tactics. Hence, the third research hypothesis:

H3: The higher the level of project manager's authority, the more certain types of influence tactics will be used.

Table 1. Definition of Influence Tactics (Yuki et al. 1992)

*Rational Persuasion***:** The person uses logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade you that a proposal or request is viable and likely to result in the attainment of task objectives.
Inspirational Appeals: The person makes a request or proposal that arouses enthusiasm by appealing to your values, ideals, aspirations, or by increasing your confidence that you can do it.
Consultation: The person seeks your participation in planning a strategy, activity, or change for which your support and assistance are desired, or is willing to modify a proposal to deal with your concerns and suggestions.
Ingratiation: The person seeks to get you in a good mood or to think favorably of him or her before asking you to do something.
Personal appeals: The person appeals to your feelings of loyalty and friendship toward him or her when asking you to do something.
Exchange: The person offers an exchange of favors, indicates willingness to reciprocate at a later time, or promises you a share of the benefits if you help accomplish a task.
Coalition tactics: The person seeks the aid of others to persuade you to do something or uses the support of others as a reason for you to agree also.
Pressure: The person uses demands, threats, frequent checking, or persistent reminders to influence you to do what he/she wants.
Legitimacy Tactics: The person seeks to establish the legitimacy of a request by claiming the authority or right to make it, or by verifying that it is consistent with organizational policies, rules, practices, or traditions

Methodology

A questionnaire was mailed to 426 project managers. Thirty-one percent (139) of these questionnaires were returned. Since only one out of the respondents' organizations was described as pure functional, it was removed from the sample. The respondent's experience as project managers varies; 16% have less than five years experience, 38% have five to ten years, and the remaining 46% have more than ten years. They originate from organizations in the private (52%) and public (48%) sectors. More than three-quarters of these organizations are large (500 employees or more), while the others are either medium-sized (100-499, 19%) or small (99 or less, 4%).

The structure used for managing IS development projects in the respondents' organization was assessed by having them choose one of the 5 structural types described in the literature. Project managers' authority was measured by asking to what extent they had control over 13 types of decisions based on the roles generally attributed to project managers. The tactics used by project leaders to influence members of their project team were measured with the instrument validated by Yukl et al. (1992).

A principal components factor analysis was performed on the data, in order to uncover the underlying structure of the nine influence tactics. The original influence tactics were thus reduced into a three-factor structure, with adequate reliability and face validity. The first component was named "Z-tactics"; it regroups rational persuasion, consultation, and inspirational appeal. The second component, "Y-tactics" includes ingratiation, exchange, and personal appeal. The last component, "X-tactics" joins together coalition, pressure and legitimating.

Results

Hypothesis 1. Table 2 shows that the level of project manager's authority increases from a functional matrix structure to a project management structure. An overall significant F statistic confirms that the more project-oriented the organization structure, the higher the level of project manager's authority, hence supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2. The results obtained for the individual influence tactics provide little support for the hypothesis, since only two influence tactics (ingratiation and coalition) vary across organizational structures. Examining the influence tactic grouped into factors, it is observed that while the Y-tactics are used more often in the project organization structure than in the balanced matrix, and the X-tactics are more frequent in a project organization structure than in a project matrix, there is no other significant difference across organizational structures.

Hypothesis 3. The data partly support the hypothesis, since while some influence tactics are positively related to project manager's authority (Pressure, $r = .19$, $p<.001$; Personal appeal, $r = .15$, $p<.05$), others are negatively related (Consultation, $r = -.21$, $p<.01$). Managers with higher levels of authority tend to use pressure and personal appeal more frequently, and tend to use consultation less frequently. Also, while Y-tactics are positively related to authority ($r =.14$, $p<.01$), whereas Z-tactics are negatively related ($r = -.15$, $p<.01$).

Conclusion

The findings of the study point to the mediating role played by project managers' level of decision authority in linking organization structures to influence tactics. While influence tactics used do not vary across project structures, they do so across various levels of decision authority. In turn, the level of authority of project leaders varies across structures and steadily increases on the functional-project continuum. Another interesting result is obtained in factoring the influence tactics into three groups that were named the X-tactics, the Y-tactics, and the Z-tactics.

These findings lead to further research questions. One pertains to the relationship between decision authority, influence tactics, and the successful completion of projects. Another is related to the appropriateness of specific influence tactics to specific project contexts, i.e. when are X-tactics more appropriate than Y or Z-tactics? Finally, a critical question is that of the "fit" between structure, decision authority, and influence tactics.

Table 2. Breakdown of Project Manager's Authority and Influence Tactics by Organization Structure

Organization Structure	Functional matrix (n=39)		Balanced matrix (n=38)		Project matrix (n=48)		Project management (n=13)		F	η^2
ANOVAs	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.		
Project Manager's Authority	2.9_c	0.5	3.2_b	0.6	3.5_a	0.5	3.6_a	0.5	9***	.17
Influence tactic										
rational persuasion	3.8	0.6	3.6	0.6	3.9	0.6	3.7	0.6	0.9	.02
ingratiation	2.9_b	0.7	2.9_b	0.6	3.0_b	0.8	3.5_a	0.8	2.9*	.06
exchange	2.1	0.7	2.1	0.6	2.2	0.7	2.4	0.9	0.6	.01
coalition	2.2	0.6	2.1	0.6	2.0_b	0.5	2.4_a	0.8	2.1	.05
consultation	3.9	0.6	3.8	0.6	3.9	0.6	3.9	0.8	0.1	.00
inspirational appeal	3.9	0.6	3.6	0.5	3.7	0.6	3.9	0.6	1.3	.03
pressure	2.2	0.6	2.4	0.8	2.3	0.7	2.6	0.6	1.4	.03
personal appeal	2.0	1.8	1.8	0.7	2.0	0.5	2.1	0.7	1.2	.03
legitimating	2.5	0.6	2.4	0.5	2.4	0.9	2.8	0.8	1.2	.03
Influence tactic factor										
Z-tactics	3.9	0.5	3.7	0.5	3.8	0.5	3.8	0.6	1.8	.02
Y-tactics	2.3	0.5	2.3_b	0.5	2.4	0.5	2.7_a	0.7	2.0	.04
X-tactics	2.3	0.4	2.3	0.5	2.2_b	0.5	2.6_a	0.6	1.9	.04

Note. Within rows, different subscripts indicate significant (at $p < .05$) pairwise differences for means on Duncan's multiple range test.   *: $p < .05$ **: $p < .01$ ***: $p<.001$

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