Applying Rhetorical Grease to the Squeaky Dialectics of IS Project Management

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Abstract

While the importance of establishing effective communication between the multiple and often conflicting stakeholders in a typical IS project is non-controversial and well supported in the IS project management literature, this paper argues that the traditional approach to achieving this goal is limited by its ontological and epistemological view of what constitutes effective discourse. Specifically, this paper asserts that while the prevalent dialectical approach to project management serves as a useful tool to help structure and create homogenous project discourse, it is nevertheless an inadequate tool for managing the friction produced by the inevitably heterogeneous and conflicting discourses of an IS project. To make its case this paper shares insights developed from a yearlong longitudinal study that examined the role that argumentation played in the implementation of a health information exchange initiative in Southeast USA. The paper applies Toulmin’s dialectical theory of argumentation to illustrate its case and suggests the application of Perelman Olbrechts-Tyteca’s “New Rhetoric” as a more flexible means for managing project discourse.

Keywords: Toulmin, Perelman Olbrechts-Tyteca, New Rhetoric, Dialectics, Project Management, Discourse, Argumentation

Introduction

The role and importance of effective communication between the multiple and often conflicting stakeholders in an IS project is non-controversial and well established in the literature (Assudani et al. 2010; Napier et al. 2009; Shuraida et al. 2013). Achieving effective communication, however, is a non-trivial undertaking given the widely accepted observation that different groups think differently about information technologies and that these differences can produce implementation problems (Davidson et al. 2004; Orlikowski et al. 1994; Walsh 1995). To navigate this complex terrain, traditional PMBOK based project management models have adopted discursive strategies that involve the use of standardized discourse and rational argumentation to help prevent conflicts that could arise from divergent perspectives (Pollack 2006; Räisänen et al. 2004).

While this approach to project management provides discursive structures that protect previously established project objectives from contrary views, this paper suggests that these discursive structures also serve as barriers to participative project management because they impede the inclusion of heterogeneous perspectives. Indeed, this paper asserts that although traditional project management models often include robust stakeholder engagement and communication plans, the structure of these plans are ill-suited to manage conflicting views or arguments because they are limited to rational project constructs such as project scope, budgets and time schedule. To ameliorate this problem this paper recommends the broadening of project communications to accommodate and negotiate discordant views instead of creating and insulating a dominant discourse. Specifically, it suggests enhancing the traditional dialectic approach to project stakeholder management with an application of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s (1969) “New Rhetoric” communication framework. The paper asserts that a rhetorical approach to project communications will provide a more participatory approach to project communications because rhetorical communication derives its credibility solely from audience acceptance. Dialectical
communication on the other hand is more transcendent and derives its plausibility from logical appeals that ostensibly hold true independent of the environmental context of their application.

To illustrate the potential application of rhetorical strategies to the management of divergent or conflicting perspectives in an IS project, this paper reports on the shortcomings of dialectical discourse observed in a yearlong longitudinal study of a health information exchange initiative implementation in Southeast USA. It then shows how the New Rhetoric could help improve on this discourse. To achieve this goal the paper proceeds as follows: (1) To theoretically situate the New Rhetoric approach that is advocated by this paper, the paper first provides a brief overview of argument theory. (2) It then offers an abridged report that highlights some of the drawbacks of dialectical argumentation as observed in the study of a health information exchange implementation initiative. (3) It then proceeds to highlight the potential contributions that the New Rhetoric could have made to the discourse in this project.

Overview of Argument Theory

Dialectical versus Rhetorical Argumentation

As “the epistemological method” the notion of argumentation could be traced back to Greek conceptualizations of knowledge and its acquisition. As Hirschheim (1985) records it, “The Greeks chose to classify knowledge into two types: doxa (that which was believed to be true) and episteme (that which was known to be true).” Argumentation from this perspective could be seen as the process of moving from “doxa” to “episteme” with the difference between the two providing the illative motivation for an argument or argumentation. Aristotle referred to argumentation within this epistemic realm of knowledge as demonstrations. Demonstrations moved from necessary premises to necessary conclusions through syllogistic deduction (i.e. “all A’s are B’s, all B’s are C’s, therefore all A’s are C’s”) (Van Eemeren et al., 1996). He argued that in order for a syllogism to produce an epistemic conclusion, “demonstrative knowledge must necessarily depend on premises which are true, primary, immediate, and better known than, and prior to and causes of, the conclusion”.

Since demonstrations were dependent on truth claims they gave rise to the dialectic method of argumentation which aimed to resolve disagreements through rational evaluations of truth claims (Pinto, 2001). The dialectical method consequently presented argumentation as a highly structured form of propositional logic that tested arguments by applying a set of precisely defined formal rules (Rowland, 1987). As a result of its emphasis on precisely defined rules, dialectical argumentation is intrinsically abstract or theoretical in its approach, focusing on universal principles unencumbered by the details involved in particular circumstances. As Leff (2002) records, “The dialectical thesis – e.g. should a man marry? – is unencumbered by particulars, and thus dialectical arguments focus upon principles of inference per se.” Unlike the question, “Should Cato marry?” which deals with a particular person the dialectical thesis addresses a prototypical man and is thus not concerned with the plethora of circumstantial details such as who, where, when, by what means, and how Cato should marry. Dialectical argumentation also focuses more on the relationship between propositional alternatives than with the relationship between the propositions and the audience (tends to transcend instead of situate). Dialectic therefore tends to be more associated with “reason” because it only considers the rational appeal of an argument (the logos) and can bracket matters of character (ethos) or emotion (pathos) (Leff, 2002). The language of dialectical argumentation consequently is, “closed, precise, technical and plain” (ibid).

The ‘episteme’ concept and its related dialectical method were not without its critics in antiquity. The Sophists challenged the idea of absolute knowledge by asking how man could transcend his own language and cultural system (Hirschheim, 1985). Sophists asserted that absolute truth was unknowable and perhaps nonexistent and had to be established in each individual case because as Protagoras of Abdera, who is credited with initiating the Sophist movement, stated, “Man is the measure of all things” (Foss et al. 1985). Similarly, Isocrates, an early sophist who established a school of rhetoric in Athens, argued that, “the ideal of absolute knowledge (episteme) of useful matters, i.e. those that pertain to making choices in in one’s personal life or as a member of a community, is unattainable. Therefore it is better to have the right opinions (doxa) about them than scientific knowledge of what is in this sense considered useless” (Bons, 2002). Sophistry consequently developed a form of argumentation that was diametrically different from the Aristotelian syllogistic demonstrations. Since Sophistry was concerned with practical
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insights instead of objective knowledge and its main lens was opinion and not truth, it did not have the same rigid structure as the dialectic. As Rapp (2010) notes, Aristotle referred to argumentation that did not meet the strictures of syllogistic structure as an enthymeme and he related this argument type to persuasive discourse or rhetoric. Rhetorical argumentation consequently was loosely defined by Aristotle as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” (in Krabbe, 2002). Unlike dialectic argumentation which sought to attain truth, rhetoric was concerned with attaining shared opinions.

Rhetoric consequently, because of its emphasis on persuasion and not truth, involves more than an examination of propositions relative to their alternatives, but focuses on the plausibility of these propositions relative to the audience addressed (Leff, 2002). Indeed, unlike the abstract or theoretical approach of the dialectic that focused on universal principles and disregarded the details of particular circumstances, the rhetorical discipline is heavily vested in the local particulars of an argument. For example, unlike the dialectical thesis – should a man marry? – which has universal connotations, the rhetorical hypothesis – should Cato marry? – deals with the specific persons and actions that enter into consideration of a social or political situation, and so rhetorical argument must apply principles to actual cases (ibid). While therefore rhetorical argumentation is likely to be less precise than dialectic argumentation it is nevertheless governed by norms of appropriateness or pertinence to a particular setting or context. As Leff (2002) writes, “To speak well rhetorically as a matter of art is to demonstrate a capacity to adapt to changing local circumstances. In other words, the circumstantial and situated character of rhetoric encourages a norm of accommodation and flexibility – a norm connected with *phronesis* (practical wisdom) or *prudentia* (prudence)”. Rhetorical argumentation therefore generates practical insights (not truths) that are geared at managing particular situations and circumstances. As Bons (2002) notes, “it is the experience of these [rhetorical insights] and a pragmatic analysis of them which provides one with an empirical stock of knowledge which informs one’s opinion and which enables one to respond effectively to the requirements of any given situation”. Jacobs (2000) sums up this distinctly pragmatic feature of rhetorical argumentation well when he writes, “Dialectic searches for truth; Rhetoric makes it effective”.

Rhetoric’s emphasis on persuasion also engenders it to include and highlight the role of *ethos* and *pathos* in argumentation instead of focusing solely on *logos* or pristine rational thought. As Jacob (2000) writes, “Rhetoric adds motivational appeal and linguistic style in order to animate the inferential forms and propositional content of logic”. This is perhaps the source of pejorative uses of the term in everyday parlance to refer to empty words with no substance or flowery, ornate speech. As Hohmann (2000) observes there is a tendency, “...to conceive of dialectic as a rather pure and theoretically sound method aimed at a cooperative search for cognitive truth, and of rhetoric as a seriously tainted and practically compromised knack serving a competitive quest for persuasive success”.

While dialectic and rhetorical approaches seem very much opposed to each other with rhetoric criticized as feigned and unreasonable speech addressed to man’s lower instincts, rather than reason, and dialectic described as useless logic chopping, full of sophistry with no practical benefit, both could be construed as complementary sides of the same coin (Krabbe, 2002). Leff (2002) makes this case when he observes that dialectic is dependent upon rhetoric to “close and define the situations in which it can operate.” Rhetoric, he argues, can help provide provisional, local closure when conclusive agreements are not reached through the inferential sequence. On the other side of the coin, Leff suggests that rhetoric needs to be tempered with dialectical rationality if it is to achieve its goal of effective persuasion.

This paper consequently uses its contrast of rhetorics and dialectics more as heuristic device to facilitate insights into the research endeavor than as a reified dichotomy. It does however seek to highlight the overlooked role of rhetorics in project management discourse and to showcase the pitfalls of emphasizing dialectical approaches to project communications at the expense of rhetorical considerations.
**Features of Dialectical Argumentation** | **Features of Rhetorical Argumentation**
--- | ---
Adds institutional commitments and deliberative format in order to test inferential forms and propositional content | Adds motivational appeal and linguistic style in order to animate the inferential forms and propositional content of logic
Searches for truth | Makes truth effective
Structure of opposition | Structure of identification
Emphasizes the logos aspect of argumentation and brackets out ethos and pathos | Includes and highlights ethos and pathos in argumentation
Proceeds through question and answer, and the interlocuters seek to convince each other (i.e. win the argument) | Proceeds through uninterrupted discourse, and speakers seek to persuade the audience
Materials of dialectic are symbolic inducements | Materials of rhetoric are pragmatic acts
Tendency in dialectic is to transcend | Tendency in rhetoric is to situate
Intrinsic standards for judging argument quality in terms of procedural implementation | Extrinsic standards for judging argument quality in terms of persuasive outcome
Considers the relationship of propositions to one another and follows norms of logical rationality | Considers the relationship between propositions and situations and follows norms that refer to appropriate social relationships
Critical in Epistemic orientation | Relativistic in epistemic orientation
Viewed as a technical art | Viewed as a practical art
Criticized as an irrelevant, arcane and esoteric technique. Dismissed as peculiar curiosity | Criticized as ornamentation, bombast, seduction. Can lead to cynical sophistry.

Table 1 - Comparison of Rhetorical and Dialectical Argumentation (adapted from Leff (2002) and Jacobs (2000))

**Illustrating Dialectical Argumentation in a HIE Project (Abridged)**

**Toulmin’s Dialectical Framework**

A 2013 longitudinal study of a health information exchange (HIE) implementation initiative in Southeast USA adopted Toulmin’s (1958) theoretical lens to demonstrate the impact that argument structures belonging to different technology frames of reference (Orlikowski et al. 1994) had on the implementation effort. Toulmin’s theory of argumentation was selected for this study because it has been widely employed in IS studies (e.g. Hirschheim et al, 2012; Berente et al, 2011; Kim et al, 2009) and because it is designed for the real world practice of argumentation.

Toulmin took issue with the application of the impersonal, highly specialized and abstract principles of mathematics to the intensely personal and inter-subjective practice of real world argumentation. His fundamental critique of formal logic pertained to its assumption that all aspects of argument are “field invariant” and that mathematics (particularly geometry) was the standard by which arguments in all fields could be judged. Toulmin challenged these assumptions by asserting that practical argument is a tool that is used in a variety of different fields and that aspects of arguments varied from field to field (i.e. “field dependent”) (in Foss et al, 1985). To explain this notion, Toulmin introduced the notion of “logical types”. He suggested that argumentation belonged to the same field of argument if the statements to be justified are of the same logical type, and if all the supporting statements are also of one logical type (in Van Eemeren et al, 1996).
An example of Toulmin’s logical type is argumentation pertaining to the same time period. Toulmin argued that most argument fields in the practical domain cannot accommodate timeless claims to knowledge. According to Toulmin therefore claims pertaining to the past, present and future belong to separate argument domains. He illustrates this by showing how, even in the highly specialized field of astronomy predictions are based on records that are no more current than the present hour. More data points could be observed in the future and require modifications of previous predictions or knowledge claims (Toulmin, 1958).

While Toulmin’s emphasis on an argument’s practical context represents a departure from the pure dialectics of formal logic, it could still be viewed as a dialectical approach because it still retains most of the features of dialectical argumentation (see Table 1). While, for example, it recognizes different fields or types of argumentation, Toulmin’s model still insists on the norms of logical rationality and focuses its attention on the relationship of propositions to one another (as opposed to the norms that refer to appropriate social relationships and the relationship between propositions and persons). It also adopts intrinsic standards for judging argument quality in terms of procedural implementation instead of judging arguments in terms of persuasive outcome.

Indeed, although Toulmin recognized that practical argumentation was field dependent he nevertheless developed an argument model that depicted what he asserted to be aspects of argumentation that were “field invariant”. While Toulmin conceived rationality as being field dependent, he argued that the essential method of its certification or justification was universal. His model consequently asserts that the building blocks of any argument regardless of the field of argumentation were claims, grounds, warrants, backing, qualifiers and rebuttals. Toulmin argued that this model would hold across different fields of argumentation because the “justifactory” force of qualifying terms (“modalities”) such as probably is the same in all fields, even though the specific criteria for what counts as a qualification (i.e. what probably means) changes from field to field. A diagram and illustration of Toulmin’s model is presented below:

![An Illustration of the Toulmin Argument Model](image)

**Observed Shortcomings of Toulminian Dialectics in a HIE Project**

Toulmin’s framework is well suited to describe the HIE implementation project that is outlined in this paper because the portfolio management office (PMO) involved in implementing the HIE system ran its projects based on the overtly dialectical Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) guidelines. Like Toulmin’s framework, PMBOK guidelines advocate dividing projects into discrete logical types or processes that each have their own distinct considerations or argumentation (e.g. initiation, planning, executing, controlling and closing processes). A key purpose of these distinct processes is to ensure that
project objectives are construed narrowly enough to ensure that they are logically linked to equally well defined project outcomes or success measures. An example of the importance of maintaining this logical linkage is seen in the care that is taken to protect the project from scope creep or deviations from clearly delineated project objectives.

Although therefore PMBOK guidelines divide project management into discrete fields, it also (much like the Toulmin Argument Model) suggests that these processes represent a universal type that could be applied across different contexts. Indeed, the essential logical structure of PMBOK processes (i.e., Project Objectives ----> Logical Process ----> Project Outcome) is functionally identical to Toulmin’s basic argument model (i.e., Grounds ----> Modality ----> Claim). Similarly, much like the “justifactory” purpose of Toulmin’s argument model, PMBOK procedures provide a logical mechanism for establishing quality controls over projects as well as a rational means for troubleshooting project processes.

While the emphasis on rational processes provides a robust means of controlling IS projects, this approach to project discourse has several weaknesses as demonstrated when applied in the context of the HIE implementation effort. A key challenge that the PMBOK methodology faced in the HIE initiative related to its dialectical compartmentalization of project discourse into separate worlds of argumentation.

At the project’s initiation, the project was initially chartered as a narrow interface endeavor between a hospital and group of oncology physicians to comply with the requirements of a grant from the National Cancer Institute. The justification for this project was provided from the following logical domains (and their corresponding stakeholder groups): 1. Clinical Frame (Physicians and other clinicians), 2. Financial Frame (CFO’s and Finance Dept. Employees), 3. Technical Frame (Project Management), and 4. Political Frame (administrative representatives from different organizations). These differing logical domains were not problematic at the onset of the project however because they all supported the project’s initial charter (howbeit for differing reasons or rationale).

With the passage of the HITECH ACT in 2009 the project was escalated from a relatively routine interface project to a HIE initiative that would be a critical part of a $10 million endeavor that was tied to about $30 million in incentive payments from the federal government. Although this change broadened the stakeholder base of the project to include all four hospitals in the health system as well as more functional areas than the oncology department, no significant challenges were anticipated because the change was not deemed to impact the underlying logical rationale that had governed the original project.

The project however encountered a major hindrance at the vendor selection stage when it was discovered that a powerful stakeholder group (i.e., the marketing department at the flagship hospital) objected to the PMO’s vendor of choice due to a pre-existing strategic relationship that it had with a different vendor for the performance of its online marketing function. Resolving this issue was difficult because in keeping with the dialectical separation of argument domains it was hard to transfer the technical and financial rationale that supported the PMO decision to the political logic employed by the marketing department for a different vendor choice.

In its attempt to resolve the issue the PMO attempted to demonstrate the logical validity of its choice by (1) creating a level setting document that illustrated the industry standards for HIE, (2) Emphasizing the immutability of technical considerations, (3) Attempting to depoliticize the vendor selection process (characterizing it as a purely technical endeavor), (4) Emphasizing the impartiality of technical considerations (Technical view as fact based).

While the PMOs arguments were not refuted they were nevertheless unsuccessful as the marketing department supported its choice by offering equally rational argumentation from a separate logical domain. It did this by: (1) Citing separate industry standards for marketing activities (2) Emphasizing the superiority of business considerations, (3) Emphasizing the value of relationships/politics to the business, (4) Providing separate business facts.

The attempt to resolve this impasse ‘logically’ therefore failed because each side made internally consistent arguments that could not be refuted by the other side as they belonged to separate logical domains. Indeed, because dialectical approaches create separate domains of argumentation they also encourage a prevalent “perspective blindness” or “perspective indifference” in project management that exacerbates the difficulty that emerges when there is a conflict between the domains. This blindness or indifference was illustrated in the HIE project when the PMO failed to anticipate opposition from the
marketing department because this type of opposition did not fall within the scope of its logical frame of reference.

While therefore dialectical methods are suitable for controlling projects that have a pre-established consensus their main weakness is their inability to provide a mechanism for reaching participative agreement. In the aforementioned HIE project, the controversy between the marketing department and the PMO office was finally resolved by dissatisfactory authoritative fiat or “hegemonic consensus” instead of attaining a negotiated agreement between the parties. Interestingly, this decision violated the seemingly inviolable financial and technical constraints delineated by the PMO in favor of the more political arguments offered by the marketing department.

**Potential Contributions of “New Rhetoric” to Project Management**

*Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s New Rhetoric (Summarized)*

The main weakness of the Toulmin and PMBOK models is derived from their contention that rationality is field dependent. Since these models limit rational argumentation to particular domains or fields they do not allow for argumentation between domains. As illustrated above, however, in a typical IS project several fields (e.g. finance, technical, clinical) could all have equally valid, but nevertheless conflicting arguments about a particular vendor selection decision. Dialectical models do not provide rational recourse for the resolution of these disputes other than the arbitrary adoption of the more dominant or powerful argument domain.

An alternate conceptualization that circumvents this criticism of Toulmin’s argument model is Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s (1969) rhetorical approach to argumentation. Unlike Toulmin whose main point of departure from the formal logic tradition is his notion of separate argument domains, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s *New Rhetoric* fundamental criticism of the Cartesian concept of reason was its suggestion that whenever two persons arrive at opposite decisions about the same matter, at least one of them must be wrong (Corvellac, 2011). Indeed, to make a sharp distinction between formal logic’s Cartesian ideal of reasoning and everyday reasoning the New Rhetoric refers to the former as ‘demonstrations” and the latter as “argumentation”. (See Table 2 below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demonstration</th>
<th>Argumentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moves strictly from premises to conclusions</td>
<td>A mix of opinions, justifications and criticisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons on truth</td>
<td>Reasons on values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belongs to rational domain</td>
<td>Belongs to the domain of the reasonable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is eternally valid, irreversible</td>
<td>Evolves over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal, based on objective axioms</td>
<td>Personal, based on audience accepted premises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion is certain (self-evident)</td>
<td>Conclusion is based on audience adherence (more or less strong, more or less convincing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplined process</td>
<td>Creative process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order of steps guided by internal logic, meets demands of rational consistency</td>
<td>Open ended, embedded in timely contingency of individual, social conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims to calculate</td>
<td>Aims to seek adherence to a thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logically coercive (based on definitive proof)</td>
<td>Persuasive approach (based on choice and free will)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - New Rhetoric’s Distinction between Demonstration and Argumentation
Demonstrations, as depicted by the New Rhetoric, move from clearly stated premises to a conclusion that cannot be challenged if one accepts the premises and the rules of the logic in use. These demonstrations do not constitute arguments in the eyes of the New Rhetoric because they are based on the coercive notion of self-evidence. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write, “All proof would be reduction to the self-evident, and what is self-evident would have no need of proof”. Argumentation on the other hand, as conceived by the New Rhetoric, is not a calculation that is made in accordance with pre-existent rules, but rather is a discursive endeavor designed to, “induce or increase the mind’s adherence [emphasis mine] to the theses presented for its assent.” This notion of adherence (from the French term adhésion) is pivotal to New Rhetoric and is considered its main contribution to argument theory (Corvellac, 2011). Adherence does not involve a binary knowledge outcome (such as “no/yes” or “do not know/know for sure”) but is a matter of the degree of audience acceptance on a continuum that ranges from strong to weak. Adherence consequently, unlike formal approaches that emphasize logic or argument structure, is an audience centric view of argumentation. While the more formal approaches may look at the argument itself and tend to discount or overlook the audience, the New Rhetoric does the converse and treats the audience as primary and minimizes the import of argument structures and logic.

To illustrate this consider Toulmin’s (1958) characterization of his argument model (See Figure 1). Someone asks whether Harry is a British citizen. Toulmin does not indicate who this person is, neither does he indicate who the question is addressed to nor does he mention the relationship between the two. As Crosswhite (2008) writes, “Toulmin’s model has no agents and no social relations, aside from the ghosts who prompt with questions and activate the model. It has no account of what arguers must know or what deep skill or virtues they must have”. From the perspective of the New Rhetoric, however, all argumentation must occur in relation to a particular audience. A speech requires hearers and a book entails readers. Indeed, the New Rhetoric contends with the notion that scientists merely report facts and do not necessarily address a specific audience, by arguing that facts do not “speak”. “Facts” only become facts when an audience consents to call them facts (Foss et al, 1985). In the New Rhetoric power is derived from the audience and the audience has (or should have) an independent prerogative to determine how much credence or force it will bestow upon a given argument. A complete illustration of the New Rhetoric Model is provided in Figure 2 below.

As is evident from the depiction in Figure 2, the New Rhetoric, unlike Toulmin’s argument model, is field independent and allows for argumentation between different fields or logical perspectives. The model can navigate equally valid, but differing perspectives because its primary aim is to persuade and not to justify. Since practical decisions are primarily made by choice, there are no rational reasons that can necessitate a particular outcome. Choice implies that an individual can agree with the justifications for a particular course of action, but still legitimately choose an alternate course based on pure preference or choice (i.e. choose to remain un-persuaded).
Potential contribution of New Rhetoric to IS Project Management

The New Rhetoric approach to discourse may help mitigate the weaknesses of dialectical structures by focusing the attention of the discourse on its audience instead of abstract processes or objectives. It addresses the problem of perspective indifference by requiring interpersonal engagement or what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) refer to as contact des esprit ("a meeting of the minds") as a prerequisite for argumentation. In the HIE project, for example, the PMO would not have been caught off guard by Marketing's objection because the rhetorical method would have discounted the prevailing "facts" of the project and focused instead on the opinions of all stakeholders including the Marketing department. Focusing on rhetorical argumentation helps to remove "perspective blindness" because its emphasis on the social construction of "facts" and "processes" underscores the need for sustained effort to maintain and achieve negotiated consensus about these "facts". Indeed, while the facts around a project could be considered indisputable (e.g. in the HIE project, where neither side refuted the validity of the other sides arguments), the appreciation of these facts remains a matter of preference and therefore remain subject to negotiation.

The New Rhetoric also assists with this negotiation process by offering a theoretically justified means for inter-frame argumentation. It accomplishes this by including and highlighting the role of ethos and pathos in argumentation instead of focusing solely on the logos aspect. In the HIE initiative, for example, the PMO office might have been more successful in achieving a consensual agreement if in addition to developing the logical case for its particular vendor choice it also presented the department as trustworthy and sensitive to the unique concerns of the marketing department. Indeed, one of the major concerns raised by the marketing department was the relative historical aloofness of the corporate IS office.

Additionally, the New Rhetoric helps facilitate the negotiation of competing perspectives by treating the frame boundaries as artificial constructs that are subject to negotiation. This flexibility allows for the exploration and creative discovery of common grounds from which a negotiated agreement could be reached. Instead, for example, of starting the discourse between the PMO and the Marketing Department at the point of contention (contact between the two departments was only initiated when this conflict was noticed), it would have been more productive to start at a point of consensus regarding the project. The
New Rhetoric suggests that persuasion is best accomplished when parties first establish commonalities and then seek to achieve improved adherence to a particular perspective by linking the contentious perspective to these commonly held beliefs. This approach is also more modest than dialectical approaches as it seeks only to increase adherence to a particular perspective instead of winning the argument or convincing the other side.

While therefore dialectical methods remain robust and useful tools for achieving project goals when there is consensus around these goals, this paper suggests that dialectical methods are not ideal for attaining and maintaining this consensus. To achieve this end the paper recommends adding rhetorical approaches that are better equipped to accommodate and navigate the often conflicting perspectives that are entailed in a typical IS project.
REFERENCES


