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How Cats Are Herded: Sequencing CIO Influence Tactics for Various Coordination Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT
Large organizations often utilize independent sub-units to pursue specific strategic and business objectives. These organizations have compelling reasons for independent sub-units to act in consistent, coordinated ways including costs, regulation, and customer priorities. Coordination is particularly important in the implementation of enterprise information technology (IT) and information systems (IS). As such, the Chief Information Officer plays a critical role in establishing effective coordination between organizational sub-units. Framed by information processing theory and influence tactics research, this theory building study proposes using event sequence analysis (ESA) to identify the portfolio of influence tactics that are most effective in achieving support for various coordination mechanisms in a federated IS governance structure.

Keywords  
Influence tactics, coordination mechanisms, federated governance, event sequence analysis.

INTRODUCTION
The Chief Information Officer (CIO) plays a crucial role in ensuring that organizations realize value from the information systems (IS) function (Earl and Feeny, 1994). This depends on the CIO’s ability to influence members of the organization to understand and support the strategic use of IS (Earl and Feeny, 1994). The CIO must understand the situation, context, and personalities of key personnel to determine the most effective influence behaviors, and have a broad repertoire of influence tactics available to achieve organization objectives (Cohen and Bradford, 1989).

Influence processes help us understand how managers obtain support from peers and others in the organization over whom they have no authority (Falbe and Yukl, 1992). Complex organizations often use independent sub-units to pursue strategic objectives and market opportunities. Organizations with this structure can benefit from economies of scope and scale generated through coordination of activities between independent sub-units (Brown and Magill, 1998). Organization theory literature identifies formal and informal mechanisms such as task forces, committees, direct contacts, and liaison roles used in a variety of contexts to achieve coordination (Daft and Lengel, 1986, Galbraith, 1973, Thompson, 1967, Tushman and Nadler, 1978). More research on coordination is needed because of significant economic consequences possible from failure to address better organizational integration (Giachetti, 2004).

Many aspects of the effective use of influence tactics have been studied including the use of single tactics and combinations of tactics, the target of the influence tactic, relationship of agent and target, and the influence objective (e.g. Enns, Huff and Higgins, 2003, Falbe and Yukl, 1992, Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson, 1980, Yukl and Falbe, 1990, Yukl, Lepsinger and Lucia, 1992). However, use of portfolios of influence tactics, as well as their timing and sequencing, has been largely ignored in the literature. Furthermore, no studies have examined the nature of influence tactics required when the objective of the influence is to achieve effective coordination within a federated governance structure. The proposed theory building study provides a theoretical contribution to IS Leadership by examining influence tactics used by the CIO and sub-unit managers to achieve coordination in organizations with highly autonomous IS sub-units. The study applies event sequence analysis (ESA) to data collected from an in-depth, longitudinal case study to identify the nature, timing, and sequencing of influence tactics most effective in achieving coordination in a federated IS governance structure.
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Influence Tactics

Research on influence tactics in organizations is extensive (see Falbe and Yukl, 1992, Kipnis et al., 1980, Yukl and Falbe, 1990, Yukl et al., 1992). However, little research has focused on the use of influence tactics by CIO’s and other IT managers (Enns et al., 2003). As CIO’s often lack formal authority over units, the use of influence is often their only means to bring about coordinated action (Enns et al., 2003) particularly for CIO’s and IT managers in organizations with autonomous sub-units. A number of influence tactics have been identified in the literature and are presented in Table 1. These influence attempts can result in three possible outcomes: commitment, compliance and resistance (Yukl, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence Behaviors</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rational Persuasion</td>
<td>Use logical arguments and factual evidence to show a proposal is feasible to attain objective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Encourage the target to plan or modify a proposal for which support is desired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>Use praise or express confidence in the target’s ability to complete a request.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Appeals</td>
<td>Ask the target to carry out a request out of friendship or as a favor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>Offer incentives or willingness to reciprocate at a later time for cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition Tactics</td>
<td>Seek the aid of or use support of others to persuade the target to cooperate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>Use demands, threats or persistent reminders to influence the target.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational Appeals</td>
<td>Make an appeal to target’s ideals emotions to gain commitment for a proposal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Influence Behaviors (Yukl, 2002)

The use of paired tactics, and the sequencing and use of certain tactic combinations have been shown to impact influence outcomes (Yukl and Falbe, 1990). Furthermore, the objective of the influence tactic is an important factor in determining the tactic used and its success (Yukl, Guinan and Sottolano, 1995). For example, in the current research, whether the objective of the influence attempt is to achieve formal or informal coordination may determine the portfolio of influence tactics chosen as well as their efficacy.

Before discussing the conceptual model of the study, and since the objective of the influence tactics studied is to bring about coordinated action, it is important to understand the nature of coordination and coordination mechanisms in a federated organizational environment. A brief overview of this literature is discussed next.

Coordination Mechanisms

Information Processing Theory offers a basis for assessing how organizations deal with task uncertainty and interdependence (Daft and Lengel, 1986, Galbraith, 1973, Tushman and Nadler, 1978). Establishing coordination mechanisms are one means of increasing information processing to manage uncertainty. These include formal mechanisms (processes for interactions sponsored by established organizational structures) and informal mechanisms (interpersonal interactions involving individuals and groups that arise outside of formal structure) (see Brown, 1999, Daft and Lengel, 1986, Galbraith, 1973, Tushman and Nadler, 1978).

Both formal and informal mechanisms play a role in increasing coordination, communication and decision making between organizational units, and combinations of formal and informal mechanisms are likely to be implemented in complex organizations (Brown, 1999). Research on coordination mechanisms in the IS context is limited (see Gupta and Raghunathan 1989, Brown 1999, Saaksjarvi 1994, McKeen and Gulmaraes 1985, Doll and Torkzadeh 1987, Torkzadeh and Xia 1992), and even fewer (e.g., Blanton et al 1992, DeSanctis and Jackson 1994, Clark 1992) have considered coordination mechanisms in federated structures that is, organizations where the locus of responsibility for the management of technology functions is highly centralized, but the locus of responsibility for the management of the use of technology is highly decentralized (Brown and Magill, 1994). Clearly, coordinated action in a federated environment has distinct benefits such as improved efficiency through the sharing of resources and the elimination of redundant activities, economies of scale, more comprehensive solutions and enhanced support. Coordination depends on active support from those involved with the interdependent activities. The CIO and IT managers play a critical role in generating this support for coordinated implementation and use of...
Depending on the type of coordination needed, the ways in which managers attempt to influence the organization may differ. This relationship is identified in the conceptual model presented in Figure 1.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

This study proposes a model to examine the use of influence tactics by the CIO and IT managers to achieve coordination in a federated IT governance context. Central to this model is the influence tactic portfolio. This represents the selection of, sequencing and timing of influence tactics used by the CIO. As such, it represents a portfolio of influence events targeting coordinated action and represents a process view of the phenomenon. Choice of tactics is associated with the agent’s objectives for attempting the influence, the appropriateness of the objective, and the level of target resistance encountered or anticipated (Kipnis et al., 1980, Yukl and Falbe, 1990). The nature of the relationship between the agent and target will impact the outcome of an influence attempt (e.g., Ansari and Kapoor, 1987, Erez, Rim and Keider, 1986, Feeny, Edwards and Simpson, 1992, Higgens, Judge and Ferris, 2003, Kipnis et al., 1980). Thus, based on the influence literature and combining process and variance perspectives on the phenomenon (e.g., Sabherwal and Robey, 1995), we suggest that the efficacy of specific influence portfolios will depend on subunit attitude towards cooperation and the quality of the relationship between the CIO and the subunit. For example, if the CIO is perceived favorably by the sub-unit, coordination influence attempts may find a more receptive audience and be more successful. In addition, different portfolios (different tactics, timing, sequencing) may be required under conditions where the CIO does not have a good relationship with a unit or where the unit is not receptive to coordinating.

Figure 1 – Conceptual Model

Furthermore, the influence tactic portfolio chosen may also depend on the nature of coordination to be achieved (e.g., formal vs. informal). For example, efforts at formal coordination (e.g. task forces, committees, and matrix designs) may lead the CIO to choose different portfolios of influence tactics than for informal coordination (e.g. direct contacts, liaison roles, and voluntary groups). Thus, for various coordination mechanisms, CIOs may use different portfolios of influence tactics to achieve support. These outcomes will be influenced by sub-unit willingness to cooperate and its relationship with the CIO.

METHODOLOGY

Process theory enables analysis of sequences of events that occur over time to understand how organizations change (Van De Ven and Huber, 1990). These events are defined as episodes of social action occurring as part of the process of interest (Sabherwal and Robey, 1993). Analyzing sequences of events provides the ability to describe the processes that lead to the outcomes of interests (Abbott, 1990, Sabherwal and Robey, 1993, Van De Ven and Huber, 1990). The uses of influence tactics to achieve coordination of IT activities represent events within the process of implementing coordination mechanisms.

A longitudinal case study is undertaken to identify the process by which coordination in a federated IS structure is achieved. Data is being collected from weekly meetings with the CIO and interviews with 20 to 30 members of the administration and
IT management at a major public research university regarding their experiences with coordination activities. The university has a federated governance structure with many highly autonomous sub-units, and is undertaking a major effort to improve coordination of IT activities organization wide. This provides an extraordinary environment to analyze in-depth the role of influence tactics in implementing coordination.

ESA will be used to analyze the patterns of influence tactics used by CIOs and IT managers to obtain support for the implementation of coordination mechanisms. Data will be collected via a critical incidents methodology. Specifically, participants will describe incidents of the use of influence tactics in relationship to the implementation of coordination including the type of coordination mechanism (formal vs. informal), by whom and how the participant was approached to enlist support, and their commitment, compliance or resistance. This critical incident analysis has been used frequently to study influence tactics (see Kipnis et al., 1980, Yukl and Falbe, 1990). Each sequence of influence attempts and outcome for a particular coordination activity will represent a single data point in the ESA.

Optimal matching provides a way to measure similarity for sequences of clearly defined elements (Abbott and Hrycak, 1990, Sabherwal and Robey, 1993) and will be used to identify the sequence of influence tactics leading to “best outcome” for a given coordination mechanism.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

As with all case study research, generalizability of the findings to other settings cannot be assumed. The process theory approach gives the opportunity to identify key sequences of activities leading to outcome states but not to explain variation in dependent variables based on identifying predictor variables (e.g., Sabherwal and Robey, 1995). However, this study offers the opportunity to refine the proposed conceptual model and identify specifically testable hypotheses.

This study makes a significant contribution to understanding leadership effectiveness both in the IS and broader management literature. Examining influence tactic portfolios makes a significant contribution to the knowledge on influence tactics which has traditionally taken a simpler view on the phenomenon. Prior studies on coordination mechanisms have assessed the efficacy of the coordination efforts but not the role of the CIO in influencing support for formal and informal coordination. This study will investigate the impact of these influence tactic portfolios for specific types of coordination mechanisms. Finally, this study will analyze the role of influence tactics in the context of the federated governance structure which emphasizes the indirect ability of the CIO and senior IT managers to bring about change. These represent significant contributions to both research and practice through a much richer understanding of the influence and coordination phenomena.

SELECTED REFERENCES