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# DRAMATURGICAL THEORY AS A LENS TO VIEW PROJECT MANAGEMENT ISSUES IN AN IOIS PROJECT

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## **Abstract**

*This qualitative study analyses the lived experiences of project members who worked in a three-year-long inter-organisational information system (IOIS) project. The IOIS project spanned nine organisations. The data was gathered by means of interviews, observations of project meetings, diaries, project memoranda and emails sent by project members to each other during these years. This study used dramaturgical theory by Goffman (1959, 1963, 1974) as a lens to view human issues in an IOIS project to further the understanding of the human issues of project management. We also demonstrate how a dramaturgical perspective to assess emotional issues not only helps our understanding of inter-organisational information systems but also improves management of projects. The paper concludes by discussing theoretical and practical implications of our findings.*

*Keywords: Dramaturgical theory, inter-organisational information system project, qualitative study.*

# 1 Introduction

A large number of investigations have been conducted into information system (IS) implementation, IS failure and success (e.g. Avgerou and McGrath, 2007; Lyytinen and Newman, 2008). It has been argued by Nelson (2007) that failure is rooted in one or a series of mishaps in project management. However, though IS project failures have received a great deal of attention, it has been argued by Napier, Keil and Tan (2009) that there is little empirical research on the project manager's requirements for successful information technology (IT) management. It has also been argued that human and organisational reasons are related to IS development failures with many organisational consequences (Panteli and Sockalingam, 2005). There is a need to understand how social aspects actually contribute to successful collaboration (e.g. Levina and Vaast, 2008).

IS researchers have a long tradition in borrowing theories from other disciplines and IS research has benefitted from the resulting interdisciplinary studies (Wade and Hulland, 2004). It has been suggested that we should take into account socio-emotional aspects in IS studies (McGrath, 2006), and that we might learn something about organisations by conducting retrospective studies (Nelson, 2007). Panteli and Duncan (2004) used a dramaturgical perspective for conceptualising trust development within temporary virtual teams, and highlighted that when virtual interactions are studied through the dramaturgical perspective, differences from traditional conceptualisations of trust emerge from players' actions and interactions. A dramaturgical model for conceptualising the qualitative interview has also been proposed (Myers and Newman, 2007).

Adopting dramaturgical perspective to the lived experiences of the project members who worked in a three-year-long inter-organisational information system (IOIS) project this study provides new insights into the human issues of the project. Our perspective uses dramaturgical theory based on Goffman's (1959) seminal work on social life. The central focus of Goffman's (1974) work is how the feeling of reality (experience) is organised in a person's social life in terms of recognizable activities. In this study, we use the five frames presented by Goffman (1974) for conceptualising the experiences of project members about project management within a three-year-long IOIS project: the assumption of others about the play, backstage, the successes of rituals, face-work, and stigma. The research question addressed by this study is as follows: how dramaturgical theory (Goffman, 1959, 1963, 1974) helps us to understand human issues of project management in an IOIS project?

The paper is organised as follows. In the next section we present the literature relevant to this study. The third section outlines the research methodology. The fourth section introduces some of the complexities associated with the projects under investigation. The fifth section presents the findings of our analysis. The sixth section discusses the implications of our findings, and we conclude our study with a brief summary of our contributions.

## 2 Literature Review

Relevant research literature on the paper topic are human issues of IS project management and the theatre metaphor, both of which are discussed in this section.

### 2.1 Human issues of IS project management

Traditionally, proper project management has been demonstrated by a successful conclusion to the project: the project is accomplished within time, within budget, at the desired quality level. The effective plans, clear goals and coordination of the project work have been found to be critical to project success (Choudhury and Sabherwal, 2003). However, it has been pointed out that '*success is a moving target*': it depends on the time at which the evaluation is carried out (Larsen and Myers, 1999: 396) and who carries out the evaluation (White and Leifer, 1986). However, it has been argued that a

good example in which failure may have little to do with system breakdown is that involving political processes of resistance in organisations (Fincham, 2002). Conflict management has long been seen as a real part of the work of IS development (DeChurch and Marks, 2005). It has been argued that communication problems and ineffective leadership play a major role in system project failures (Levina and Vaast, 2008). Kerzner (1987) has argued that besides being results-oriented, the project manager needs to possess a strong leadership style, for example, with authority, and responsibility.

Differences in organisational structures, working habits (Kirsch and Beath, 1996), values, languages, and education levels between users and developers (Alvarez, 2002) have been seen to aggravate problems in collaboration. In addition to this, economic, technical, and socio-political perspectives have been raised (Kumar and van Dissel, 1996). According to Khazanchi and Petter (2006), the challenges associated with managing e-service projects are no different than in any other IT projects. Khazanchi and Zigurs (2007) have proposed an integrative way of identifying and applying best practices for the management of virtual projects. Their approach allows managers to determine the nature of their virtual projects, and discover and apply patterns for managing them. Becker, Algermissen and Niehaves (2006) examined project management in virtual projects and provided guidelines for process oriented e-government projects. Druskat and Pescosolido (2002) have highlighted that it is important that project members have a collective belief that all members in a team are part owners and that outcomes belong to the team. Similarly, McGrath (2006) showed that if we are narrowing human agency to its cognitive dimensions, it is impossible to consider the totality of human capacities that are either positively or negatively engaged with IS innovation processes. Altogether, many challenges have been outlined regarding project management issues in IS projects, such as structure, complexity, cultural differences, and type of stakeholders among others (e.g. Evaristo, Scudder, Desouza and Sato, 2004).

Over the past decade, IOIS projects have increased in number as multinational organisations seek to standardise information systems across regions and countries (Sarker, Sarker and Jana, 2010). It has been argued that traditionally, IOIS research has concentrated on the economic and competitive benefits, and that the complexity of relationships between members of the environment has received only secondary attention (Allen, Colligan, Finnie and Kern, 2000). Smyth and Morris (2007) argue that although the context-specific nature of projects is acknowledged (e.g. there is no 'right way' to carry out all projects), research methodologies still overlook this.

## **2.2 Dramaturgical perspective**

Dramaturgical theory builds on Goffman's (1959) seminal work on social life. In the 1950s, Goffman was interested in the rules which make social life organised and somewhat predictable. In his book, Goffman (1959) outlines his approach, and uses a theatre metaphor, and the terminology of theatre to symbolise a social world where people act out their 'selves' and roles. According to Goffman, in interactions, the individual strives in all possible ways to act so as to ensure the impressions he/she gives when he/she comes into contact with other people. Goffman sees interaction as a 'ritual', and rituals are going well when everyone is not breaching etiquette and are conducting their duties successfully. Goffman also expresses how actors can belong to some group which organises the performance to give a special impression: an example would be a working group presenting its work to a customer. In many cases, the audience is the same as the actors. It is the situation that the people invite complementary performances from others, which could support their own role. According to Goffman (1959), a significant share of an organisation's activity is also conveyed in face-to-face interaction. However, Goffman (1959) highlighted that there are often conflicts between emotion ideologies and the behaviour of a person. Goffman does not use the analogy of a theatre in his later writing (Goffman, 1963), though the view is still how to act as 'self'. The later focus of examination was stigmatised behaviour – how people, for example, hide their selves. According to Goffman, the basic situation in a social life when the 'normal' and 'stigmatised' selves are facing each other, is a

situation where the special nature of human sociality is exposed. Goffman was interested in the issues of how people act as their selves, and how ‘faces’ are maintained.

We analysed the data using the five frames presented by Goffman (1974). *First*, the assumption of others about the play: interaction controls behaviour so that each individual’s actions are reflected in the other’s actions. Others (audience) are following the enactment of the play (role), which should give a desired impression. *Second*, backstage: the assumption is that to a certain level, people are aware of their performances and it is appropriate to plan, act, and evaluate the management of the role. Backstage also makes the point that in a dramaturgical view, there is much hidden from the view of those who are caught up in social relationships. *Third*, the success of rituals: Following Goffman (1974), the matter is just a pure game or a self-purposeful routine. *Fourth*, Goffman illustrated that the basic principle of social life is to keep up appearances and how to save the loss of face. Thus, bafflement is a common threat, so actors try to avoid it altogether. It is the situation that the people invite complimentary performances from others, which could support their own role. *Fifth*, the focus of examination is stigmatised behaviour – how people, for example, act as their selves, how ‘faces’ are maintained, and how people hide their selves. One interesting issue is how situations are manipulated to achieve certain strategies – it is important from the point of view that makes ‘the rules of the interaction of theatre’ visible.

### 3 Methodology

This study revisits the data of an empirical study that discussed lived experiences of project members who worked in a three year long (2004-2006) IOIS project (e.g. Hekkala, 2011). Nine organisational project teams and two inter-organisational project (PreViWo and ViWo) teams, in a public sector IOIS development and implementation project were included in the study. Data collected ranged from in-depth interviews (250 pages of transcripts), to observations of project meetings (20), diaries (80 pages of notes), 48 memoranda of project and steering group meetings, and e-mails (over 700) containing messages that project members sent to each other during these years. Among the fourteen interviewees were managers from the steering group, representatives of suppliers, members of the research organisation associated with the project, and users active in the project. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two-and-a-half hours. In this study project members’ lived experience was explored through narratives. The names (pseudonyms) and the roles of project members’ are summarised in Table 1. Interviewees were asked to tell their own story about the project and its progress. Following the advice of Myers and Newman (2007) that through narrative stories one would be able to get closer to people’s experiences we focused on the understanding how people deal with experience and construct stories.

<b>Organisations</b>	<b>Role of Organisations</b>
Research organisation Epsilon	Matthew, organiser and member of steering group; Ruut, project manager and member of steering and project group; Thomas and Simon, members of quality group
User organisations (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta)	Organiser: Lucy, Alpha, a member of the steering group; Users: Sophie (Delta); Rosie (Alpha); Kathy (Beta); (Sophie, Rosie, Kathy; members of project group)
Eta/ Zeta	Peter, John, Jack, Daniel (suppliers and members of project group) (John, Peter and Jack, members of PreViWo as well)
Nofco	Sarah, project group member and member of PreViWo; Sheila, steering group member and project manager of PreViWo)

Table 1. Interviewees and their roles

## 4 PreViWo and ViWo projects

ViWo was preceded by a pilot project called PreViWo. *PreViWo* was a one-year-long project for specification, and planning. The pilot project was influential in framing the organisation of the larger project we studied (ViWo). We also noticed that the history of the pilot project influenced the perceptions of the participants. Table 2 contains the organisations in the pilot project.

Organisations	Role of Organisations
Ministry	Ministry responsible for funding the pilot project
Nofco	Consortium of user organisations in charge of the project (a virtual organisation)
Lambda	Consortium of user organisations (an organ of cooperation) that used a similar IOIS
Theta, Iota	Suppliers of the software
Eta	Expert consultants
Alpha	User organisation that was a member of Nofco and Lambda and initiated the project

Table 2. Organisations Involved in PreViWo project.

PreViWo employed two consortia (Lambda and Nofco), and two software houses (Theta, Iota). It became apparent that the management of this process of two consortia and two software houses was very complicated. Besides tensions between the goals of the two consortia, and a perceived lack of confidence in the representatives of Lambda, another factor in the reorganisation of the forthcoming ViWo development was the concern of the capability of Nofco. It seemed to be a sensible strategy to limit the number of active organisations. This meant that ViWo would first be developed for Alpha, Beta and Gamma. The goal was that the IOIS named *ViWo*, would be designed and used by several similar organisations, 21 in total. The ViWo project was a three year long project and served as a pilot test of the IS in four user organisations before establishing the system at the national level. The development of ViWo involved the electronification of a work process to facilitate office work, consolidate information across organisations, and manage key activities. As the project management and research organisation, Epsilon headed the project. The user organisations consisted of Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta. User organisations were members of Nofco. Nofco consisted of 21 organisations, and all these organisations would eventually use ViWo. The organisations collaborated with the relevant Ministry, suppliers and consultants. Table 3 contains the actors in the ViWo project.

Organisations	Role of Organisations
Ministry	Ministry responsible for funding the pilot project
Nofco	Consortium of 21 user organisations (Virtual organisation). The basic function of Nofco was to promote and develop locally, regionally, and nationally, the utilisation of IT and to enhance IO collaboration in multiple-related issues and administrative practices
Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta	User organisations in the project (Members of Nofco and Lambda) Alpha was also the fund holder for the project
Zeta, Eta	Software company that supplies the software solutions for the project Part of the national research network that develop research and IT based services for the needs of research and education, and the supporting IT administration Acted as an expert advisor. Withdrew from the project before it ended
Epsilon	Organisation responsible for project management and research objectives

Table 3. Organisations Involved in ViWo project.

## 5 Findings

According to a dramaturgical perspective that treats organisational behaviours metaphorically as if it were a theatre, many organisational behaviours are based on scripts, for example how a job contract defines roles and responsibilities. In this section, we use the five frames presented by Goffman (1974)

for conceptualising the experiences of project members within a three-year-long IOIS project: the assumption of others about the play, backstage, the successes of rituals, face-work, and stigma. The reason for the lack of quotes is due to the space constraints of a conference paper.

## 5.1 The assumption of others (the audience) about the play (roles)

The first of Goffman's (1974) principles is that there is the assumption of others about the play: interaction controls behaviour so that each individual's actions are influenced by the other's actions. Others (the audience) are following the enactment of the play (role), which should produce a desired impression.

The managers of the previous project (PreViWo) were not invited to take charge of the ViWo project (due to scheduling and specification problems), and the suppliers were replaced. The reorganisation of the ViWo project evoked strong reactions concerning the choice of personnel. Some of the old members from PreViWo attended on the ViWo project as well. There are numerous examples in our case where project members had an assumption of others about the 'play', had different kinds of expectations for each other, and they found it very challenging to find their own role, and meaning for the project. Next we give some examples how stakeholders saw the role of others in the project.

Thomas (member of the quality group, Epsilon) saw the intention to form a well-functioning multi-professional group as a reason for employing members of PreViWo. The project management people thought that the supplier involvement was inevitable because of the previous project, whereas the supplier (Eta) felt that they were engaged in the project because of 'blackmailing'. The project manager considered it unnecessary to employ two people from the Nofco organisation. She thought that it was not important that the project manager of the previous project (PreViWo) was attending on the project meetings of ViWo. The members of Nofco (the consortium of user organisations) wished that the participants from the background project (PreViWo) could have continued in their posts: *'There should have been more of those people who had previous experience; it was unfortunate that the personnel changed...'* (Sarah, Member of steering group, Nofco).

The change in the project organisation affected the manageability of the project. What made the management of the project challenging was the fact that the authority of Nofco, the user consortium, and its relationship to the lead organisations, was poorly defined. Sarah and Sheila (Members of Nofco) felt that maintaining an artificial separation between these two IS projects caused problems for organisational memory. According to Sheila (Nofco), Eta should have made sure that they kept Alpha (user organisation) up-to-date on what their areas of operation were. Nofco's representative, Sheila, thought that not even Alpha (user organisation) had a picture of how these two projects related to each other: *'Perhaps they didn't have an exact picture of how these two projects [PreViWo and ViWo] relate to each other either, which itself is quite a strange situation – let's not say any more about that...[Loud laughter]'* (Sheila, Steering group member, Nofco).

According to John (supplier, Eta), the responsibilities were distributed among too many people. Sheila (Nofco), for her part, saw that one really significant problem was that suppliers were given the power to decide on matters in the project group. Rosie (user representative, Alpha) felt that PreViWo imposed pressures on the current project in the sense that an element of competition became involved in the project work. The project manager was blamed for focusing on managing the project instead of focusing on the development work. Both project management and both suppliers (Eta, Zeta) felt that it was often necessary to return to decisions due to questions or criticisms presented by Nofco (the consortium of user organisations) and felt that Nofco inhibited decision-making. Ruth (project manager, Epsilon) complained that it was difficult, although decisions were made at project group meetings. According to Peter (Supplier, Eta), they acted according to instructions received from Nofco. John (Supplier, Eta) criticised the financial issues because the applicant for the financing (Alpha) did not eventually assume responsibility for the financing but 'outsourced it' to the person in charge of the project (Epsilon).

Following Goffman, if we do not have clear roles for the play in IOIS project, and if 'actors' are having uncertain feelings about achieving some goals; it causes a lot of challenges for the project's management.

## 5.2 Backstage

The second of Goffman's principles – backstage - is the assumption that, to a certain level, people are aware of their performances and it is appropriate to plan to act and evaluate the management of the role. Backstage also makes the point that in a dramaturgical view there is much hidden from those who are caught up in social relationships. In this section we have given some illustrative examples 'at backstage' which had a potential effect for the project management.

The managers of the previous project (PreViWo) were not invited to take charge of the ViWo project (due to schedule and specifications problems), and the suppliers were replaced. The real reason was not revealed to those members. However, Lucy (organiser, Alpha) sought certainty that the people who were leading the previous project (PreViWo) did not understand the reorganisation as a lack of trust: *'I still remember that I called Sheila on the day before Christmas Eve. Sheila was at home and I told her that we intended to apply for a grant from the Ministry and asked about her opinion about it to make sure that this was not understood as an infringement...'* (Lucy, Organiser, Alpha).

The background of the project (PreViWo) brought a feeling of insecurity to the ViWo project work in many ways and project members discussed it a lot. Project members discussed the project with other project members and tried to understand issues that were not clear in their own minds. Some project members dealt with faults by 'tattling' to the project manager to achieve some goals. Rosie (user representative, Alpha) felt that it was difficult to form opinions because she did not understand what was being discussed: *'If someone mentions the word interface once more, I'll jump out the window...! Let's talk about substance without the technology...'* (Rosie, User, Alpha).

From these examples we can see that backstage also make the point that there is much hidden from the view of those who are caught up in social relationships.

## 5.3 The success of rituals

Following Goffman (1974), the third principle (the success of rituals) is the assumption that the matter is just a pure game or a self-purposeful routine. Next we give some illustrative examples about the third view, which had a potential effect for the project's management.

According to Jack (supplier, Eta), the biggest problem in the project was how to manage the project, not that this was an IS project. Some members claimed that the leader often did not look for alternative solutions to problems, but made decisions based on position or time; in other words, she chose the fastest way to get something done which was not necessarily the best way. Some project members said that in this way the project manager wanted to show that the project progressed well but that it became evident that it was not possible to measure how well the project was actually going: *'Project members were at the mercy of the project manager and were not able to interfere or say why we didn't pay attention to... or ask if we could do this a different way...'* (Sophie, User, Delta).

The project manager (Ruth, Epsilon) pointed out that the management of project group was difficult because of the fact that the responsibility was shared. There were also many situations that emphasised that project managers should have the ability to be polite and cooperative, to manage the budget better, and to manage tasks, timetables and roles, etc. Jack criticised the project manager for trusting Eta's expertise too much. Unclear plans caused insecurity and conflict among project members, and it was difficult to plan project schedules and estimate future workloads for some members (e.g. Nofco).

The previous project affected the power struggle in many ways, for example, Nofco had the ability to veto decisions, albeit informally. It was often necessary to revisit decisions due to questions or



criticisms from user organisations. Some other people questioned others' importance and how it affected collaboration: *'Too often, problems that emerged from practical work or were brought up in discussions were ignored by pointing out that the process had already been defined. But those specifications of the process were not adequate...'* (Jack, Supplier, Eta).

According to Rosie, the considerable turnover of Eta's representatives in the project significantly hindered the progress of the project. It was felt by Thomas that the effort Eta put into the project was minimal. Thomas pondered how the steering group should regard the matter, since nothing was actually happening. Eta's representative, Daniel, considered Zeta to be a professional software producer, but he felt that Zeta's 'bluntness' hindered collaboration. Rosie (user, Alpha) felt that collaboration was very challenging and required patience due to the variety of actors and the physical distance between them. She felt that collaboration became easier as she got to know the people better. Dissatisfaction in the division of work was evident in situations where project members expected more from the project manager. One example is the situation where supplier Eta was asked to finish some tasks but it was not evident they would. Jack and Daniel (Eta) felt that the project manager was not aware of Eta's resources and they thought there were unreasonable demands as to how they were expected to contribute to the project. The project manager felt that she was expected to be perfect. Expert power was used in the project. Because of disagreements, supplier Eta needed the project manager's help in order for them to get their work contribution accepted. Lucy (organiser, Alpha) said that when the project manager pointed something out in a plausible way, she gave the necessary final authority. Thomas also criticised the way that some things presented to the steering group by the project manager were wide of the mark. Many of the project members' comments highlighted the significance of the interaction and leadership process in achieving a common viewpoint.

## 5.4 Facework

Goffman's (1974) fourth principle illustrated that the basic principle of social life is to keep up appearances and how to save the loss of face. In this section we have given some illustrative examples about the situations where the persons invite complimentary performances from others, which could support her/his own role.

There was some hostility evident in relationships in the project. Project manager Ruth (Epsilon) felt that Nofco's members were aggressive when the project started but that this began to wane as the project progressed. Though PreViWo had many problems, it was nevertheless seen as a starting point. The diversity of the conceptions about the project material was evident in the ViWo project. Matthew (organiser, Epsilon) doubted the suitability of the material for starting the new project. Eta, who was involved as an expert in PreViWo, did not support the use of the material in the further project. Ruth (project manager, Epsilon) doubted the suitability of the project material but when the steering group made their decision that the project would continue with that data, she thought there was no other choice. Jack (Eta) felt that the specifications from the previous project caused more harm than good.

By contrast, within Nofco (the consortium of user organisations), the project organisation was criticised for its lack of continuity: *'... previously created knowledge was discarded and we lost the gate-keeper role that we thought we knew well...'* (Sheila, Steering group member, Nofco). Sheila felt that they had to reinvent the wheel in the ViWo project. This comment related to the efforts made to familiarise the new project members with the task. Sophie (user, Delta) felt that the project management had become more important than the content of the project. Jack (supplier, Eta) felt that the project was more of a 'technology project' for the project manager and the other supplier, Zeta. Ruth (project manager, Epsilon) felt that the biggest challenge was clarifying what the previous vision had been. It was often necessary to revisit decisions due to questions or critiques from Nofco members, some of whom had been involved in PreViWo. These members felt that decisions made in the previous project should not be questioned or changed. Both the suppliers and project management felt that the representatives of Nofco effectively had an informal veto, which inhibited decision making. The other organiser and project leader, Lucy (Alpha), said that she trusted others' views,

using intuition and feelings, because she saw herself as a layman in these matters. The final authority did not always rest with the same person. There was one interesting example of 'learning': Ruth (the project manager) said that at one phase of the project she had learned that it was Nofco's project. But interestingly enough, in the final report, the owner was not Nofco. A very important decision was made at the end of the project. Regardless of what the findings have brought out in this study, the final evaluation of the project by the project manager (29th July 2006) emphasised how: *'The project has been successful and it seemed like this is the first project ever that has been a success, where everything goes as planned and the output is satisfactory.'*

In this section we have given some examples about the situations where the persons invite complementary performances from others, which could support her/his own role, for example how the final authority did not always rest with the same person.

## 5.5 Stigma

The fifth principle of Goffman focuses on stigmatised behaviour – how people, for example, act as their selves, how 'faces' are maintained, and how people hide their selves. According to Goffman (1974), the basic situation in a social life is when the 'normal' and 'stigmatised' selves are facing each other. One interesting issue is how situations are manipulated to achieve certain strategies – it is important from the point of view that makes 'the rules of the interaction of theatre' visible.

In this section we have given some illustrative examples, which had a potential effect for project management. As explained earlier, the ViWo project staff was comprised partly of members of the previous project (PreViWo) but also incorporated some new actors. Among the new members were the project manager (Ruth, Epsilon), the representatives of the other supplier (Zeta) and academic researchers (Epsilon). Not all members realised that how difficult it was going to be when joining the project because of the different positions they occupied in the project. The project members had different starting points, positions and expectations with regard to the background work that was carried out before the project was established. For instance, Ruth (project manager, Epsilon) prevented some project members from attending the project meetings by using her legitimate power. She manipulated the situation by not inviting all the former members (Nofco, the consortium of user organisations) to the project meetings.

Some members speculated that she did this to avoid competition between her and the previous project manager of PreViWo: *'I ask this because I don't intend to invite the whole steering group. At the moment there are already 19 people invited. Do you think that your presence is also necessary?'*(Ruth, Project manager, Epsilon). She also sent an email to Simon (Epsilon) to state that his presence in project meetings was not necessary. Simon was amazed and asked if some other project management presence was necessary, it was speculated, that for some reason they did not get on well with each other. There was a 'tug-of war' between the suppliers and the project manager around various issues. The supplier (Eta) felt that disagreements were frequent and faults were dealt with by 'tattling' to the project manager. Therefore, Eta sought background support for their work from other project members on the basis of their expert power. At that time, Eta had a good reputation and there was discussion among the project management that it was not easy to disagree with Eta because of the skill and know how owned by the company. Later, however, confidence in Eta started to wane. Because legitimate power was not defined in the project it meant that people 'took' power and the abilities to manage it were not present. The project had the characteristics of a protracted, conflictual process. In one phase, Nofco announced that a journal article had been published about the ViWo project. This raised criticism among the project members, because they thought that Nofco had wrongly taken credit for work that it had neither planned nor implemented alone.

This section showed some interesting issues how situations were manipulated to achieve certain goals. It is interesting, for example, how the legitimate, expert power and political power was used in the project, as shown in how the project was represented as a success to those outside the project.

## 6 Discussion

The aim of the paper was to explore how the understanding of human issues of project management can be broadened by using Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959, 1963, 1974) as a lens to view human issues in an IOIS project. The qualitative analysis of the longitudinal case study focused on the lived experiences of the project members working in a three year long IOIS project. Khazanchi and Zigurs (2007) have for example defined three elements that are involved in the management of virtual projects; co-ordination, communication and control. We focused especially on co-ordination aspect of project management, and more particularly to the human part of this subject matter. Collaboration in multiparty IS development projects has been studied by Levina (2005), where the target was to find out how people from diverse professions and organisational settings collaborate in IS development projects, and to describe how their diversity influences the IS that they are designing. Levina (2005) explains how collaboration in multiparty IS development can be understood as a collective reflection-in-action cycle that changes and is changed by versatile organisational and professional stakeholders. This paper contributes by providing insights relying on Goffman's dramaturgical theory (e.g. 1959).

We used five frames to analyse our data presented by Goffman (1974), and the main findings can be summarised as follows. *First*, the assumption of others (audience) about the play (roles) manifested itself through the experiences of historical influences, lack of confidence, lack of trust, finding not only one's own role but also the organisation's role, distribution problems, power issues, and emotional issues. This first frame included a large number of issues concerning mutual social relationships and the conceptions that project members had about each other. The results of the reorganisation showed that when conflicting understandings interact in collaboration, the interplay of individuals and groups within a particular context shape the whole IS project. There were contradictory views among others regarding personnel; changes in project parties caused problems and affected the presence of appropriate skills. The first view, the assumption of others about the play, shows that in this particular IS project, project members had assumptions about the roles of others (users, suppliers, project manager, etc.).

The *second* frame highlights different issues of 'backstage'. They discussed the project with other project members and tried to clarify issues that were not clear in their minds. The second frame also shows that people use emotions to gain further resources via communication. For example, some project members dealt with faults by 'tattling' to the project manager. In addition to this, presenting accounts of others' emotions tends to privilege a particular rational discourse. The *third* frame, the success of rituals, points out that the expression given is often different to the expression received. There were several examples about some issues that gave different impressions than the given facts would suggest. Issues which make challenges for the success of rituals: how to manage issues, haste, poor interaction, who defines when project is progressing well, schedule, difficulties to estimate future workloads, fear of change, and authority issues. The *fourth* frame, face-work, shows the difference between the emotion ideology and the emotional intensity. The results show that people hide feelings at work in order to save the loss of face, or in order to get work done. There were also situations where project members 'invited complimentary performances' from others, which could support their own role in IS project work. The *fifth* frame, stigma, deals issues such as how situations are manipulated to achieve certain strategies. It is also evident and important from the point of view that makes 'the rules of the interaction of theatre' visible. For example, at the end stage of the project, Nofco wrongly took credit for work that it had neither planned nor implemented alone. They manipulated others to believe so by announcing a journal article on the issue. There were also other examples of manipulation. As previously mentioned, it was felt that Nofco people effectively held an informal veto due to their involvement in PreViWo. Ruth, the project manager (Epsilon), also prevented some members of Nofco from attending project meetings because they were seen as a threat to progress.

## 7 Conclusion

This qualitative study analysed the lived experiences of project members who worked in a three-year-long IOIS project. The IOIS project spanned nine organisations altogether. The study makes a contribution to IS using dramaturgical theory as a lens to view project management issues in an IOIS project. We have demonstrated how a dramaturgical perspective helps us to understand the project management issues of IOIS project. The dramaturgical perspective reveals that in IS work we: 1) hold strong assumptions about the roles of others in a project, 2) people adopt other roles at times, 3) the roles of people and interaction may seem as ambivalent issues, and the expression given may be different from the expression received, and 4) People 'invite complimentary performances' from others, which could support their own role in IS project work.

We have showed that collaboration issues are very challenging to understand and manage in IS projects. Although many articles have been written on the topic, we urge IS researchers to investigate more socio-emotional aspects of IS projects. Dramaturgical theory helps to understand the behavioural and project management issues more: are people engaging in manipulation using emotional displays to deceive others in 'games' of varying magnitude? Do people use emotions to gain other resources via communication, for example to gain power over others in games of a micropolitical nature? Is it helpful to understand people via the view that individuals are often caught in a conflict between emotion ideologies, and display rules on the one side and their actual emotional experiences on the other? Of course, it could be argued that the weakness of the dramaturgical model is that it can potentially encourage manipulative and 'cynical' behaviour for one's own ends.

Future research: Given the lack of research on emotional issues in project management and systems success/failure we feel it is important to apply other theories to explain emotional issues in IOIS development. In this paper we have shown how it is done by applying Goffman's dramaturgical perspective but a useful future research direction would be to deepen our analysis of whether people use emotional displays to con others in 'games' of varying magnitude (expressive manipulation of emotions), and how such an analysis can benefit IS research.

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