Not in Silos: Locating ERP Project Into a Complex Network, A Multiple-Project Perspective

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NOT IN SILOS – LOCATING ERP PROJECT INTO A COMPLEX NETWORK: A MULTIPLE-PROJECT PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper explores the different aspects and sources of interaction that ERP projects face in multiple projects environment. It adopts Actor Network Theory conceptualisation of network and network building to examine a case study of implementing ERP system in a reputable international organisation. It reveals that ERP project interacts not only with other IS projects as literature on IS project management suggests but more importantly with organizational change projects. The level of interaction ranges between following or competing depending on the organizational status of the change project. It also reveals that competition over management attention rise between projects resulting on attention shift from one project to another. Hence there is a project that would be deemed to loose management attention. The findings extends the scope of IS multiple project management and portfolio management beyond the limited focus on the interactions between IS projects. The study enriches the current conceptual base of project management studies and provides a detailed case study that this recent field generally lacks. On the practice side, the study provides a practical insight and comprehensive view of the implementation of IS projects in multiple projects organizations.

1 INTRODUCTION

The rising and domination of large integrated business packaged software such as Enterprise Resource Planning systems (ERP) caught the attention of many researchers and brought about an emerging body of research that focuses on the complex and distinctive nature of its implementation. Studies on ERP implementation projects varied in their orientation between managerial oriented studies that aim to find tools to aid managers in the implementation project and social and organizational studies that aim to understand the complexity involved in such implementation. A large number of the managerial oriented studies focus on identifying the consecutive stages, or “life cycle”, that an ERP implementation should follow within the buyer organization (see for example: Brehm and Markus, 2000; Markus and Tanis, 2000; Parr and Shanks, 2000). Within this stream, there are studies aiming to develop implementation methods through extracting from case studies the methods, models, and frameworks applied to ERP implementation and generalize them (Al-Mudimigh, Zairi and Al-Mashari, 2001; Rebstock and Selig, 2000). There is also a significant body of research that focuses on identifying the “critical success factors” that need to be followed and taken care of to achieve a successful ERP implementation and reap its benefits (Al-Mashari, Al-Mudimigh and Zairi, 2003; Colmenares and Leopolodo, 2004).

Social and organizational studies have revealed the processes by which organizational understanding and interaction with ERP evolves (Boudreau and Robey, 2005; Cadili and Whitley, 2005; Grant, Hall, Wailles and Wright, 2006; Lee and Myers, 2004). Research within this stream identified different elements that contribute to ERP innovation difficulties such as addressing different epistemic culture, the existence of corporate reciprocity in the negotiation of specifications, the high rate of unintended consequence and the need for improvisation, the incorporation of historically estranged business units, the configurability of the package, the negotiations involved between different stakeholders,
The literature on ERP implementation from both streams tend to adopt a narrow view that focuses solely on the ERP project understudy overlooking the existence of other projects that take place in the organization. This single project focus is also shared by the majority of project management literature (Payne, 1995) despite the reported increase in organizational practices of having many projects running at the same time (Masini and Pich, 2004). It is estimated that up to 90% of projects in general are carried out in multiple projects environment (Payne, 1995) and organizations increasingly under competitive pressures to innovate and introduce change which is usually done through projects (Dooley, Lupton and O'Sullivan, 2005). To reflect its increasing importance, a strand of project management research has been recently devoted to study the complexity involved in managing multiple projects. This strand of research is dominated by studies aim to develop mechanistic tools and techniques to manage multiple projects (Soderlund, 2004). Drawing largely on operational management field, tools such as critical path dependency, simulation, modeling has been developed to address the complexity of scheduling and human resources allocation.

The multiple project view focuses primarily on the simultaneous management of projects of the same kind. Terms such as programme management, multiple project management, and portfolio management tended to be used interchangeably. However for the purposes of this study, multiple project management would be used to mean grouping several relatively small or related IS projects under a program and addressing the complexity involved in scheduling and human resource allocation (Dooley et al., 2005). Portfolio management is a wider concept that covers all projects in a certain department or area of business. For example IS portfolio covers all IS project within the organization and R&D portfolio covers all R & D projects.

This research intends to hit a new ground in ERP studies by exploring the ERP project environment in today’s organizations. It aims to examine the multiple project environment organizations experience and its implications on ERP implementation project. It presents an exploratory enquiry to examine the question: what other networks does an ERP project interact with in multiple projects environment? what is the nature of the interaction? and what are the implications? It aims to reveal the relationship between ERP network and others and understand the nature of the relationship. To this end, the study adopts Actor Network theory’s (ANT) conceptualisation of the nature of the project. ANT views a project as a network of humans and non-humans allies tied together to achieve the network builder’s goals. The theory provides a valuable ontological and analytical lens that focuses on projects and how network builders achieve or fail to achieve their goals which makes it particularly useful for studying projects in general despite their orientation. ANT have been increasingly adopted in IS research and its value and contribution to IS research has been discussed and advocated in many occasions (Hanseth, Aanestad and Berg, 2004; Monteiro, 2004; Walsham, 1997). Researchers also find it particularly useful in studying ERP systems (see for example: Elbanna, 2007; Hanseth and Braa, 1998; Scott and Wagner, 2003).

The paper consists of six sections. Following the introduction, section two briefly reviews ANT focusing on its conceptualisation of the relationship between the project entity and other existing entities. Section three presents the research site and methodology. Section four presents an interpretation of the findings of the study followed by a discussion of the findings in light of the developed ANT proposition. Section six provides a conclusion and discussion of the implications and suggestions of further research.

2 NETWORKS: DEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS

Actor Network Theory (ANT) was developed to understand how scientists construct a network of human and non-human alliances in order to pursue their goals. The theory later expanded to cover
other settings and the construction of other types of projects such as aircrafts, engines, expeditions, atomic bomb, railway system, and market economy. The basic idea of ANT is that in order to achieve a goal, a network of faithful alliances needs to be created to carry the network builders' intentions and materialise their goal. As the theory holds a distinctive view of society as a network of humans and non-humans that interact and cooperate to pursue a certain goal, it maintains that any network building would involve the recruitment of human and non-human actors.

The notion of ‘network’ used in ANT is concerned with mapping how actors define and distribute roles, and mobilise or invent others to play these roles. Such roles may be social, political, technical, or bureaucratic in character; the objects that are mobilised to fill the roles are also heterogeneous and may take the form of people, organisations, machines, or scientific findings. Hence, ANT network concept helps to underline the simultaneously social and technical character of any social arrangements. It is a metaphor for the interconnected heterogeneity that underlies sociotechnical engineering (Law and Callon, 1988).

Translation is the mechanism by which the network builder recruits actors and ensures their faithful alliance. It describes a variety of ways in which actors actively seek to interest others to support their project and enrol them in the coalition dedicated to pursue the network builder goal (Faraj, Kwon and Watts, 2004). However it takes place through the application of different strategies (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987), it aims to ensure that other actors whatever they do would be faithful to the realisation of the alliance goals. Callon identified four interrelated moments of translation: problematisation, interessement, enrolment, and mobilisation (Callon, 1986). There is no order for these moments as they are not linear and largely inseparable (see for example: Callon and Law, 1982). A network strength is derived from the associations of alliances it creates (Latour, 1986).

Problematisation is the process by which an actor position his project as indispensable to others and is usually achieved when the actor set his project as an obligatory passage point for others that allow them to pursue their own interests. Interessement involves attracting one entity by coming between that entity and a third one. This means that interessement includes cutting or weakening all the links between the target allies and their original network. The possible strategies and mechanisms that are adopted to bring about these interruptions are unlimited. They could vary from pure force to seduction or a simple solicitation. Enrolment is likely to be complex as there will be many different actor-networks attempting to translate the actors, with some in competition and others in at least tacit cooperation. Law clarifies that “The elementary case of translation is thus triangular. One entity enrols. Another is enrolled. And a third fails in its attempts to enrol [as in the original]” (Law, 1986, pg.71). Mobilisation represents the successful alignment of actors into the network builder’s network

The moments of translation indicate that the attempts to translate and recruit actors into a certain network are associated to the attempts to distance or weaken the relationships between these actors and other networks. The network that succeeds to dominate is the one that attracts and interests many actors. However, a run of success does not preclude the possibility that next time another actor network will array such a powerful structure of forces and the previously constructed actor network finds itself


localised in another network. That is another reason why ANT assumes that reversibility is an embedded character of any network (Callon, 1991).

3 RESEARCH SITE AND METHODS

The data for this study is part of a larger research project aimed to investigate the implementation of integrated application packaged software represented by ERP systems. The data collection methodology was geared to collect rich data and followed the ANT convention of not having a priori assumptions about the fieldwork which is also in line with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This paper only presents the case of a large international food and beverages company that is one of the world leaders in its industrial league disguised here as Drinko. The data collection was carried out in two business units located in two different European countries; EUK and EUB. Data collection took place between the period of August 2000 and March 2001. Data was collected from 13 respondents who were initially interviewed using a semi-structured method for one to three hours then continued to be contacted either by follow up interviews, e-mail, or telephone throughout the data collection period and two months after withdrawal from the field. Two other members of the project were informally met several times in 1999 and early 2000 prior to the conduction of formal fieldwork. Respondents shared many documents with the researcher including organisation bulletins, reports, announcements, and in a couple of occasion internal e-mails. Following the access agreement with the organisation, interviews were not tape-recorded and all names and locations are disguised. Quotes that express many informants point of view are reported through presenting only one of them between parentheses without a reference to the source. The ERP project studied was an organisation-wide implementation of SAP R/3.

Data analysis took place in different levels in light of ANT framework. It progressed from identifying the actors within the ERP project and the organisational actors external to the project. Themes such as events, issues and issues’ resolution were identified and data was organised accordingly. Connections were drawn between these criteria and the actors involved and a wall chart was drawn to show the interactions inside and outside the ERP project. Reading whole interviews and field notes and observations chronologically took place in several occasions to develop a clear understanding of the complexity of the situation, the whole stream of negotiation and action involved, and the closure of rising disputes within networks (Vaughan, 1996). This constant move from the details to the whole created a hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1976; Klein and Myers, 1999) that aided the construction of a clear overall picture of the project, its events, incidents, people, and artefacts involved.

4 THE CASE OF DRINKO

The company referred to as ‘Drinko’ is a global food and beverages group that is one of the top ten companies worldwide in its industrial league, employing about 12,500 people across the globe. It has manufacturing facilities in around fifty countries and sells its products in more than a hundred and fifty countries.

The organisation-wide SAP project was planned to replace 225 systems around Drinko. It identified five business processes as being “in scope”: sales and operations planning, product supply, procurement, customer order fulfilment, and finance. The cost of SAP R/3 implementation project in Drinko reached over $80 m, around $6 m over budget. The SAP project was not the only major initiative in Drinko at the time, although it was one of the largest in terms of scale and cost. Many other change projects were running at the same time in addition to other systems implementations. This

2 Data about a third business units was initially collected until this business unit was dropped out of the ERP project in an early stage.
paper focuses mainly on two other initiatives that co-existed with the SAP: a local change programme in EUB and an organization-wide transformation programme.

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The implementation project of SAP faced many challenges from several different networks. Three major networks have been identified in this regard. The first network represents a major change programme that was underway in one of the two subsidiaries involved in the project. The second network was a reengineering programme that spanned the whole organisation and was officially announced during the course of the ERP project. The third network was the external consultants’ network. The details of these three network forces that affected the project are as follows.

5.1 Local Change Programme

The SAP project approached EUB to find staff occupied by an internal development programme. It was a local initiative that captured staff interest in modernising and bringing their business “to the twenty first century’s business practices”. It aimed to change SUB1 work practices towards more formal standardised processes, rather than their informal traditional way of working. This project, however started before the SAP project, was continuing in parallel with the SAP project absorbing EUB ‘best staff’. Therefore the SAP found serious difficulties in recruiting staff into its network as local staff preferred to continue with their joining of their local project.

Tension between the two projects emerged as EUB favoured its internal development programme and gave priority to achieving its objectives overlooking the global SAP project vision. SAP project managers found that SAP objectives are “subjugated to national market interests and that long term ownership is not achieved” (Internal report). The SAP project manager describes the tension: “we had similar profile, they targeted the [same] people we need and off course they [SUB1] preferred it in the beginning”. SAP project management felt the need to pull SUB1 staff away from their internal programme and recruit them into the SAP implementation network instead. Being an internal programme within the SUB1 network beyond SAP implementation control, it asked the corporate CEO to “kill” the development programme (interview with SAP project change manager”). Keen not to appear as the one who approved of “kill[ing] other programmes”, he left it to the process and change managers within the SAP project to do so “he said ok guys do what you need to do” (interviews with a process manager and a change manager).

The SAP project managers therefore had to interest SUB1 and come between SUB1 and its internal development programme. To do so, they decided to approach SUB1 business units directly and problematised and set SAP implementation as indispensable if they wanted to join the top executives network, which fully support the SAP implementation as one of their top priorities. They also waved the big “secured budget” that this project enjoyed and contrasted it with the development project’s shaky budget. They also interested them by suggesting that the SAP project would have more tangible results, in the form of “a system”, than the development programme, and seized the opportunity provided by the latter being the first SUB1 change programme to infuse fear that it was to “do mainly with redundancy” (project manager).

The SAP project team impressed SUB1 by the generosity of its “lavish” workshops and seminars and its problematisation helped to translate individuals’ interests in money, a good career record, and joining the top executives’ network. The project continued to hire the “very same people” that the development programme had hired, and used all possible ways to ensure their involvement in the SAP
project network. In so doing, it emptied the rival network of many of its human actors, which significantly affected its deliverables and led to its later failure to get a budget for its continuation.

5.2 Organisation-wide transformation programme

While the SAP project network was expanding, a new network was under construction in a highly confidential manner: the transformation programme network. This was developing with a vague notion of what it was supposed to deliver; it started as a brainstorming initiative to discuss business strategy and evolved to become a project that reviews the strategic direction of the organisation and define strategic options. It then became a highly confidential network, isolated in a building devoted to staff contributing to it, who were not allowed to exchange “any sort of information with any other project” within the organisation for sometime before its formal announcement. Yet, the CEO who was sponsoring the SAP project informed a senior change manager in the SAP project that the transformation programme was researching the separation of the supply and demand organisations (production and sales) and that they have to take it into account when configuring the new SAP system to support the separation if it went ahead. He set the SAP configuration to support the supply and demand separation as a little detour if the SAP project network was to proceed with its objective of implementing a working system. The senior change manager conveyed the message and mobilised the SAP project to configure the system in a way that supported the separation of the supply and demand if it was approved.

The transformation programme grew up to represent a more powerful network than the SAP project. The transformation programme started as a top management gathering that initiated follow up brainstorming sessions. Then top management participants of the brainstorming sessions found it very interesting and decided to make it a ‘blue sky’ initiative to explore strategic options and possible directions. The transformation programme was the top management own initiative that dealt with the higher levels of organisation design and structuring. In that sense, the transformation programme was evolving producing general ideas its initial phase during which SAP project had to follow the transformation programme network vague idea regarding the possible separation between the supply and demand organisation in exchange for the continuation of its funding, otherwise “the project could have been reduced … suspended, or at least put on hold”. For these reasons, the SAP project went on making its own assumptions about the details of this separation and configuring SAP system that could support this separation if the transformation programme moved into a realisation stage.

This meant the SAP system was not being configured for the actual organisation, but for a future organisation that the SAP project assumed the transformation programme was considering. Accordingly, the first few releases of the system were problematic because it did not fit the existing organization and hence SAP project teams had to “invent a lot of work around” to “let it work”. It was only in late 1999, by when the transformation programme was widely announced, that the SAP project realised it had made different assumptions from the outcome of that programme. A change manager explained that the organisational structure that was eventually announced, “changed the organisation altogether” compared to that assumed and configured in the SAP system. This meant the SAP project had “ended up with business processes and a system that match an organisation that does not exist; neither today nor in the future”, so the system “had to be tuned and changed again” which caused some delay in the SAP project (change Manager, project manager).

The transformation programme also affected the local implementation of SAP. It attracted the management’s full attention and diverted it from the SAP project, which in return started to struggle with the local implementation at that time. Management became less concerned about the SAP project’s local implementation and much more occupied with the transformation programme, in particular the changes it brought and the redundancies it would result in. Local implementation once supported by top management visible presence and regular visits to the project office and direct interest
to solve issues and obstacles that face the project lost this strong support and started to struggle for attention.

5.3 The external consultants

Business Consulting, the business consulting firm contributing to the SAP project implementation, found the vibrant projects-busy environment of Drinko inviting to secure itself a long-term presence in such a large ambitious client. To do so, the consultants targeted the top executives in Drinko and tried to enrol them tightly into their network. Hence, they started to “shadow business people [Drinko staff]” and “to integrate themselves into the project” until they eventually “became influential at the MDs [managing directors] level”.

Business Consulting succeeded in getting too close to the top management from the perspective of Drinko’s change managers. As change managers commented, “The communication chain [got] faster for them” so that when “we [change managers] say something in a meeting, then they go to an MD telling him this idea as if it is theirs”. This became “de-motivating” for Drinko change managers and something that was not tolerated in Drinko’s internal network.

There was also a clash between the consultants’ business methodology and Drinko’s Project Management Methodology. The consultants wanted to “force” their methodology and “to implement their way regardless of what works for Drinko”. Change managers made it clear to top management that the business consultants wanted to recruit Drinko to follow them: “they did not show us the full picture and prefer to sign only for each phase”. Then they brought in their expertise as business managers who had worked in Drinko for many years and who had conducted many change projects successfully in the company, arguing: “we have seen many changes through here”. This was contrasted not only with the consultants’ inexperience in Drinko but also with a claim that the consultants were confused about their own methodology as “each consultant has a different view of the methodology”. One change manager summarised this position: “In Drinko, we have our way of working, it worked before and is working [now], we know our business, what we want and what are our priorities, they came with it [the methodology] to impress… No sorry, I am not”.

The change managers initiated debate about the role of business consultants on the project and the value they added to Drinko. They attempted to recruit the project management into a network opposing the consultants. To interest the project management, the change managers problematised the slippage in the budget and the delay in the project schedule that the project management was facing to be a result of the Business Consulting’s “astronomical” fees and their low achievement. They claimed that Business Consulting provide no “good value for money” and that project management were “paying too much” and the consultants had achieved little. Project management adopted this version of the claim as they found it a good way out of their budget and schedule problems.

Both change managers and the business consultants therefore competed for top management attention and alignment. Change managers succeeded in opening the consultants’ black box and refuted most of their claims, thereby rallying against the business consultants and succeeding in translating the project’s management. In addition to seeing this as a way out of the project’s budget slippage, the project management also saw it as a way back to focusing on system building rather than the business side of the project. Eventually, one network ended up excluding another altogether as Drinko’s executives were convinced by the change managers’ claim and, consequently, Business Consulting’s contract was terminated.
It is noted that Business Consultants in this case are not a competing project to the SAP but rather a competing network within the project that competed with other internal networks over management attention. Business Consultants emerged as a separate network as opposed to being fully integrated into the business. They became a separate network that pursued its parent network (the consulting firm) ambition of getting more projects’ contracts within Drinko vibrant multiple projects environment.

6 DISCUSSION

The previous sections reveal that ERP implementation project faces different types of interaction from different types of networks. Figure 1 shows the web of interaction within and around the project. It presents the three main networks that interacted with the SAP project over different organizational resources as the discussion below details. For the purposes of the discussion these relationships are divided according to the organizational level where the interaction take place are divided into: Over arching networks, parallel networks, and internal networks.

![Figure 1: The interactions of ERP project in Drinko](image)

6.1 Overarching network

Despite the confusion the emerged transformation programme caused to the SAP project, its successful recruitments of the powerful organizational actors of top management (management support) led it to occupy the status of a host network. This led to a rather ‘swift translation’ of the SAP project as it found itself embedded in another network that did not exist before (Mahring, Holmstrom, Keil and Montealegre, 2004). Being in a position of following the emerging host network of the transformation programme, the SAP programme had to accept the changes of the organizational structure that the transformation programme designed despite their serious ramifications on some of the configuration assumptions of the SAP programme. This confused and delayed the SAP project in trying to understand the changes and finding work around and ways to reconfigure parts of the system that was nearly ready for business units’ local implementation.
It is worth noting that the emergence of overarching networks is not considered by multiple projects literature or ERP studies. However as a current organization practice, it is suggested here that this phenomena needs to be accounted for as one of the potential risks of ERP projects.

6.2 Parallel network

The change project of EUB represented yet another source of business oriented competition in Drinko. SAP project in its trials to recruit actors in EUB to join its network faced this rival network that was already underway and successful in recruiting actors across EUB network. Since it was a business project that sought to change the business practices in EUB, it interfered with SAP project network that also provide another view of organizational change. The organizational change required by SAP was not welcomed in favor of the organizational change brought in by this local change project. The initiation of SAP project in the corporate center and its arrival to EUB in clash with their local change programme also invigorate national pride and local staff were engaged and in favor of their local business change project and were not willing to join the SAP project. The SAP project managed to translate EUB staff by setting the SAP project as a direct way to join the corporate executives and as a career enhancing opportunity to be part of the implementation of such an ever-popular system. They promoted SAP project as an opportunity to have the best business practices and bring EUB to very high business standard. They also convinced staff that the organization change it brings is well established in the business world in contrast with their current organizational change project. They also infused fear of the current change project by cultivating the idea that it is mainly to do with redundancy and head cuts. In doing so, SAP project managed to interest and recruit EUB management and staff to their network and to kill the rival local change initiative.

The case study reveals that SAP project competed with other organisational change projects. This finding could be further analysed in light of the nature of ERP systems. ERP systems are known to be business oriented in the sense that they arrive to the organisation with a certain notion of business practices, business structure, and operational functions that require organisations to adapt to the way prescribed by, and suited to, the ERP package it buys (Davenport, 1998; Davenport, 2000; Kallinikos, 2002). Thus ERP implementation often initiates business restructuring and reengineering programs (Taylor, 1998). Accordingly ERP project find itself in competition with other business change projects not only over staff and budget but more important over approaches to organisational change as the finding revealed. The result of the competition depends on which project would succeed to translate different actors and come between them and its rival networks. This could be an alternative explanation of why large number of ERP projects fail (Ross and Vitale, 2000).

6.3 Internal network

Another face of the competition between the constituent networks of the SAP project was the competition that Drinko SAP faced between the change managers and Business Consultants over management recognition and attention. It presents a different source of competition than experienced between the modules of SAP in Posta. This competition could be stemmed from the multiple memberships in different networks that some actors maintain. Star (1991) notes that actors do not necessary belong to only one network - as initially assumed by early versions of ANT- but they could have membership of several networks with different degrees of strength (Star, 1991). This multiple memberships could present a ‘high tension zone’ at times when actors are invited to belong and be enrolled into a single network. In Drinko case, the multiple memberships of consultants into Drinko and Business Consulting derived them to seek more business in Drinko. They though that recruiting top management could open up the door for more involvement in Drinko network and hence satisfying their consulting network. They did so through overriding change managers to emphasis their competency and hence importance to Drinko. Yet Drinko top management was traditionally aligned to change managers network and hence change managers could not tolerate the interference in their own network and fought back. The competition over top management alignment led change managers to strengthen
their position by associating themselves with project management to get rid of the Business Consultants.

7 CONCLUSION

This study goes beyond the linear view of project management (Hallows, 1998; McLeod and Smith, 1996) to portray a complex picture of ERP implementation project (Baccarini, 1996). It supports the view that ERP implementation projects are complex and new project management skills are needed to manage this complexity (Brown and Vessey, 1999; Ryan, 1999). It does so by uncovering another dimension of this complexity through revealing the multiplicity of organisational life and that a packaged software implementation project is part of a far complex network as much as it constitutes a complex network itself. A packaged software project needs to attract a large number of alliances that vary in nature between humans such as top management, staff, business units and non-humans such as other systems, functions, and schedule. Attracting these actors and translate them into faithful alliances involves interrupting their existing interest and translation into other networks. Other networks will not accept voluntarily to loose their actors and weaken its associations. Therefore, competition between projects’ networks would rise to attract these actors.

The study reveals the competition within and outside the ERP project. It highlight that the source of the external competition that an ERP project faces within the organisation is from rivalry change projects. This finding enriches our understanding of current Information systems projects. As information systems such as ERP systems are getting increasingly business oriented, the project management approach of considering only the IS portfolio within the organisation or the multiple IS project under implementation become inadequate. Business oriented IS would interfere and compete with other change project suffocating them as the case with EUB or being confused and affected by them as the case of the transformation programme. competition The study also illustrates that the competition within the project emerged as a result of external consultants’ pursuing the goals of the parent network of their consulting firm. This estranged them from the internal team within Drinko in their attempts to get closer to corporate decision makers and budget approvals.

The presented case of Drinko reveals that ERP project competed with other projects over resources, management attention, timing, and domination. Organisational resources in terms of work force, and fund are limited and the existence of several projects result on fierce competition between them over these resources; each tries to recruit as many as possible into its network and could result in diminishing or reducing some projects as the case of the local change programme. The study also reveals that top management support is one of the corporate scarce resources. Management support of one project could mean withdrawal of support from another. Top management support has been repeatedly reported as an important factor for the implementation success (Al-Mudimigh et al., 2001; Gibson, Holland and Light, 1999; Slevin and Pinto, 1987; Umble, Haft and Umble, 2003). What previous studies disregarded is the struggle and competition between different projects over management attention and support. This study shows the struggle projects face in attracting management attention and that recruiting top management into one project network could mean pulling it away from another network. Therefore one project success in this regard could mean another’s failure. This reflects that there could be always a project that would fail to compete and attract sufficient management support for its operations.

The research contributes to the project management field and the multiple project management stream. It responds to the call for “the need to develop new models and theories which recognise and illuminate the complexity of projects …which extend and enrich our understanding of the actual reality of projects and project management practices”(Winter, Smith, Morris and Cicmil, 2006). It provides a detailed case study to the project management field that suffers from the lack of practice-based investigations
It also contributes to broadening the perspective of multiple project management by revealing different aspects of the interaction between projects beyond the repeatedly reported time and human resources.

The application of Actor Network Theory provides a novel perspective for IS project management that allows to have a multiple lens that could zoom out of the particularities of ERP project to detect its interaction with other projects within the organization and could also zoom in to reveal the interactions between the ERP project’s internal groups.

This research invites practitioners to map the organisation setting during the implementation projects and recognise possible tension and competition with other projects and different networks. This ‘working map’ could help in preventing some of the surprises the reported projects faced along their way. Understanding the rival networks that a packaged software project faces provides a richer view of its context that consider internal and external forces that project managers need to consider. The ‘mosaic of networks’ the packaged software projects consist of should also be examined to resolve any potential tensions and improve cooperation.

This research presents an exploratory investigation that opens up research and debate about the multiple projects phenomena and its effect on IS implementation projects. This research needs to be taken further to investigate other sites and other information systems projects.

References:


