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The IT sales cycle as a source of context in IS implementation theory

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Abstract

Theories of systems implementation identify contextual factors that influence both management action and implementation outcomes. Building on this, I showed using case studies, how the actions of participants in the IT sales cycle create the context within which implementation takes place. I argue that implementation begins much earlier than current theories have assumed and should be considered to consist of two distinct but related processes: the acquisition of IS and their deployment in the organization.

Keywords: IS implementation; IT sales cycle; Acquisition of IT

1. Introduction

The study of IT implementation is a core activity in IS [20] and implementation represents a major component of an organization's expenditures on new IT. Over time, various theoretical perspectives on implementation have been developed; each focused on some specific construct or set of related constructs to explain implementation outcomes such as systems use, user satisfaction, systems quality, and budget and schedule performance. Some of the better researched models of IT implementation success have proposed technology acceptance [1], user participation [4], management style [3], resource availability [5], task-technology fit [12], and project governance mode [10] as key explanatory variables.

Aubert et al. [2] analyzed the IT implementation literature and identified a common architecture across various theories of IT implementation. In their analysis, theories of IT implementation were shown to contain three types of variables:

- Contextual ''refer to individual, project, project team, and organizational characteristics that can influence the outcome of IT implementations and that are more or less fixed at the beginning of the implementation effort''.
- Implementation describe ''management actions and decisions that govern or influence how an IT implementation effort is carried out and executed''.
- Outcome represent the results of the implementation effort, generally in terms relevant to management evaluation of the project.

The common architecture of the key contextual, implementation, and outcome variables, and the organization of these variables into four different ''perspectives'' on implementation by these authors is shown in Fig. 1.

This common architecture is helpful in thinking about and comparing different perspectives on IT

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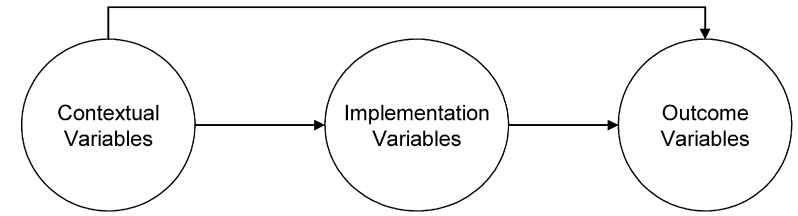

Technology Acceptance (TA) Perspective

• Individual Characteristics • Task-Technology fit • Social norms	• Top Mgmt Support • User Training • User Participation	• System Use • User Satisfaction

Conflict Management (CM) Perspective

• Individual • Project • Project team • Organizational characteristics	• Conflict Management Styles	• User Satisfaction • System quality • Budget performance • Schedule performance

Risk Management (RM) Perspective

• Project Size • Project Team Expertise • Organizational Resource Availability	• Project Management • Internal Integration • External Integration • Formal Planning	• User Satisfaction • System quality • Budget performance • Schedule performance

Organizational Economics (OE) Perspective

• Asset Specificity • Uncertainty • Performance Ambiguity • Economies of Scale • Goals of Parties • Origin of Critical Investment	• Governance • Contract Type • Risk Allocation • Incentive Structure • Appropriate Allocation of Control	• Budget performance (Cost) • Schedule performance (Efficiency)

Fig. 1. Common architecture of theories of IT implementation.

implementation. Yet it also begs the question of the origins of context. The context of an IT implementation project includes all those ''individual, project, project team, and organizational characteristics'' that influence implementation outcomes and management action. While certain of these characteristics may be ''fixed at the beginning of the implementation effort'', for example the composition of a project team, the fact that certain individuals are members of that team is the result of some decision taken before the project begins. Likewise, to state that the degree of task-technology fit or the level of performance ambiguity are ''contextual'' is to ignore the process by which the product being implemented has been evaluated and chosen and the contract for implementation services specified.

I argue that the IT sales cycle, as an antecedent to most implementations, is an important source of implementation context, that therefore implementation begins much earlier than current theory suggests, and that understanding IT implementation would be better served by considering acquisition activities as part of an overall implementation process.

The question of the origins of context is important for two reasons:

1. Context plays an important role in implementation theory. The greater the extent to which the process of context creation is understood the more it can be managed, which, in turn, increases an implementer's ability to manage or influence outcomes. Thus, it is