



The interaction of political behaviors in information systems implementation processes – Structuration Theory



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ABSTRACT

Political behavior is one of the most important factors determining success or failure in the information systems implementation processes (ISIP). This study relies on qualitative case methodology, data collected from the company herein designated as *Tahao* (anonym), a family-owned, traditional manufacturer in Taiwan. This paper has found 16 kinds of political behavior patterns in ISIP. The paper identifies how these interact and affect the organization and IS outcome, and then how they reproduced the signification, domination and legitimation structure of *Tahao*, analyzed by Giddens's Structuration Theory. On a practical level, the detailed descriptions used in this study to describe the political behavior in ISIP can be applied to other organizations which need to build new IS or undertake migration. Moreover, the research finding of this study provides management with fresh insight into political behavior in the ISIP context.

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1. Introduction

Research into power and political behavior has been conducted for decades. People manipulate political behavior to obtain power, influence and self-interests, and also to avoid responsibility in information systems implementation processes (ISIP) (Gray, 2001; Markus, 1983). Zuboff (1988), Jaspersen et al. (2002), Doolin (2004), Introna and Wood (2004), Lawrence, Mauws, and Dyck (2005), Avgerou and McGrath (2007), Limayem, Hirt, and Cheung (2007), Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2008), Kim and Kankanhalli (2009), Smith, Winchester, Bunker, and Jamieson (2010), and Chang (2010, 2012a,b, 2013) discovered that changes in organizational structure and political behavior are closely related to power shifts, placing the spotlight on power and politics in ISIP.

Few academic studies have discussed these phenomena from the political behavior perspective or further analyzed their context, processes and interactions. Markus (1983) believed that political behavior could be induced by power allocation, therefore, people resist IS because of an interaction between people and IS: thus she asserted the resistant behaviors of users could be interpreted with the political variance by interaction theory. Smith et al. (2010) also used the circuits of power to investigate the IS security *de jure* standard in a government organization. Chang (2012a,b) analyzed political tactics in information systems development processes from Chinese culture perspective, and the dynamic relationship between power types and political games (Chang, 2013).

However, none of these articles resolved how political behavior patterns will interact with each other.

At the same time, it has become apparent that information professionals use their dominant position to control resources (Boonstra & Vries, 2005; Coombs, 1992). According to Giddens (1984), resources are structured properties of social systems, drawn upon and reproduced by knowledgeable agents in the course of interaction. Thus, resources are media through which power is exercised as a routine element of conduct in social reproduction. Jones and Karsten (2008) and Orlikowski (2000) emphasize the value of using Structuration Theory to analyze power and political behavior. Although a number of studies have used this particular theory in the MIS domain (Brooks, Atkinsonb, & Wainwright, 2008; Hussain & Cornelius, 2009; Jones & Karsten, 2008; Orlikowski, 2010), to date, none has adopted both the political behavior and Structuration Theory as the lenses for analyzing how these political behavior patterns are manipulated, and in turn, affect IS and organization.

Thus, previous researchers did not resolve the above two questions: (1) how do political behavior patterns interact with each other in the ISIP context? (2) How have these political behavior patterns been manipulated, and how do they, in turn, affect IS and organization? In order to bridge the gap, drawing upon qualitative case research methods, the present study discovered some interesting events in *Tahao* and adopts the Structuration Theory to explore and resolve these two research questions. Finally, the present study provides two propositions and the interaction framework of political behavior patterns in ISIP context based on Structuration Theory. This case should prove useful as a reference for other organizations in the ISIP situation.

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The structure of the paper is as follows: the first part reviews the body of literature on the power, political behavior and ISIP, and articulates an understanding of these through the lenses of the Structuration Theory. This study relies on qualitative case data collected from a company to analyze political behavior patterns in the ISIP among departments and employees. These political behavior patterns arise, interact with each other, then influence the organization to produce or reproduce the structures of legitimation, domination and signification (Structuration Theory feedback). The paper ends by highlighting the study's contribution in both the academic and practical contexts, and by noting the limitation of the study as well as possibilities for future research.

2. Literature review

Political behavior always occurs when individuals scramble to obtain power or to secure their self-interests (Boonstra & Vries, 2005). The relative power and dependence among individuals are the dominant factors affected by their benefit exchange in these actions (Markus, 1983). Robey and Markus (1984) believed that organizational structure, mechanisms of cooperation, and employee loyalty influence the extent of political behavior in ISIP. To this end, political behavior promotes a climate of distrust among employees in ISIP, and as a consequence, prohibits IS from developing smoothly (Lines, 2007; Robey & Newman, 1996).

On the one hand, if users do not have enough informed knowledge of ISIP, information professionals will manipulate both political behavior and IS to their advantage by changing requests, forming coalitions, consolidating territories, fighting against oppression and reinforcing subcultures (Leidner & Kayworth, 2006; Lines, 2007; Newman & Rosenberg, 1985; Orlikowski, 2000; Yates & Orlikowski, 2002). This is necessary **because** information technology (IT) acts as a good negotiation chip for information professionals because they possess IT professional knowledge. On the other hand, each subunit may set out to achieve its own goal, which may not be sanctioned by the organization, and which ultimately affects the rational goal of the organization (Boonstra & Vries, 2005; Vredenburg & Maurer, 1984). For this reason, political behavior is essentially social exchange behavior with individual goals, and differs from rational behavior (Blau, 1964).

Although Chang (2013) confirmed the complex relationship between the types of power and the kinds of political behaviors in the IS development process, he did not establish the interaction among these political games. Therefore, there is value in classifying the kind of political behavior patterns for increasing a power base and the kind of political tactics for using power in ISIP. In addition, it is useful to clarify how those political behavior patterns interact with each other as well as how they affect the structure and interactive mechanism of the organization. For this reason, power within social systems which enjoy some continuity in time and space presumes regularized relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or collectivities in contexts of social interaction (Giddens, 1984). In reality, political behavior is a complex interactive process; organizational factors and culture affect people's political behavior, and vice versa (Orlikowski, 2000). In view of this, IS may influence people's behavior, and in turn, people's behavior has a feedback effect on both the IS and the organization (Markus, 1983), and this is in alignment with the Structuration Theory.

Based on the above, this study makes the following 2 propositions:

P₁. Political behavior patterns will interact with each other in ISIP.

P₂. IS and organizational structure will be produced/reproduced, if political behavior patterns have been manipulated in ISIP.

2.1. Structuration Theory

Giddens (1979, 1984) believed that people's actions are a dynamic social process, and that structuration emphasizes the duality of the individual and the society. People's (actors') interactions are based on "rules" and "resources", while at the same time, new structural rules and resources are produced. Thus, individual actions, interaction, and the social system are reciprocally active and not independent of each other. Giddens (1979, 1984) proposed the notion of structure as the set of enacted rules and resources that mediate social action through three modalities: interpretive schemes, facilities, and norms. In social life, actors do not enact structures in a vacuum. In doing so, they reconstitute the "rules" and "resources" that structure their social action (see Fig. 1). Hence, structure will continuously be produced/reproduced by individual actions. Thus, the production and reproduction of structure is known as the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984).

Giddens (1984) believed that "resources" are the means through which intentions are realized, goals accomplished, and power exercised. Firstly, "interpretive schemes" are the modes of typification incorporated within actors' stocks of knowledge, applied reflexively in the sustaining of communication. The communication of meaning, as with all aspects of the contextuality of action, does not have to be seen merely as happening in time-space. Thus, "interpretive schemes" are standardized, becoming shared knowledge that humans draw upon to analyze behavior and events. In this way, meaningful interaction is achieved. The intersection of interpretative schemes and norms for accountability for one's activities is both the explication of the reasons for them and the supply of the normative grounds whereby they may be justified. As employees are able to use their expert knowledge to analyze what the IS feature should be, they will use political behavior to achieve their goals (Introna & Whittaker, 2003). For this reason, the **structure of signification** will be produced and reproduced through the interaction process.

Secondly, "norms" are organizational rules or conventions governing legitimate or appropriate conduct. Thus, normative components of interaction always center upon relations between the rights and obligations expected of those participating in a range of interaction contexts. For this reason, the normative elements of social systems are contingent claims which have to be sustained and made to count through the effective mobilization of sanctions in the contexts of actual encounters. Therefore, the production and reproduction of the legitimation structure will be induced by the interactive process. At the same time, the normative sanctions express structural asymmetries of domination, and the relations of those nominally subject to them may be of various sorts other than expressions of the commitments those norms supposedly engender. Thus, people will use their power to manipulate political behaviors and will change the norm of an organization to achieve their goal in ISIP (Introna & Whittaker, 2003). In this way, the **legitimation structures** are produced and reproduced.

Thirdly, "facilities" are structural elements that constitute organizational structures of domination. Domination depends upon the mobilization of two distinguishable types of resources: authorita-

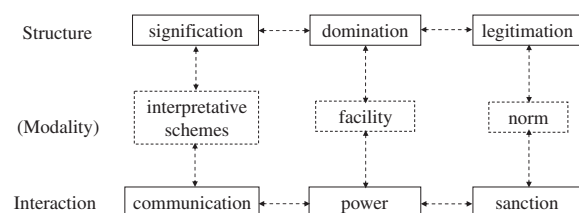


Fig. 1. The dimensions of the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984).

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