Organisational politics and enterprise resources planning implementation: an examination of the influence of political skills

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Abstract: This study shows how ERP implementers' political skills influence the ERP implementation in a higher education institution. It employs a qualitative case study methodology, using semi-structured interviews with ERP implementers and employees from a single organisation. It demonstrates how political skills, such as coalition building, the use of power, networking abilities, the use of narratives, and compromise, all play a role in, and influence, the success of ERP implementation. This study employs social influence theory, to inform the data collection and analysis methods, in order to demonstrate how political skills influence the success of ERP implementation. The results demonstrate that political skills primarily influence the decisions made in the implementation of an ERP, and also when facilitating the acceptance of the relevant systems by connecting the goals of all the actors involved, thereby helping to achieve the organisation's satisfaction with the ERP.

Keywords: ERP; ERP implementation; organisational politics; political skills; social influence theory; case study.

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1 Introduction

Successful enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems links all the functions of an organisation, including financial, accounting, and human resource management, and enable the organisation to connect with external partners, such as suppliers, through an integrated system, using a shared database (Muscatello and Chen, 2008). Previous studies, such as that conducted by Koch (2003), demonstrated that politics as a practice influences the implementation stage of the ERP life cycle, and the present study contributes to the extant body of research by exploring the influence of political skills from the stance of social influence theory.

Recent research (e.g., Ali et al., 2017) identified certain factors, such as organisational culture, lack of change management strategies, system choice, customisation and internal politics, as leading to implementation failures. The political nature of organisations results in the construction of a hierarchical culture that informs the destiny of information systems implementation (Saadé et al., 2017). Information systems experts, such as corporate information officers can understand internal politics, and as such are more involved, not only with the technicality of the information systems implementation, but can also react to political issues associated with their work (Nath, 2017). For this reason, dealing with politics can lead to ERP implementation success due to the need to deploy and develop political skills. This research illustrates how political skills are used within the context of ERP implementation in a higher education institution.

Encouraging ERP implementers to develop political skills is not the sole contribution of this research, as it also facilitates understanding of the role of their influence, arguing for the necessity of implementers to possess such skills, in order to avoid problems, and to overcome the many challenges of the implementation process, and thereby through the use of these skills to overcome the complexities of ERP implementation.

This paper commences with a literature review of the extant studies concerning ERP implementation, organisational politics, and the role of political skills in ERP implementation. This is followed by a description of the theoretical background employed by this study, which was based on social influence theory; a description of the data collection and analysis methods employed, and finally, the presentation of the results and outcomes of the research.

2 ERP implementation and organisational politics

According to Al-Mashari et al. (2003), ERP systems are software packages, and an integrated form of software, and tend to be customised according to the client's needs. The implementation of ERP systems is complex, and this is often the reason why organisations fail to implement them (Ribbers and Schoo, 2002; Bansal and Negi, 2008).

ERP implementation is a complex process, affecting operations and performance among organisations (Ranjan et al., 2018). A number of studies have put considerable effort (Kiran and Reddy, 2019) into identifying factors for ERP implementation success to address complexity; these include organisational factors, such as organisational commitment, culture and change management. Other factors, such as top management support and leadership are also important, with business process reengineering demanding minimum customisation.

Understanding the complexity, organisational practices, and power relations involved in ERP implementation can be useful for its successful management (Corbitt et al., 2005). Factors such as the presence of an experienced project manager with political skills is necessary for ensuring that the top management of an organisation provides support for the implementation. There is a dearth of studies evaluating political skills in environments such as IT (Zaman et al., 2019).

The implementation of ERP seeks to improve the management of an organisation, and does not solely concern the implementation of a traditional computer system (Chen et al., 2006). The steps that are normally undertaken in the ERP life cycle are requirements identification, ERP development, implementation, and finally BRP (Chen et al., 2006). The value of political skills in these stages can be assumed, since influencing decision-making requires negotiation, and building a support group for the project as a whole can benefit the entire ERP life cycle.

Organisational politics and conflict impacts the development and implementation of IS (Warne, 1998). A number of previous studies, such as that conducted by Rocheleau (2003), demonstrated how neglecting the political aspects of managing IS can cause difficulties. Corporate information officers, as the primary IS players in an organisation, must therefore not only support the technical aspects of IS implementation or development, but must also be aware of the internal politics in an organisation, and be a player within them (Nath, 2017).

To explain how understandings of politics in organisations evolve overtime, March (1962) described organisations as political coalitions that compete to achieve goals through bargaining processes. Political behaviour becomes particularly apparent in times of change, where conflict is evident, and actors fight to secure resources; while political behaviour, such as collation building and bargaining, can be a tool for resolving such conflicts (Harvey and Mills, 1970). Politics also concerns the use of power to realise aims, and implement certain future directions (Wamsley and Zald, 1973), while control and influence are additional concerns in the context of organisational politics (Martin and Sims, 1974).

To be more specific, political skills are used to create new coalitions in response to numerous unanticipated areas of negotiation (Newman, 2017). Meanwhile, Kacmar and Ferris (1993) explained that political skills assist those who possess them to employ power to attempt to impact the decision-making processes, in order to achieve their desired results; in essence, an individual's political skills assist in protecting their self-interest. Coalition building is one way of employing political skills to attempt to control and secure results. Political skills therefore have a direct impact on task outcomes in organisations (Jam et al., 2011).

Many studies have demonstrated how political skills influence organisations. Political skill can enhance people's understanding of organisations, as they affect their behaviours and the need to push forward individual or organisational programs (Lvina et al., 2018). Also political skill improves performance in organisations by refining social networking (Guo et al., 2020; Chelagat, 2020). In terms of affecting ERP project performance, a number of factors have been identified, such as communication, human resources, time management and risk management (Sweis et al., 2018).

Key skills, such as networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness and apparent sincerity are the main issues covering political skills, which consist of Gansen-Ammann et al. (2019). For instance, Shi et al. (2011) noted the importance of developing political skills to improve job performance, demonstrating the effect that

political skills have on networking abilities, interpersonal influence, and social astuteness, and how they highlight the link between a proactive personality and role performance.

There is a strong tradition of linking IS and politics in information technology (IT) research. According to Bloomfield and Danieli (1995), socio-political skills are employed by IT specialists in the form of motivating discursive and symbolic resources to develop IT systems. As a form of technology, ERP can enable both empowerment and panoptic control, but an organisation's management may resist empowerment driven by ERP implementation (Sia et al., 2002). According to Koch (2001, p64), "The political role of technology is not just a case of flexibility or hardness, but a complicated pattern of negotiability, resource, social and geographical distance", while Brown (1998) explained that narratives can be employed in political efforts to legitimatise actors' actions and interests. The management of technology at the organisational level is constituted of the political processes of alliance building, choice, and compromise (Koch, 2003). Political skills can be employed in a positive way (Kacmar and Ferris, 1993), for example, in ERP implementation, they can be a powerful force that enables an organisation to consider everybody's interests. The employment of political skills is a social ability that can facilitate the attainment of targets, such as ensuring the success of an ERP implementation, by influencing others to achieve a better level of performance (Gansen-Ammann et al., 2019).

Organisations are a fundamentally political showground, in which political skills are employed to influence by persuading, manipulating, and negotiating (Pfeffer, 1981). The possession of political skills promotes the ability to understand individuals in the workplace, and through this understanding enable the influencer to influence these individuals to align with their targets (Ferris et al., 2005). Through their ability to change their behaviour to suit different situations, the influencer can encourage, trust, and take control using their political skills. Such skills can be taught and developed through learning and practice (Ferris et al., 2007). In organisations, those with political skills are often influential, as they are able to read the organisation, and to identify the tasks required (Baddeley and James, 1987). Moreover, those with political skills possess the communication skills necessary to communicate successfully, and to build appropriate relationships by connecting with powerful individuals who are able to influence others, and also to help others (Ewen et al., 2013).

3 Social influence theory

Social influence theory was first developed 35 years ago in the field of social psychology (Forgas and Williams, 2001). The theory was developed by Kelman (1958) to explain that social influence occurs when individual views or deeds are influenced either deliberately or unintentionally by other individuals. Social influence is concerned with the intentional, or unintentional, means by which actors influence the views, feelings, and engagement of others (Turner, 1991). A significant principle of the theory is the notion that all personal relationships involve some form of social influence in the way that individuals employ forms of persuasion with one another through communication and information exchange (Cialdini and Trost, 1998).

According to Kelman (1958), social influence takes three main forms: compliance, internalisation, and identification. Compliance occurs when an individual appears to

follow the mainstream view in public, but disagrees with it in private. Identification is when an individual is influenced by a person who is respected, and whom they look up to, such as a celebrity. Internalisation occurs when someone is effortlessly encouraged to approve something, on a general or personal level. Social influence explains how individuals who are part of a social network are subjected to the behaviour of others (Venkatesh and Brown, 2001).

Specifically, social influence reflects the approaches, background, and features of the influence effort, and the influencer who employs strategies to influence action and achieve a goal (Rashotte, 2007). As Rashotte (2007) explained, social influence affects alteration, as in individual's opinions, feelings, approaches, or behaviours, which result from communication with others. More importantly, the theory recognises those aspects that enable individuals to influence others, as well as the results of such influence (Levy et al., 1998). Social influence explains how individuals who are part of a social network are subjected, by the behaviour of others, to adhere to behaviour generally accepted within a society (Venkatesh and Brown, 2001).

In their work, Deutsch and Gerard (1955) characterised two kinds of social influence: informational and normative. Informational social influence relates to the acceptance of information given by another as truth, while normative social influence is designed to meet the expectations of other people. Normative influence occurs in groups, and is grounded in the need to maintain group harmony, or to elicit the positive appraisal of others (Kaplan and Miller, 1987). When people are under a normative influence, they are under social pressure to act in a certain way, irrespective of their principles and attitudes regarding that behaviour. Informational social influence causes people to consider their current position and views after discussing the evidence, and before making a decision (Kaplan and Miller, 1987). Learning is enhanced as a result of social group influence (Lee et al., 2006).

Social influence theory is becoming increasingly applied when verifying behaviour in the context of social computing behaviour (group behaviour). As explained previously, the theory acknowledges three types of social influence processes, namely compliance, internalisation, and identification. Compliance is when an individual surrenders to social influence to support a particular action. Research in the field of IS has demonstrated that the subjective norm reveals the influence of a certain actor, and this can be used to explain social normative compliance (for example, Venkatesh et al., 2003). Compliance is particularly powerful when defining decisions about primary participation, when users do not have any previous experience of IS adoption, and so apply the subjective norm as a motive for their involvement (Abdillah, 2011). Internalisation occurs when an individual concurs with social influence, because they share a similar goal with other actors within their community. Once users begin to adopt a technology, internalisation functions to motivate repeated adoption behaviour (Abdillah, 2011). Identification occurs when an individual concurs with social influence with the aim of resolving an issue, as a way to achieve a level of satisfaction among individuals within certain relationship spheres. Social identity plays a central role in defining which value or emotion plays a role in determining the identification of social influence (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). These three types of influence can overlap (Abdillah, 2011).

Social influence theory is a suitable theoretical lens through which to better understand ERP implementers' political skills, since the theory considers the methods, context, and tactics employed to influence a target's preferred direction. The theory assists in identifying the impact of political skills on ERP implementation by identifying

the behaviour of the actors involved in an ERP implementation, who accept the implementers' information as evidence and reality. If ERP implementers conform with the expectations of the organisation regarding the adoption and implementation of the ERP system, they will be in a position to wield social influence. Social influence theory can explain the ERP implementers' political skills by understanding how their skills can be employed to achieve harmony with other actors.

This theoretical framework illuminates how influence occurs, as a result of the use of political skills in ERP implementation. It demonstrates that influence occurs as a result of the subjective norm of the influencer, to achieve similar and shared goals among the different actors involved. The attainment of the ultimate satisfaction of all parties involved demonstrates the process of influence, according to social influence theory. The political skills used to exert influence may include coalition building, the use of power, networking abilities, interpersonal influence, negotiation skills, the use of narratives and compromise, and understanding individuals in the workplace. The aim of this study is to identify how these skills are influential in implementing ERP at a higher education institution.

4 Research methods

This study adopted an ontological view of social constructivism (Marsh and Furlong, 2002) that emphasises the fact that understanding how political skills influence ERP implementation requires an understanding of the culture and context in which an ERP is implemented. This enabled the construction of knowledge related to the matter (Kim, 2001). Interpretivism helps the researcher to reflect upon what they know about the problem studied, and how they know it (Kim, 2001). An understanding of the influence of political skills can be achieved through the process of interpretation (Goldkuhl, 2012). By adopting interpretivism, the present study sought to generate a re-constructive understanding of the social and historical context of how political skills influence ERP implementation. In order to understand how the situation under investigation occurred (Klein and Myers, 1999), the focus of the research must concern the historical context of the study (Goldkuhl, 2012).

Identifying and understanding how political skills influence the success of ERP systems implementation is the primary objective of this research, and can be achieved by taking an interpretivist stance. Positivism was considered as another available epistemology; it views data as objective and applies quantitative methods and aims to achieve quantification of the construct researched, and so would not be appropriate in the context of this research (Pather and Remenyi, 2005). Interpretivism requires a lot of data and results in a large quantity of information that leads others to understand actions, such as the influence of political skills in ERP implementation, which was the reason for choosing them (Pather and Remenyi, 2005).

This study adopted a qualitative methodology that provided a systematic way to understand how political skills influence ERP implementation, from the viewpoint of the participants. It comprised a number of interviews that yielded rich data to analyse and interpret within the social and institutional context (Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative methodology is a broad methodology, the aim of which is to generate a theory from the data and from methods such as interviews. Political skills that influence ERP implementation require the generation of a theory totally grounded in data, as the

quantification of quantitative methodologies cannot provide an adequate amount of information (Garcia and Quek, 1997).

The research employed a qualitative case study strategy, as it is a method that is suited to the investigation of a single phenomenon, which in this study was the influence of political skills on ERP implementation, as it provided a wealth of meaning gathered from both its supporters and opponents (Gerring, 2004). The political skills of IT staff, and their influence on ERP implementation was studied in the context of a university in Saudi Arabia. The study produced complex data and focused on one group in a single setting, with the aim of exploring the influence of political skills, as case studies fit exploratory studies more than other strategies (Benbasat et al., 1987). In addition, case studies are more useful for studying 'how' political skills influence the success of ERP implementation (Benbasat et al., 1987).

The arrangements for gathering the data commenced three months prior to the data collection. The university's administration granted permission for the researcher to conduct the data collection, which commenced by contacting the university's ERP project management office (PMO) manager, who was interviewed for an hour and a half. The researcher asked him to provide the names of ERP implementers, together with system analysts and university managers who were involved in the ERP process, in some form, and who therefore had knowledge and experience of ERP implementation. The snowballing method was employed in each interview conducted, at the end of which, the interviewee was asked for recommendations of additional individuals with relevant knowledge, who might be interviewed at a later date. This meant it was possible to benefit from the participants' knowledge of with regard to who else might be able to provide insight into using political skills in ERP implementation, thereby targeting the right population (Atkinson and Flint, 2001).

The data collection tool employed to conduct the research was the semi-structured interview, which Dunn (2005, p.80) described and used as follows:

> "Structured interviews follow a predetermined and standardized list of questions. The questions are always asked in almost the same way and in the same order. At the other end of the continuum are unstructured forms of interviewing such as oral histories… The conversation in these interviews is actually directed by the informant rather than by the set questions. In the middle of this continuum are semi-structured interviews. This form of interviewing has some degree of predetermined order but still ensures flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant."

The data collection tool employed to conduct the research was the semi-structured interview (Dunn, 2005). For the purpose of the present study, interviews were conducted with 25 individuals: a project manager, five organisational managers, seven ERP implementers, seven employees in different departments within the organisation, and five systems analysts. Each interview lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. The choice of interviewees aligned with the aim to explore different viewpoints of the research question. In addition, the choice was mainly from people involved in ERP implementation with the ability to use political skills to support the process of ERP implementation. The above outlined the use of the snowballing method to select ideal participants. The interviews illuminated the complexities of ERP implementation by clarifying how the specific factor of political skills played a role in its success (Barriball and While, 1994). The following areas and questions were addressed during the interviews:

1 background information about the interviewee

2 information about the organisation

3 How did your firm implement the ERP?

4 How did you influence the decision-making processes in the ERP implementation?

5 How did the political skill of collation building influence the ERP implementation?

6 How did the political skill of the use of power influence the ERP implementation?

7 How did the political skill of the use of narratives influence the ERP implementation?

8 How did the political skill of the networking abilities influence the ERP implementation?

9 How did the political skill of interpersonal influence, influences the ERP implementation?

10 How did the political skill of the negotiation influence the ERP implementation?

11 How did the political skill of compromise influence the ERP implementation?

The role of theory as a guide for designing and implementing a data collection tool was emphasised by Eisenhardt (1989), as part of an iterative process of data collection and analysis, and as a final product of the research (Walsham, 1995). For the purpose of the present study, social influence theory was employed to build a theoretical framework to guide the data collection and analysis, which assisted in locating the research in the correct organisational context, and facilitated understanding of how political skills might influence ERP implementation. The theory also underpinned the data analysis method employed, which was based on the systematic technique of data analysis described by Creswell (2013) that is comprised of six steps. The analysis commenced by organising and preparing the data for the analysis. This step included activities such as transcribing the interviews. Second, the researcher read the data collected, in order to comprehend its content. Third, the data was coded. Coding was explained by Creswell (2013) as the process of arranging the data into segments of text, before explaining the meaning of the sections. This information was then grouped into categories, and labelled. Fourth, the themes present in the data were identified for analysis. These themes included details regarding the use of political skills in ERP implementation. Finally, the data was interpreted, for example by comparing the findings with the existing literature, within the context of the theory employed for the present study. This data analysis technique was used because it is well-suited to qualitative research and case studies, as it provides a step-by-step procedure for use by the researcher.

In specific terms, the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered in the interviews first required the transcription of each interview. Each interview was then analysed by coding the data, by organising each piece of relevant information under a theme denoting a political skill, such as coalition building. In order to understand how the theme, such as collation building, influenced the ERP implementation, it was first necessary to examine what the majority of the interviewees said about the influence. In order to interpret this influence, the process of influence described in social influence theory was applied, namely compliance, internalisation, and identification. This processes played a central

role in analysing and interpreting the results under each political skill concerned. All of the data obtained in the interviews was analysed and interpreted in this way.

5 Political skills in university context

This study was conducted within a higher education institution in Saudi Arabia that, for the purpose of this study, is referred to as the North House. The university first opened its doors to students in the mid-1950s, and over the years, it has grown from one college to more than 20 colleges, covering all subjects. The university is a public university, influenced by government legislation, and its rules are influenced by internal university politics. The government appoints individuals to all high positions in the university, from deans to deputy rectors and rectors. This involvement of the government influences the culture and values within the university, in terms of what are deemed to be acceptable actions, and what are not. This governmental influence in the university makes it a highly politicised environment. Understanding the politics and the influential actors, and how decisions are made, plays a role in the transformation engendered by the ERP. In the absence of political skills, it would have been difficult to achieve the changes engendered by new IS for the university, as ERP implementer AZ explained

> "Political skills enable us to understand the needs and environment in a very positive way. For example, in purchasing, the government regulations regarding purchasing are very onerous. If we didn't understand how a public organization operates, and how politics occurs, it would be very difficult for us to implement [the ERP] successfully."

The ERP implementation was a success story for the university, since it achieved its minimum targets. The university sought a system that would assist in relocating its working processes and business from paper to automation. The implementation of the ERP commenced in the human resources department, which was one of the most complex departments, in terms of the rules and business processes it employed. It was achieved by mirroring the extant business processes and rules in the ERP. The local vendor of the ERP employed by the university provided leadership in the way the ERP was implemented, with the support of a university PMO. Additionally, the ERP was implemented by customising many processes, which was criticised by the ERP implementer, who argued that employing best practice is one of the goals of any ERP implementation, but that it was ignored by the university. Once the ERP reached a stabilisation stage, the time was deemed to be appropriate for developing the system, and the politics involved in transforming the university began to evolve. As the PMO Manager explained

> "Now, we are thinking of improving the ERP by adding some new features, or buying a totally new ERP from an international vendor, such as SAP or Oracle. This is because we suffered during the implementation and its subsequent development, due to the local developer. They required a lot of money for everything we requested, which made it almost impossible to achieve the ambitions we had for the ERP. In future, we are looking for an ERP that can predict, using the huge amount of data in the ERP. The research on machine learning will add a lot to the new ERP systems, and it is these systems that we believe will benefit the university and its huge administration [body]. We will need to deal with the politics again in future to argue for the new ERP system to be implemented in the university."

At the time when the ERP was first implemented, in 2007, the leadership of the university had developed a vision detailing all the activities concerned, such as management, teaching, and research, together with a vision for how the technology should be used. This primarily meant ridding the university of the need for paper-based work, and replacing it with the ERP for the activities and processes related to the administration and management of different departments. This vision was developed further by the leadership of the university subsequent to 2007. Hence, the university's leaders played a central role in the process, and influenced not only the evolution of the visions, but also created a culture of improvement that informed all the activities at the university. Moreover, these leaders fought for the budget required to execute their vision, which amounted to tens of millions of Saudi riyals.

The university already had a long history of using technology, dating back to the time before the introduction of ERP. Specific IS were established to support each function of the university. These included a separate system for payroll, and other systems to support other functions. The ERP promised an integrated system to serve the majority of administrative and financial functions, and constituted a tool for providing data and information to decision makers, and for assisting the establishment of best practice within the university. The ERP was provided by the package vendor and the PMO.

5.1 Coalition building

Coalition building was observed during the ERP implementation at the North House, and the majority of the participants in this study agreed that it was important for influencing the success of the ERP implementation. Coalition building as a political skill helped to socially influence the university's employees through meetings, discussion of challenges and solutions, communication, training courses for staff from different departments, and offering incentives to encourage employees to support the ERP implementation.

Winning the support of stakeholders through discussion, and encouraging them to play a role in the project's success influenced the ERP implementation positively, since building a support group for the ERP within the university engendered the acceptance of the ERP implementers' efforts. Engaging stakeholders involves communicating with all parties, and understanding one another's interests. Coalition building influenced the ERP implementation by providing members of staff who may play a role in resisting the ERP implementation with compliance directions established by the coalition. These were decisions taken in concordance with the elements that the ERP implementers believed were necessary for the success of the implementation process. ERP implementer AC explained

> "Coalition building is one of the success factors that led to the success of our ERP in the university. Involving stakeholders, and insuring their support, and building a coalition with them, led to our views and goals being adopted by them, which led the implementation to be quick and better."

Exercises such as issuing training certificates to members of staff who undertook the courses offered, which demonstrated, for example, how the ERP could transform business practice at the university, and which counted as promotion points, made it easier for the PMO to implement the changes. Such measures socially influenced the employees, and helped the PMO staff at the university to promote acceptance of the ERP. According to social influence theory, this form of influence is 'internalisation'. These

exercises encouraged employees to consider their positions and situations, and the evidence provided by the PMO's information built up their confidence in the ERP, and influenced their acceptance of the new system. One ERP implementer SD explained

> "I am responsible for the administrative communication module in the ERP systems in the university. We give training courses to employees in the administrative communication departments from time to time. We issue attendance certificates, which help the employees, and count as points in promotion applications in the future. What we notice is the tremendous influence of the course in the use of the system by the employees."

This observation regarding the influence of such courses concurred with the findings of previous studies, such as that conducted by Koch (2001), who argued that coalition building influences the achievement of the change required of ERP implementation. Configuring an ERP to an organisation's needs requires engagement with political processes, such as building alliances (Koch, 2003). For example, active coalitions that involve top management and the software vendor or supplier can transform organisations (Bob-Jones et al., 2008).

Thus, coalitions emerge when members of an organisation share similar goals, targets, and missions for influencing decision-making concerning a certain objective (Mizrahi and Rosenthal, 2001). Coalition building often occurs when IT development projects are highly dependent on the local context; where conflict is clear, the developers involved in projects tend to engage in coalitions (Biggs and Smith, 1998).

5.2 Use of power

One way of using this form of power is to compile reports during an implementation, and another way of influencing employees is to show them how useful the system is, and to establish a set of policies that govern the implementation, and the later use of an ERP. The ERP project manager explained

> "We raised the resistance to the implementation by different departments, and the only way forward was to force the employees to use the system. We saw that power played a tremendous role in ensuring that the system was used. This force and support of the top management was a result the good presentation of the facts that made the implementation a struggle. The university used a clever way of providing incentives for supporting the use of the ERP and its implementation, indicating that resisting the system would cost a lot in terms of promotion, for example."

Individuals can be influenced by the use of the power when an administration enforces the implementation and use of an ERP, although they may privately disagree with the decision. This was the case at the North House, as the university employees were pressurised into taking action. As ERP implementer DS explained

> "The use of power by the stakeholders to support the implementation insured that the system enjoyed sustainability. The university council forcing the [use of the] system, and the best practice it brought, was necessary when we noticed the employees or users in different departments were not adopting top management's wishes to implement the system smoothly, perhaps because of fears of a loss of power, and maybe laziness. In this case, we looked for stern powers to be used, because there was a risk of failing to implement the ERP. So use of power was a must."

Thus, the use of power by the university's highest management insured compliance from users, regarding their use of the ERP. The sharing of similar interests and goals by the university's administrators, and some departmental heads, caused pressure to be applied to employees to insure their use of the ERP, according to the desire of the vendor and top management. This use of power also motivated them to achieve successful ERP implementation.

This form of influence provides another example of how power influences ERP implementation, in terms of insuring compliance, or motivating the adoption of directions that differ from the norm, for example those that Clegg's (1989) circuits of power, or other theories of power, may explain. Previous studies, such as that conducted by Alawattage et al. (2007), demonstrated that power relations may cause conflict, and failure, therefore understanding the appropriate form of power to use, and employing it correctly, assists enormously with ERP implementation.

The use of power, in its basic form, as explained by Clegg (1989), occurs in three circuits: episodic, social, and system. The episodic circuit is the clearest and most obvious use and influences power as used by individuals. It is apparent in the forcing of an ERP implementation by an administration, which can cause users to do something that they would not otherwise do, were their interests not being threatened. This is why use of power can generate positive results if it used well.

5.3 Networking abilities

Networking, or relationship development capability, as it is referred to in some studies, denotes a number of activities designed and intended to develop and strengthen the relationships between project members and an organisation's employees (Mitrega et al., 2012). At the North House, relationships were forged and strengthened through individuals introducing themselves to one another, or through meetings, social gathering activities, or training courses. As an ERP systems analyst AQ explained

> "Networking was a key skill, I believe, because it played a role in building relationships that last, and gave an opportunity to support each other's initiatives. In the ERP implementation, I remember the people I met in social gathering activities at the level of the departments that were implementing the ERP, and we were invited to understand concerns and problems, and act accordingly."

Networking abilities influence ERP implementation, and help ensure that the decisions taken are in the interest of the ERP implementers and the organisation concerned. This was achieved in the case of North House, by ERP practitioners providing and gathering evidence relating to how to implement ERP, and adopt suitable decisions by observing the reality of ERP on the ground. The possession of the appropriate information, and knowledge sharing, are key factors in influencing a successful ERP implementation. As one ERP implementer SD observed

> "We had to win debates in meetings with the users, because there are, as you know, conflicts of interest. Networking enabled us to overcome conflicts of interest, and to insure that the majority did not oppose the way we wanted the implementation to go, because you can overcome an individual opposing the ERP, but you can never oppose or stop the majority, and here comes the value of networking for an ERP. We used to have to meet individuals and explain our case before meetings, and we made it clear: you support us and we will give

> you a system that works, according to your needs. Also, we had to support and listen to their views, and insure that we collaborated, and also the opposite was true."

Wining debates and engage in meetings and social gatherings influenced the decisions made in the ERP implementation. This was possible because in the debates, the ERP implementers and project managers sought to align their interests with the users and managers, and thereby to gain the support of the majority of the users and members of the university administration. For example, in the ERP implementation, the implementers sought to demonstrate how the ERP can influence the performance of the university departments if its implementation is successful. Another ERP implementer AS explained

> "We noticed that employees who were involved with us in the ERP implementation prolonged the work; for work that needed two hours, they spent days. We had to decide how to involve them, so we formed committees and university gave [people] pounces for attending and contributing to the success of the ERP at the university. This was a way we insured that networking can be useful, and this was one way to insure that everyone was on board."

Incentives therefore played a supportive role in the ERP implementation by encouraging the acceptance of certain views. They also helped to inspire a sense of satisfaction in the participants, as they were able to increase their income, and to see a tangible benefit in being involved in the project. Furthermore, the involvement of users in committees made them feel that their input was valued and taken into consideration. All of these factors influenced the successful implementation of the ERP.

Networking is a method used to insure ERP implementation success, and involves linking employee income to incentives and other benefits, such as promoting staff who use and support ERP implementers and implementation in general. This ensures networking is successful and effectively accelerates implementation.

Networking has been found to be one of many skills required in ERP implementation (Hawking and Stein, 2003), and also as a networking skills influence knowledge sharing, and support knowledge integration (Newell et al., 2006), as evidenced by the present study. Thus, the ability to forge collaboration among the different actors involved in an ERP implementation can engender its success (Zaglago et al., 2016).

5.4 Use of narratives

Narratives are a "tale, story, and recital of facts, especially a story told in the first person" [Myers, (1997), p.241]. According to Brown (1998), narratives can be employed in a political context to legitimise certain actions and interests in the context of IT implementation, and also to provide meaning to the new IT systems available within an organisation.

The majority of participants in the present study believed that relating narratives to other employees was a powerful political skill. These narratives helped to illustrate how the system was to be used and implemented in other departments, how positive change can occur due to the implementation of ERP in the university, and the current status of the system as a whole. Through these narratives, the staff were able to better understand the ERP implementation, because they described what was occurring in actuality during implementation, and were easy to for them to understand. In addition, the narratives were vehicles for the ERP implementers to convey messages to the other individuals involved in the process. As one ERP implementer AS observed

> "Narratives have a strong influence on users and the university, because they show what's happening and the difficulties facing the systems, and the influence the ERP has on the university, in a language that is easy to understand. We used an example of the Ministry of Justice's electronic services implementation, and how successful it was for the Ministry, in our exchange with managers at the university."

However, according to one ERP manager, the ability to influence employees, and to gain their compliance with ERP implementation, would only be possible if the user participants involved in ERP implementation heard examples from other organisations directly, as this had a direct influence on decisions taken regarding their positive participation in any implementation. These narratives provided the requisite knowledge, explaining how other organisations achieved their goals, thereby influencing the implementation at North House, by providing an example of a similar project, which had been successful. Such narratives can also unite the efforts of ERP implementers and users. As one ERP manager explained:

> "Some [employees] believed that introducing narratives and stories from other implementations was not useful, because they refused to accept anything from us. It might be a valid and powerful narrative if [they] heard it directly from other organizations implementing an ERP. For example, I might bring the BMW case to them, and [tell them] how it increased productivity, but they wouldn't buy it and believe it. The story had to be lived and seen by [the individuals] to be believed. Also, using studies and numbers wouldn't be influential, as it had to be seen and heard by them directly from their friends to be believed."

In specific terms, these narratives encouraged individuals at the university to consider their position regarding the ERP implementation, and they played a significant role both within and outside the university. This evidence played a central role in many decisions taken by top management, and even by employees. The narratives of ERP implementations outside the university, for example cases in which other organisations adopted a certain strategy or methodology in their ERP implementation, impacted the views of the top management and employees, who may decide to adopt the same strategy, especially if it was successful.

Use of narratives is a powerful political tool, as it can be employed to convey success stories and promote acceptance of efforts from ERP staff during implementation. However, some participants believe that it is preferable to hear such information directly from those organisations implementing the system, this is because ERP staff lack credibility. The issue of credibility is important here, because if there is high credibility resulting from efforts and exchanges of information between two parties this can facilitate the success of narratives.

Narratives provide a pragmatic understanding of the IS, promoting awareness regarding how the system is actually used within the organisation (Alvarez and Urla, 2002). The use of narratives is also one way of improving ERP systems in organisations by employing them to express the meanings, interpretations, and understanding of the system, all of which facilitate the tasks involved (Hedman and Borell, 2004).

5.5 The influence of compromise on users, top management and other players

The process of ERP implementation requires certain forms of compromise, balancing what the organisation requires, with what the ERP implementer wishes to see implemented. As one manager KH explained:

> "In terms of compromise, we all had to be flexible, and able to compromise when needed. For example, we believed in the best practice that ERP can bring to the university, but after many discussions with Human Resources, we worked together to implement some of what they wished to see the ERP do."

Sometimes, ERP implementers, users and managers, were influenced by the users, when there was a strong desire to meet a certain request, even if one party disagreed entirely with it. In such cases, the ERP implementers strongly believed that best practice should be implemented, but due to its own internal rules, the university sometimes required functionality other than that the ERP provided. It was therefore necessary for ERP implementers to consider the arguments posed by the North House managers and users, so as to reach a decision according to the evidence presented. Hence, the ability to determine a middle ground played a significant role in achieving compromise where the parties were concerned. Such compromises were achieved with good planning, and what one ERP implementer (AS) referred to as 'staging'. The decisions taken, regarding whether to support the project's success or not, depended on how the implementer concerned conveyed their requirements, which highlights the value of planning the implementation correctly. Employing appropriate methods, and reaching a compromise by agreeing to certain goals shared by both parties helped smooth the operation of the process, and compromise also helped motivate all the parties, as certain issues requiring a compromise ensured the project could achieve its aims. One ERP implementer AS noted:

> "Staging is necessary here to avoid not adopting the right way to implement [something] … the style of feeding is sometimes important, but you don't want to miss the aim. We reached a compromise sometimes, because we knew that continuing with the same methods and tools could cause other problems. This indicated the importance of strategy and long-term planning in the ERP implementation. For example, in the warehouse department, we compromised in terms of the way the system supports their work, and it worked, but it could sometimes cause problems in other departments."

Compromise leads to satisfaction among employees and agreement regarding how implementation should proceed. The reason for involving employees in the direction to be taken and the most important decision making is that it increases the probability of collaboration, which can then lead to a high degree of ERP implementation success.

Achieving success in implementing certain ERP modules requires compromises with some departments in an organisation (Sia et al., 2002), since there is a need to coordinate the actions involved in an ERP implementation to attain its goals. Such compromises require communication between the parties involved to achieve an orderly solution, and rather than seeking to achieve a common goal, they should aim to negotiate a solution to problems (Wagner and Newell, 2006).

5.6 Interpersonal influence

Interpersonal influence involves producing, sending, and receiving messages to influence receivers (Wilson and Zigurs, 2001). Studies, such as that conducted by Byrd and Turner

(2001), have found that interpersonal skills have a positive influence on IS success. This view was echoed by Jiang et al. (2003, p.799), who concluded that the impact of interpersonal skills "is not a simple function of the perceived level of the IS staff's skill proficiency but is also determined by the understood expectations of skill requirements".

At the North House, interpersonal influence occurred according to the majority among the different parties involved in the ERP implementation, who influenced the administration to introduce incentives for the employees who were users of the system, and to influence them to favour the elements it was believed were essential for the ERP implementation, by connecting the interests of the ERP implementers and users and the university in general. The ERP implementers also personally influenced both the users and managers during the implementation by explaining that the ERP had many benefits, and that they should collaborate to develop the university through the ERP initiative. As one ERP implementer KA explained

> "Our influence on the university to provide incentives is one example of this influence. The university listened to us, and provided incentives that benefitted employees, in terms of their promotion, if they undertook our training."

This influence exerted by the ERP implementers pressurised university managers to act to ensure its successful implementation. Through the implementers' verbal and written communication in meetings, and reports related to the status of the implementation in the university, the university's management was encouraged to comply with the implementers' and ERP project manager's viewpoints, despite discrepancies. The ERP implementers' interpersonal influence therefore influenced the success of the ERP implementation at North House.

Reaching decisions and obtaining the acceptance of all parties is one way in which the influence of interpersonal skills is apparent. In situations in which there was no sharing of goals, the ERP implementers found it challenging to gain acceptance for certain actions, however, the users could be motivated to get involved if they shared common goals. Additionally, treating users fairly inspired feelings of satisfaction on the part of the users, which influenced the success of the implementation. Moreover, as one ERP implementer AS observed

> "Personality acceptance is important for ERP implementers, because it enables the acceptance of advice and decisions. Sometimes, we had ERP implementers who were not accepted and liked by the users, so we had to change those implementers. Implementers who are not accepted [by users] can cause failure, in our experience. Bringing a coffee or tea with cakes to the employees proved to inspire interpersonal acceptance."

Interpersonal influence raises the likelihood of ERP implementation proving successful. However, the opposite may also be true, in that implementers who have no interpersonal influence or skill can experience failure. Therefore, the role of personality is also important.

Interpersonal influence is also important for influencing the process of obtaining the ERP from the vendor (Verville and Halingten, 2002), and interpersonal relationships, such as with IT consultants and vendors, can provide vehicles for sharing knowledge that influences practice (Daoud and Triki, 2013).

5.7 Negotiation

Every department has its own communication style, and according to the majority of this study's participants, understanding these styles is significant for a successful ERP implementation, since behaving according to these styles eases communication, and can produce productive responses. Negotiation occurred via the initiatives and incentives developed for the project that encouraged others to consider the requests of the ERP implementers. Its influence lay in understanding where a problem lay, and providing solutions. Through negotiation, the ERP implementers were able to recognise ways of conveying their messages, and of understanding problems. As a university manager KA explained, "When we want to provide a service using the ERP system that requires changing a business process, or modifying the ERP, we engage in a long negotiation effort with the ERP implementers, but ultimately we reach a decision that is agreed upon by all."

Negotiation enables both ERP implementers and users, whether employees or managers, to address existing problems, and conceptualise possible solutions to them based on evidence and information that can yield positive results for ERP implementation. According to social influence theory, internalisation results from the negotiation that occurs between different parties, in which all parties are expected to agree with the views and solutions discussed. Involvement in negotiation efforts helps support both agreements, and shared goals, which can support decisions made that positively influence the efforts involved in an ERP implementation. One ERP implementer KW at the North House observed

> "Negotiation skills are very important, and there is a demand for ERP implementers with such skills, because you need to know when to engage in talks and reach decisions that favour successful implementation. These skills, to be honest, are not very important in the private sector, because they require the force factor, and such skills are less important than in the public sector."

Negotiation skills are important for ERP implementation, because ERP requires the transformation of business processes, and without good negotiation skills this process can be lengthy. When changing business processes, hours of meetings and technical work need to be understood without engaging users such that implementers will risk failure. Therefore, negotiation involved convincing users of the current roadmap for ERP at the organisation, to ensure middle ground would be found between the parties to ERP implementation. Being able to listen to users and help them attain their goals from ERP is also important and requires negotiation.

Negotiation is also important for providing support, and when allocating tasks to participants, and it influence the roles played by different actors (Gallagher et al., 2012). The relationship between the ERP implementers and the organisation is created via negotiations that are governed by one side or the other (Elbanna, 2006).

6 Conclusions

The unique contribution of this study is that ERP implementers, in general, should employ political skills to achieve a successful ERP implementation. Learning how to develop political skills, and then applying them, is of utmost importance for both current and future ERP implementers and IS professionals. The possession of coalition building

skills, one of the seven skills concerned, can strengthen the position of ERP implementers regarding the challenges facing ERP implementation. However, care must be taken by ERP implementers when applying political skills with parties in positions of power in an organisation, therefore understanding of such skills alone is insufficient, rather there is a need to learn and apply them through experience, in order to ensure that the skills benefit the organisation in question, and ensure the future success of ERP within the organisation. Political skills play a significant role in ERP implementation, and can influence the outcome technology implementation plays in higher education institutions. Its benefits can support other organisations, due to the nature of the influence of political skills on the different parties involved. This study has presented advice regarding how to use political skill, and given examples of how to apply this advice easily.

The theoretical implication of political skill is that is can serve as a key motivator to enhance social influence in organisations by influencing decisions regarding ERP implementation, and to encourage acceptance of comprehensive implementation by aligning the aims of different actors to attain the approval of complete efforts by ERP implementers.

In terms of managerial implications is that they should support employees' learning and use of political skills by trusting them, and encouraging their use in the interest of the organisation seeking to implement an ERP mechanism. Managers should also introduce successful examples of the use of political skills to ERP implementers, and illustrations of ways in which ERP implementers' political skills have improved similar businesses implementation of ERP elsewhere. Organisational politics should be understandable, as the ability to deal with them is important for managers. In addition, organisational politics should be discussed in the context of implementers and implementations so that managers are confident dealing with them.

The limitation of this research is that it applies a qualitative case study methodology, using one method (i.e., semi structured interviews) based on the analysis of one theory which is social influence theory. It also pertains to just one organisation type, that is higher education institutions. Future research might consider how these skills should be adopted in different settings, and might employ different methods, as this would benefit IS research. It would be useful to look at each skill to establish how it influences the implementation of other ISs in different organisations. In addition, studying each component from a psychology perspectives would be useful.

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