Enterprise Systems Implementations: Organizational Influence Processes for Corporate User Representatives

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ENTERPRISE SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATIONS: ORGANIZATIONAL INFLUENCE PROCESSES FOR CORPORATE USER REPRESENTATIVES

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Abstract

Enterprise system implementation is a complex and large undertaking. Business requirements does not necessarily fit the inherited as-is features of the software. To reach agreement on features to implement requires prudent management and astute exercise of power.

In this paper we draw on an in-depth, interpretive study from the oil industry, where we analyze a case of innovative integration of an ECM system with collaboration technologies. The data collection has been longitudinal. The data analysis has been performed through the perspective of organizational influence processes.

The main finding concerns an organizational role as corporate user representative to deal with the scale and complexities of implementation. A single person was particularly influential in the role. At the outset a user representative had to perform upward influence processes from a lower formal position. This is impeding the responsibilities associated with the role. A corporate user representative in a high formal position and with lateral and downward influence processes to the steering committee and the project group was more influential. Challenging upward influence processes was thus avoided.

Typical influence tactics include rational persuasion and consultation. In addition, the corporate user representative benefits from a strong reference group to give input from the organization.

Keywords: organizational influence processes, enterprise systems, implementation, corporate user representatives.

1 INTRODUCTION

Enterprise system (ES) implementation is often a complex and large undertaking. Business requirements does not necessarily fit the inherited as-is features of the enterprise software. In ES implementation value conflicts occur between stakeholders (Allen, 2005), and ES implementation may even be viewed in a dialectic perspective (e.g. Besson and Rowe 2001, Nordheim and Päivärinta, 2006). It requires prudent management and astute exercise of power to reach agreement on features to implement across several departments as well as issues inherent in the scale and complexity of an undertaking as ES implementation.

In information systems (IS) research the issue of power has received some attention. IS development and implementation has long been characterized as a highly political process (Grover et al., 1988). Although power is crucial in the interplay between information systems and organization (Baskerville and Smithson, 1995), the study of power is said to have been marginalized in IS research in the last 20 years (Howcroft and Light, 2006). In their review of power in IS research, Jasperson et al., (2002) state that power is a complex phenomenon that best can be viewed and understood as consisting of multiple layers.

The development of large scale IS is a political process (Kling and Iacono, 1984), and agents of organizational change include IS specialists (Markus and Benjamin, 1996). Enterprise systems are said to require new research on user participation (Markus and Mao, 2004). An ES entails many stakeholders with multiple and often conflicting objectives and priorities (Sedera et al., 2004). Users and their relative power is therefore an issue in the context of ES, and the dialogue between users and designers is important (Besson and Rowe, 2001). Since users rarely are involved in the decision to launch the project, this gives rise to conflicts (Besson and Rowe, 2001). Users are given more attention in the shakedown and onward and upward phases (Markus and Tanis, 2000). A study of power issues in ES implementation shows that technical power, structural power, conceptual power, and symbolic power may be exercised by the IT management. These four categories of power are interwoven, and both overt and covert power is exercised (Howcroft and Light, 2006). Conflict and its resolution are more likely to occur when users can exercise their influence in the development process, in what may be described as constructive conflict (Robey and Farrow, 1982). There is a fine balance of power to be maintained between the stakeholder groups in order to achieve a harmonious outcome (Skok and Legge, 2002).

While some research has focused on power in ES implementation, we have studied a case where previous research is insufficient to explain a central power base, namely the role of the corporate user representative. We have chosen to apply the theory of organizational influence processes (Porter et al., 2003) and much in line with the study in (Nielsen and Ngwenyama, 2002) because this theory has a particular focus on power and influence that cannot directly be attributed to a manager's legitimate authority. We therefore apply the theory of organizational influence processes to an ES implementation case, to analyze the key role of a corporate user representative. Different people filled the role as corporate user representative during the project, and their differences are analyzed in terms of organizational influence processes. This paper addresses the question:

Faced with the challenges of an enterprise system implementation how may we understand the corporate user representative role through the perspective of organizational influence processes?

The rest of the article is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theory of organizational influence processes. After a description of the research method in Section 3, Section 4 describes the case. Section 5 presents the findings, and Section 6 discusses these in the broader context of ES implementation research with a particular focus on user representation and power.

2   ORGANIZATIONAL INFLUENCE PROCESSES

In the theory of organizational influence processes, there is a distinction between power and influence. Power is viewed as a resource of force, whereas influence is the actual application of that force (Porter et al., 2003, p. 3). Organizational influence processes are networks of social actions that an individual or group enacts to influence another individual or group to accomplish the originator's goals. Influence processes are found in all organizational activity and are necessary to attain what a formal organization cannot (Porter et al. 2003, p. xv).

Porter et al. (2003) divide power into two subsets: position power and personal power. Position power consists of reward power, coercive power and legitimate power, while personal power consists of referent power and expert power. Legitimate power is based on the target's belief that the influence originator has the right to issue directives, usually related to position. Referent power is based on the psychological identification of the target with the agent of influence, and an extension of this is charismatic leadership.

Dependence between organizational actors is key to the notion of power and influence (Kotter, 2003, p. 128). The more the target depends on the originator, the greater the influence the originator can have on the target. The power base may be direct or implicit and may include obligation, expertise, identification and persuasion (Kotter, 2003, p. 136).

The utilization of power is inherently situational, and an influence episode is a social event. It is the relationship between the influence originator and the target that determines the possible influence processes. There are in general nine influence tactics available: rational persuasion, inspirational appeal, consultation, ingratiation, exchange, personal appeal, coalition, legitimating and pressure (Yukl and Tracey, 2003, p. 99).

The framework of Porter et al. (2003), defines three common direct influence processes, namely: downward, lateral and upward (Figure 1). Downward influence means that the influencer is at a relatively higher organizational level than the potential target. Formal authority is important, but just as other means of influencing may often be more effective then formal authority may prove ineffective (Kerr, 2003; Goleman, 2003).

Lateral influence means that the two parties involved do not have a clear and unambiguous hierarchical difference between them. Neither party is in a position to use formal authority over the other. Potential lateral influencers are likely to use expert and reference forms of power, but rewards or punishments may also play a role. The influence target often has a clear choice in how to respond, and can be quite active in supporting or defeating an influence attempt (Cohen and Bradford, 2003; Ferris et al., 2003).

Upward influence is directed at a target in a position that is higher in the formal hierarchy than the influence agent. This limits the repertoire of influence methods and tactics that the subordinate may reasonably employ. The influence originator needs to rely more on personal bases of power such as expertise or charisma, or may need to resort to persuasion or even manipulation. Of four upward influence strategies, two are successful: ingratiator, a friendliness strategy; and tactician, a reason strategy (Kipnis and Schmidt, 2003).
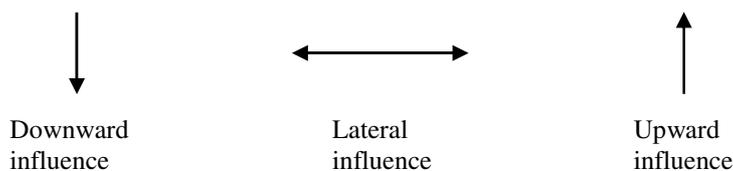

Downward   Lateral   Upward
influence   influence   influence

Figure 1. Three common direct organizational influence processes

3   RESEARCH METHOD

The study has been guided by Pettigrew's (1995) advice on longitudinal process research on change in a larger organizational context. The ES implementation project lasted from 2002 to 2007 and we have studied it in detail from 2005 to 2007. We used longitudinal process research to broaden the perspective on ES implementation and to further validate beyond what can be supported by immediate observations. We take Pettigrew's (1995) stance to study organizational change in context, namely that it requires multilevel analysis (i.e., varying levels of analysis) and processual analysis (i.e., analysis of sequential, temporal and historical dependencies). Crucial is also the element of time in the longitudinal study of organizational change. We applied a partial 'snowball' sampling of informants, to locate information-rich informants (Patton 1990).

The research data have been collected from important project documents and through interviews with key project staff. Table 1 summarizes the data sources used for this paper. The data sources reflect viewpoints from different levels and roles within the ES implementation project. The study thus represents an analysis of the experiences and interpretations of nine key actors in the project.

Date	Type of data
12.2005	Interviews with the two project managers, informants 1 and 2
10.2006	Initial interview with the QA/first corporate user representative, informant 3
02.2007	Follow-up interview with the QA/first corporate user representative, informant 3
03.2007	Interviews with the second and third corporate user representative, informants 4 and 5
04.2007a	Interviews with two reference group members, informants 6 and 7
04.2007b	Interviews with two steering committee members, informants 8 and 9

Table 1. Data sources

The principal data collection method was in-depth, semi-structured interviews, combined with background information from previous studies. To remain both focussed and open, a general interview guide approach was combined with an informal conversational interview, to 'go with the flow' (Patton, 1990). All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. To increase knowledge as the interviews progressed, an interim analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was performed and the interview guide evolved.

Interviews with the two consecutive project managers (12.2005) initiated this research as they both emphasized the importance of the corporate user representative. The theory of organizational influence processes was found relevant to make sense of the case data. The theory then became part of a 'sensitizing concept' (Patton, 1990, p. 216) to guide further data collection and analysis. The interviews included a definition of the three common direct influence processes (Figure 1), and the informants were asked to assess the corporate user representatives according to these.

The data analysis started with coding schemes based on the interview guides, data reduction and displays (Miles and Huberman, 1994), and continued with an inductive analysis of themes and categories occurring in the data (Patton, 1990). The researchers were not initially attending to the importance of the theory of organizational influence processes; that came gradually after the particular focus on the corporate user representative emerged. In retrospect, it is evident that the organizational influence processes played a significant role in practice and that these were understood in action by some of the organizational actors. Gradually we saw the emerging patterns of the organizational processes and were able to relate the patterns to theory.

An alteration between the different theoretical viewpoints presented above, emerged as a useful approach during the analysis of and reflection upon the case data. This is in line with qualitative data analysis as an iterative process proposed in (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and fits well with our interpretive stance.

Several iterations of analysis of the initial interviews (12.2005 and 10.2006) occurred in parallel with a search for an appropriate theoretical lens. Thus the research method followed a hermeneutical circle (Klein and Myers, 1999) until the parts of data from the initial interviews (12.2005, 10.2006) were considered consistent with the theoretical whole. This gave a sharpened focus for the remaining interviews (02.2007 through 04.2007b).

4 CASE BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

Statoil[1] is the third largest exporter of crude oil in the world, with approximately 25,600 employees in 33 countries in 2006. The company operates 60% of all Norwegian oil and gas production. The company consists of seven business units, each with an IS/IT manager.

Statoil was one of the world's largest users of Lotus Notes/Domino in the 1990s (Munkvold and Tvedte, 2003). The IT architecture evolved into a partly overlapping portfolio of technologies, scattered over a number of different storage media and applications. This caused major challenges related to information retrieval, version control and information quality (Munkvold et al., 2003), as Statoil's volume of information objects grow at a rate of about 300,000 per month. In response, Statoil's corporate IS/IT service therefore launched a major Enterprise Content Management (ECM) and collaboration development program in 2002. The project objectives included collaboration and information sharing across organizational and geographical boundaries, with access to corporate information. Each employee in Statoil is attached to team sites to conduct their knowledge work and collaboration. All relevant information for a project or team is accessible to the team sites, with all documents being managed throughout their life cycles. The time frame of the project is outlined in Figure 2, and the technologies that constitute the ES are summarized in Figure 3. Taken together, the team sites, corporate-wide integrated storage and search engines provide a powerful information environment, to be accessed through a corporate portal. The case is therefore a complex ES solution, based on a combination of technologies.

The project was organized with the CIO as sponsor, a steering committee, a project group with a project manager, and a reference group with representatives from the business units (Figure 4). The reference group discussed user requirements and user acceptance. The steering committee consisted of process owners and IS/IT managers from different business units, having a customer role. The sponsor represented corporate management, was financially and commercially responsible, and chaired the steering committee. The project group was staffed by corporate services IS/IT. Vendor and other consultants were involved as needed.

Strategy	Feasibility study of the organization	Building and integration of the solution	Pilot imple-mentation, first general release, new versions, stabilising the solution	Organisational implementation in all business units	New releases, solution in production
Feasibility study of vendors	Procurement process				

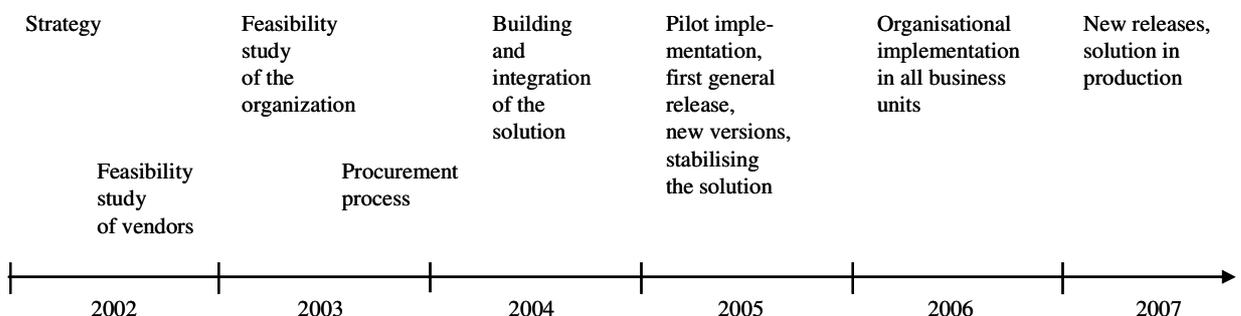| 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |

Figure 2. Time frame for the ES implementation

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[1] This case study was completed prior to the merger with Hydro's oil and gas in October 2007, now known as StatoilHydro.
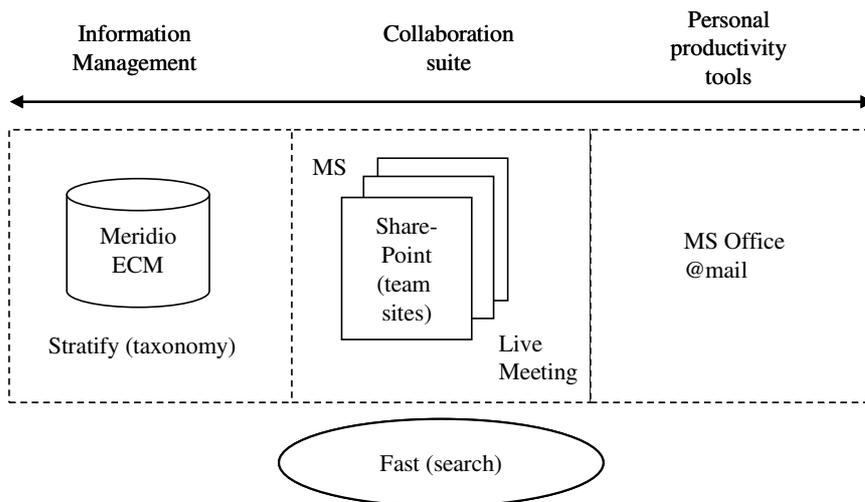
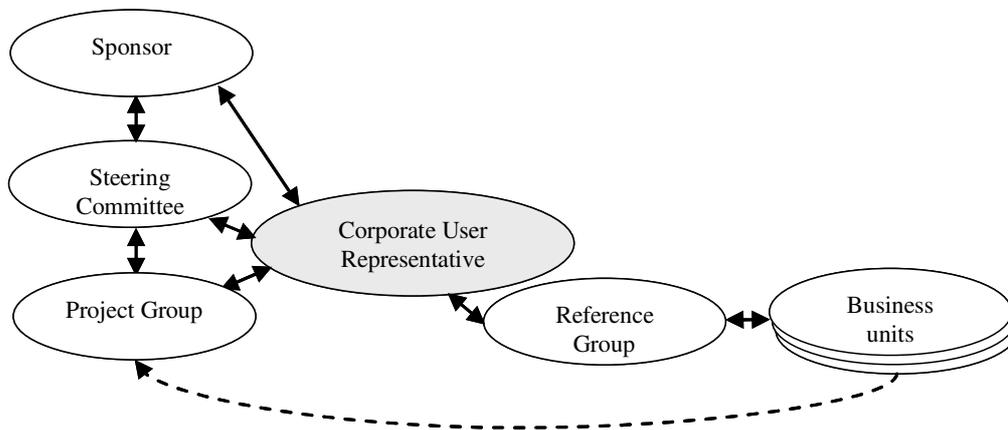*Figure 3. The set of software products chosen*

Figure 4. The context for the corporate user representative

Two project managers were involved, one from 2002 to the summer of 2005, the other since 2005. According to the two project managers, Statoil's business units were the most important stakeholders in influencing the contents of the solution, and the corporate user representative played a key role (12.2005). However, before the first real corporate user representative was appointed (i.e. representative No 2 in the following), too many strong users were allegedly voicing their opinions directly towards the project group (03.2007). This problem of the past is indicated by the dotted line in Figure 4. The involvement of users and business representatives was strong, and the use of a reference group served to obtain input and requirements from the business units and users. The overall impression was that the business units were well involved, but that varied.

4.1 The corporate user representative role

The term corporate user representative may be inadequate to describe the role in Statoil. The role is officially titled corporate user responsible, and works for the sponsor. All changes in the project are approved by the corporate user representative or the sponsor. It is important to note that the role is not an end user representative as such, but rather a representative for the business units who are the ES customers (c.f. Figure 4). To the project group, the appointment of one person to be the customer voice was considered a great advantage (04.2007b).

Because the corporate user representative is an exposed position, no ordinary user is assigned the role. It is considered a management role. "Because of extent and scope, there were no natural 'normal' user representatives to choose from … who could fill the role across the enterprise" (04.2007b). When asked whether an ordinary user could have filled this role, a reference group member replied: "I think it would have been very difficult in a project with this size". The rationale is that "you need to understand the totality. In such a complicated project you need someone who can delve into the details, but also rise above and see the totality… We all have our preferences that we fight for, and sometimes I have to admit that the common benefit – if you view the totality – means that I cannot get exactly what I want. And then the corporate user representative has to explain this to me" (04.2007a). The corporate user representative role is considered turbulent (03.2007), as the following illustrates: "Well, the project they have their agenda. They want to deliver, of course as much as possible, but they have time pressure, they have resource pressures... And the customer wants, 'Yes, is it that difficult then? Just fix it', and then you have the corporate user representative in the middle, to negotiate these positions" (04.2007a).

4.2   Individual differences between corporate user representatives

Four different individuals have been involved in the corporate user representative role, but one individual was only in for a very short time (04.2007b) and is therefore omitted in the following description. The different individuals have filled the role for natural turnover reasons. Their different backgrounds are outlined in Table 2.

	Representative No. 1	**Representative No. 2**	**Representative No. 3**
Formal role	Quality assurance responsible	Management role as corporate user representative	Management role as corporate user representative
Background	Advisor for information management and collaboration	Chief engineer of information systems	Project and product management
Project phase	Chartering, 2002-2004	Project version 1, 2005	Project version 2 and shakedown, 2006-2007

Table 2. Characteristics of the different corporate user representatives

At the outset the quality assurance responsible (No. 1) was assigned a kind of corporate user representative role, i.e. monitoring the project and reporting to the sponsor (03.2007). But at the end of the project chartering phase the need for a strong corporate role crystallized, and the steering committee decided that a management role as a corporate user representative was needed (04.2007b). The role therefore emerged, based on the project's experience (04.2007b). As a consequence, the first 'real' corporate user representative (No 2) was then appointed by the project sponsor, and mobilized a reference group consisting of representatives from relevant discipline networks and various business units representing end users (c.f. the solid lines in Figure 4). Representative No. 2 had a management background, as chief engineer of IS (03.2007), and filled the role during the most intense project phase, as version 1 was developed in 2005 (02.2007). A comment illustrates this: "but the period when [No. 2] was in office, it was pretty tough then, because it was in a way the most intense project period, well, before the solution was handed over… then I think it was of a great importance to have a very clear and crisp corporate user representative" (10.2006). As version 1 was well established, representative No. 2 entered a new position as IT manager of global business services. Representative No. 3 does not come from a comparable position as No 2 did, but is described as one who has personal power (03.2007). This personal power is exercised in an informal, open way, and is compared to a "libero" (or free, versatile type of centre back) (04.2007a).

5 FINDINGS: THE INFLUENCE OF THE CORPORATE USER REPRESENTATIVE

The corporate user representative role is in control of the customer power: "In reality the corporate user representative can be the one who holds on to all power, in fact. For if you view it from the business viewpoint, IT is there to deliver solutions to serve the business, isn't it? And then you as a corporate user representative will have quite a lot of power." (10.2006). This is in line with the steering committee members interviewed, that the corporate user representative may have an enormous influence in the project, if it is the right person (04.2007b). If the requirements are well anchored in the business units, the role has customer power: "The corporate user representative ought to be able to bring out, to get prioritized what is definitely most important for the business. Through that you ought to have enough power" (04.2007b).

The relationship between the steering committee and the corporate user representative can be described with words like negotiations, bargaining, struggle and disregard (03.2007). The corporate user representative had an important broker role to deal with conflicting priorities.

5.1 Different organizational influence processes for the corporate user representatives

The formal positions of the three corporate user representatives were different. Representative No. 2 was clearly positioned above the two others (02.2007).

The influence processes to the steering committee for representative No. 1 were upward, and downward to some project group members and lateral to others (02.2007). Influence tactics used were mainly rational persuasion, as well as some consultation: "Consultation, perhaps a touch of that, if there were particular issues that you knew would be topics for discussions, maybe you talked to one or two of the steering committee members in advance, eh, to be able to present [the matter] in a slightly different way" (02.2007).

According to the project managers, they needed a strong corporate user representative in the project phase, who could give direction by expressing the requirements of the business units. "As soon as we started to 'turn on' functionality [i.e. beyond standard], we had a greater need for acquiring … a strong and commanding user responsible, that really could put the business' requirements down on paper" (12.2005). This leads to the appointment of representative No. 2, whose management background gave him considerable position power: "What is more important than I was aware of, is the title. That I had the chief engineer title, helped tremendously. I am in a way myself, but in addition to being myself, there follows an authority and respect with that title in Statoil. As yet there is no one in corporate management that reconsiders a chief engineer's decision, which would take a lot. So when I finally say 'okay, now I have heard what you say, we do it this way', then in reality they regard my title as chief engineer every bit as much as [the fact] that it is NN who is corporate user representative, who made the decision" (03.2007). "And this means that I got off with play-offs. There were few play-offs concerning those decisions. So I think as a matter of fact that it has been important in the corporate user representative role, that we indeed have the right 'standing' in the organization to carry out that role… I got a lot free of charge with the chief engineer title" (03.2007).

Other informants confirm these viewpoints: "What may be the case is that he [No. 2] certainly has more weight in the organization, that he brings a history with him, into the role. Which may be NN [No. 3] after all is missing" (04.2007b). "It is my opinion that a person who is corporate user representative in such a project, ought to come from a reasonably solid position" (04.2007b). "When it came to NN [No. 2], he was in the process owner's staff, IS/IT, who was both sponsor and employer, so he was positioned higher in the organization; and by virtue of that he had a totally different power to prevail as a corporate user representative" (02.2007). "It is obvious that his words were really decisive in many contexts... he had power to apply pressure if he thought a matter was important… well, he [No. 2] was positioned relatively high in the hierarchy, both as regards respect from the

business and respect from the project… others need more diplomatic and a little by hook or by crook; that is, your word is not decisive, as with NN" [No. 2] (10.2006).

This power includes a pre-history in the enterprise (03.2007). Whereas position power was considered important by the corporate user representatives themselves, the steering committee members did not perceive position to be important (04.2007b). Representative No. 2's influence processes to the steering committee were lateral, and downward to the project group and reference group (03.2007). Influence tactics used were mainly rational persuasion, and consultation, although some situations included pressure: "Facing the project group I once in a while ended in a situation where I had to tell them: I hear what you say, but I am he who decides" (03.2007).

Representative No. 3 missed some of the position power that No 2 had (04.2007b), and was on a comparable position to representative No. 1: "but I think he has somewhat the same position that I had… he came from the same level in the organization too" (02.2007). Commenting on him, representative No. 2 stated: "But NN has a good share of 'personal power', and he is very clever, so he certainly handles the challenge better than the majority… But it confirms that… I do not think this [political skill] is enough… perhaps you get unnecessary lots of challenges, if you have too many relations of that kind [upward]" (03.2007). According to other informants, his influence processes to the steering committee were upward, there was a mixture of lateral and downward influence to the project group, and downward to the reference group (03.2007). According to representative No. 3's own judgment, there were lateral influence processes to some steering committee members, downward influence to the project group, and lateral influence to the project manager (03.2007). All the influence tactics were used, according to this corporate user representative. However, the steering committee members referred to consultation as the main influence tactic (04.2007b).

6   DISCUSSION

Based on the experiences of this case, the corporate user representative emerged as an important role. This case shows that corporate user representatives are particularly important in ES implementation projects, to specify business requirements. The role potentially controls an important resource, the business' acceptance of the system.

Although power is a messy and elusive concept (Jasperson et al., 2002), organizational influence processes (Porter et al., 2003) is a way to focus on the relative power of users in the dialogue with designers. As the corporate user representative role was analysed by means of organizational influence processes, important differences were found between the individuals filling the role. Through our analysis we have found that organizational influence processes account for important differences between the corporate user representatives in this ES implementation.

6.1   Organizational influence processes and corporate user representatives

Table 3 summarizes the directions of influence vis-à-vis steering committee, project group and reference group. Corporate user representative No. 2 had a higher formal position than the others, and according to Markus (1983) this gives legitimacy to use power resources. In terms of organizational influence processes he had lateral and downward influence processes and therefore avoided the problematic upward influence. This is line with Porter et al., (2003), to avoid upward influence and rather attempt lateral influence. This empowers the corporate user representatives, and is described in different ways by the informants: (i) a history in the organization, (ii) the right standing in the organization, (iii) he performed a management function, (iv) he avoided play-offs, (v) powerful and directing, considered beneficial by the project manager.

Although personal power is considered important by informants in this case, position power is necessary. Position power was not considered important by steering committee, but emphasized by all the others. Why position power was not considered important by steering committee is not clear, one explanation may be the influence tactics used. Of the nine influence tactics available (Yukl and Tracey, 2003), the corporate user representative mainly applied rational persuasion, and some consultation. None of these imply pressure.

Vis-à-vis	Representative No. 1	Representative No. 2	Representative No. 3
Steering committee	Upward influence	Lateral influence	Upward influence
Project group	Lateral influence	Downward influence	Lateral/ Downward influence
Reference group	Lateral influence	Downward influence	Lateral/ Downward influence

Table 3. The organizational influence processes of the corporate user representatives

Due to a lower formal position, corporate user representative No. 1 had to rely more on diplomatic skills, so a negotiator role was important. Corporate user representative No. 2 could more dictate from his position. Corporate user representative No. 3 also had to rely on personal skills, including his considerable personal power. This may also be an explanation for the wide spectre of influence tactics he applied. Although political skill (Ferris et al., 2003) is considered important, it may not be sufficient if there are upward influence processes. In order to function well vis-à-vis project group and steering committee, upward influence processes are to be avoided. Lateral influence requires a sufficiently high formal position. In addition to influence processes, personal characteristics such as the ability to listen are important for the role (Nordheim, 2008).

A criticism against corporate user representatives 2 and 3 was that they made too many decisions themselves. The organizational influence processes is not a likely explanation for this, since the two had different formal positions. Personal characteristics may be an explanation, possibly combined with the downward direction of influence to the reference group. Although representative No. 2 came from a position high enough to avoid upward influence processes, there was no indication in the data that the role was perceived as advocating management goals. In view of organizational influence processes, the appointment of ordinary users to the role may be risky. If they have to rely on upward influence processes, the risk of not being heard is considerable. Due to the enterprise-wide scope of an ES project, a lower proportion of affected users have opportunities to participate (Markus and Mao, 2004). In this ES context, the corporate user representative was not a user representative as such. S(he) represented the business units. End users from the different business units were represented in the reference group. User representation was therefore aggregated at two levels: the reference group, and the corporate user representative (c.f. Figure 4). One could argue that the role restricted end user participation, in the sense that user input was structured and prioritized. Reference group members did not always feel they were being heard. But this also depends on the composition of the reference group, as some reference group members were said to dominate. A strengthened reference group, internally balanced in terms of influence processes, may therefore have reduced the problem.

Organizational influence processes also raises the issue of the role as a change agent. Although No. 2 was an IS specialist, he was not a change agent according to a traditional IS model (Markus and Benjamin, 1996). Change agentry was rather a combination of some aspects of the facilitator model and the advocate model (ibid). Representative No. 2 established the reference group, by requesting business units to appoint their representatives. This implies a change agent in line with Markus and Mao (2004), designing and executing participation opportunities for stakeholders.

Organizational influence processes were in this case found useful as a theoretical lens to analyze important individual differences regarding the application of power by three different corporate user representatives. Due to the complexity and scope of an ES, the corporate user representative role requires an individual coming from a high enough formal position to avoid upward influence processes. This perspective is important, since value conflicts occur between stakeholders in ES

implementations (Allen, 2005), and there is a need for the management of user participation (Besson and Rowe, 2001) in ES projects. In view of organizational influence processes, the corporate user representative role should avoid the problematic upward influence, and this is an important criterion to look for when such a role is to be filled.

6.2   Implications for research

Our findings also indicate that the formal position of the individuals of the reference group needs careful consideration. The reference group is a vital single point-of-contact in each business unit, and could preferably be a balanced group to match the corporate user representative. To ensure lateral influence processes within the reference group appears important, but this needs to be explored.

7   CONCLUSION

Enterprise system implementation is a complex effort on a large scale. Based on the experiences of this case, the corporate user representative emerged as a critical role. Analyzed in terms of organizational influence processes, the case brings out important differences between the individuals filling the role.

At the outset a user representative (No. 1) had to perform upward influence processes due to a lower formal position. This impeded the responsibilities of the role. The corporate user representative (No. 2) appointed at the critical project phase, avoided the challenging upward influence processes. His formal position implied lateral influence processes to the steering committee and downward influence processes to the project group. This enabled clear directives for the project manager, who appreciated a powerful and directing corporate user representative. Based on the findings of this case, we therefore argue that a corporate user representative should be considered a management function, with adequate formal position to avoid upward influence processes.

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