The Influence of Organizational Politics on Business-IT Alignment

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ABSTRACT

Business-IT alignment continues to remain a top management concern. Regardless of ample research, achieving and sustaining business-IT alignment remains challenging to organization's management. To this day, the influence of organizational politics remains unstudied in the light of business-IT alignment. By performing a case study in a large organization in Sweden, the authors present and discuss how organizational politics influences business-IT alignment from the viewpoint of practitioners. They find that organizational politics has a negative influence on communications, partnering, IT governance, IT scope, and business and IT skills of the Strategic Alignment Maturity model. Furthermore, the authors identified several root causes for organizational politics in the business-IT alignment context, not addressed by the commonly used business-IT alignment constructs. The findings of this research study are useful to business and IT practitioners for achieving and sustaining business-IT alignment in their organizations considering the influence of organizational politics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Business-IT alignment (BITA) continues to be ranked as the top management concern in companies worldwide (Kappelman et al., 2016). This is not surprising considering the substantial amount of empirical evidence indicating that BITA has a positive influence on business performance (Chan et al., 1997; Gerow et al., 2014) leads to a more strategic utilization of IT (Chan et al., 2006) and supports the use of IT for achieving competitive advantage (Kearns & Lederer, 2004). Furthermore, Chan & Reich (2007) argue that organizations which successfully align their business and IT strategies will outperform those failing to do so. BITA has been studied since the 1970s (McLean & Soden, 1977), and there is still a need for researchers to extend the knowledge in this topic (Colton et al., 2015). According to Leonard & Seddon (2012) the reason for this is twofold: (1) the strategic benefits associated with BITA and (2) the fact that it is considered among the key management issues among the practitioners. Consequently, multiple models for analyzing BITA have been introduced in the literature. Suffice it to say, for most modern organizations it is not a question whether alignment is important or not, but rather how it is achieved and sustained (El-Mekawy et al., 2012). In spite of the large body of knowledge and widespread practitioner interest, attaining and sustaining BITA remains a complex and challenging undertaking for organizations in practice (Tarafdar & Qrunfleh, 2010). Therefore, it can be argued that greater focus on research should be put on understanding how BITA

can be achieved in practice and the factors influencing BITA maturity. While a substantial amount of research has been conducted on identifying barriers to alignment (Luftman et al., 1999; El-Mekawy et al., 2015a; Alaceva & Rusu, 2015) and on successfully achieving and sustaining alignment (Chan, 2002), the influence of organizational politics (OP) on BITA is missing from the research literature. Additionally, Luftman, et al. (2015) states that a vast majority of current BITA models lack political considerations. OP has been discussed in the literature since 1960s (Kimura, 2013) and remains an area of intense interest for academics and management practitioners alike (Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010). The impetus for the interest is clear. It can be argued that politics play a pervasive role in all organizations. Indeed, Ferris & Kacmar (1992, p. 1) argue that "politics in organizations is simply a fact of life". This view is echoed by Randolph (1985) who states that politics in organizations cannot be avoided. A great deal of research suggests that OP has a negative effect on organizational factors such as employee performance levels, increased pressure and stress levels at work, as well as negative attitudes between employees of different statuses (Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010). In addition, OP has shown to influence the effectiveness of strategic planning (Elbanna, 2016) and of strategic initiatives (Kreutzer et al., 2015). While these aforementioned studies have been conducted on areas related to BITA such as strategic planning and strategic initiatives, the literature is missing research regarding the influence of OP on BITA. Moreover, while the negative influence of OP on these related areas have been empirically validated, a more qualitative approach is required in order to understand the "how" and "why" OP has this negative influence on various management areas, including BITA. Subsequently, increasing the knowledge regarding how OP influences BITA can help organizations in better achieving and sustaining BITA. Therefore, it can be argued that it is likely that OP influences BITA as well. Both BITA and OP have been studied extensively (Chan & Reich, 2007; Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010) but yet each area of literature evolved separately and remain separate today.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore how OP influences BITA from the viewpoint of the practitioners. Considering the pervasiveness of politics in organizations (Buchanan, 2008) it would be a severe oversight to assume that OP plays no role in BITA.

In order to reach the aim of this study, the following research question was formulated: "How does organizational politics influence business-IT alignment? "and as sub-questions "What kind of political behaviors appear in the business-IT alignment context?"; What conditions give rise to these behaviors?; and "What are the consequences of these behaviors to business-IT alignment?".

The paper is organized into the following sections. In section 2 is presented the theoretical background regarding OP and BITA as well as the research conceptual framework. After that in section 3 is presented the research methodology with the research method, data collection and data analysis used in this study. Further on in section 4 are presented the results in the organization considered as case study, followed by a discussion of the results in section 5. Lastly, in section 6 are presented the conclusions, limitations, and the contributions of this research study.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1. Organizational Politics

The academic foundations of OP were postulated in the 1970s and early 1980s (Ferris et al., 2000; Hiekkanen et al., 2013) and as we noticed OP is a widely researched topic among organizational behavior (Elbanna, 2016). One of the first definitions states that behavior is considered political when "others are made use of as resources in competitive situations" (Burns, 1961, p. 1). Mayes & Allen (1977) have also explored the concept of OP in detail and propose a twofold definition of OP based on influence means and influence ends as well as on sanctioned and not sanctioned behavior. Further on Mintzberg (1985) posits and contrasts politics as one among a multitude of systems of influence in any given organization and the author describes system of authority as the legitimate usage of power which is formal, explicit, and legal. The system of ideology is implicit and represents the behavior that

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