



Chapter 8

Toward Comprehensive IS Project Alignment: The Case of Enterprise Resource Planning Deployment Within a Logistics Service Provider



Eddy Bajolle

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3943-6667>
CERGAM, Aix-Marseille University, France

Cécile Godé

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9148-2820>
CERGAM, Aix-Marseille University, France

Nathalie Fabbe-Costes

 0000-0001-5857-7994
 <https://orcid.org/>
CERGAM, Aix-Marseille University, France

ABSTRACT

Previous research offers limited and fragmented frameworks for information systems project alignment (ISPA). This study fills this gap by providing a comprehensive overview of the interplay between an IS project and its broader organizational context, and clarifying how contextual alignments relate to IS project success. ISPA is explored by observing a five-year implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system within a logistics service provider based in Europe and North Africa. The study's findings and key contributions highlight the plural, complex, and multifaceted nature of ISPA resulting from the interaction of strategy, structure, process, people, and culture between the project, business, and IS organization. This chapter presents a comprehensive ISPA framework and is expected to increase project managers' awareness of the context in which IS projects are managed.

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INTRODUCTION

Each year, thousands of information system (IS) projects are launched “using hardware, software, and/or networks to create a product, service, or result” (Schwalbe, 2019, p.3). Worldwide, IS spending was expected to reach 4.5 trillion dollars in 2022, representing an increase of 5.5% from 2021 (Gartner, 2021). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic compelled companies to accelerate digital transformation to remain competitive and adapt to clients’ move toward online channels (Seiler, 2020). Hence, IS projects have become essential for companies’ survival after the pandemic and continued development in an uncertain era. The 2020 Standish Group CHAOS Report indicates that almost half (47%) of all IS projects are late, over budget, or do not meet original specifications, and about one-fifth (19%) are canceled before completion (Johnson, 2020). These alarming considerations indicate significant difficulties for IS projects’ delivery of expected outcomes on schedule and budget.

Project misalignment has been determined as the origin of disappointing business results and project failure (Box & Platts, 2005; Srivannaboon & Milosevic, 2006; Patanakul & Shenhar, 2012; Alsudiri et al., 2013). Specifically, IS project alignment (ISPA) is defined as “the degree to which information system (IS) project deliverables are consistent with the project’s objectives, which are shaped by the organization’s IS strategy” (Jenkin & Chan, 2010, p.35). According to Jenkin and Chan (2010), ISPA influences project and firm performance. Project alignment, specifically ISPA research, has primarily focused on aligning project management (PM) with business strategy and ensuring alignment among project stakeholders. The broader organizational context in which IS projects are executed mainly revolves around strategic and social factors. Scarce are the studies that adopt a more open system approach to ISPA. Yet, the interplay between projects and their surrounding permanent organizations has long been the subject of research (Blomquist & Packendorff, 1998; Grabher, 2002; Engwall, 2003; Manning, 2008; Klimkeit, 2013) and still are in recent literature (Ren et al., 2019; Sydow & Windeler, 2020; Nilsson Vestola et al., 2021). These studies fall under the organizational perspective of project (Winter et al., 2006), considering projects as complex temporary systems (Packendorff, 1995) strongly influenced by the organizational context in which they are embedded. Organizational context can be understood at the project level as permanent organizational characteristics that facilitate or constrain successful project implementation. These characteristics have been addressed by previous research (Shenhar, 1999; Engwall, 2003; Manning, 2008; Klimkeit, 2013; Ren et al., 2019; Pinto, 2019), which advocates consideration of the interplay of critical elements (i.e., strategy, structure, system or process, people, politics and culture) between projects and their parent organization. Contextual alignment issues (i.e., alignment

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