Learning by negotiation – Implementing a journal management system

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LEARNING BY NEGOTIATION – IMPLEMENTING A JOURNAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

TRACK: MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Abstract

This study investigates how an international academic journal invests in an information system. Following the criticism that learning in an organisation is not conflict free the study sketches the decision making around the information system as a series of negotiations. The case shows that during these negotiations, the information system played the role of a boundary object that resulted in the editorial team understanding the system in different ways than previously. These negotiations paved the way for learning in the organisation, with the information system highlighting differences among the participants involved with the journal.

Keywords: Learning, Negotiation, Journal management system, Social world

1 INTRODUCTION

Recent years has seen a steady increase in academic outlets in variety of disciplines (Larsen & von Ins 2010), resulting in newly established academic journals that compete with existing journals. This competition is not an easy one: the new journals have to attract good papers/authors, be able to process these papers and add value to them, and then spread the word around of their existence and attract readers– three actions/processes that have taken the established journals years to hone.

Information technology (IT), needless to say, has played a role in this increase of outlets. It has enabled access to information and people, as well as opened up distribution channels that did not exist before. Thus it is not surprising that IT offers solutions to help these new journals in competing with the existing ones.

However, to be able to offer any help, the IT solutions has to be adopted by the organization. This issue is further aggravated, as there are no barriers for the established journals to use same solutions themselves. As Carr (2003) pointed out, IT would not automatically provide advantage to the organization, especially as the best practices are easily copied. For the implementation to be successful and bear this potential advantage, the organization has to go through a learning process.

This learning process is what motivates this paper. In a small international journal setting, the process of learning in a journal management system implementation is investigated. Following the arguments that organizational learning is not conflict free (see: Contu & Willmott, 2003), this paper sketches this learning process as a series of negotiations. By highlighting the challenges encountered by the editorial team and how they managed these challenges through these negotiations, the paper aims to provide an account of how an academic journal (hereafter Business Journal) makes investments in information systems (IS).

Following this brief introduction, the paper continues with section two, a short literature review on organizational learning, drawing mainly from IS perspective. Section three provides a theoretical framework for the study, followed by the research design in the next section. The case is presented and analysed in the two following sections, with section seven concluding the paper.
2 LEARNING AND IS

The issues related to learning and organizational learning are not new to the IS researchers. There are many potential benefits associated with IS implementations, often associated with benefits through standardization, automation and centralization. However, as noted by Orlikowski and Robey (1991) introduction of IS more often than not means an organizational change. It is these changes that Brynjolfsson and Hitt (2000) argue would result in gains from the IT investments, and to be able to cope with these changes, organizational learning is necessary (Robey & Sahay 1996; Gregor et al. 2006).

One obvious choice to learn is by formal learning. However, as Lave and Wenger (1991) argue, formal learning is just one way, and not necessarily how learning is done in practice. They argue that learning is situated in everyday practice and that learning takes place by observation and imitation, and by socializing within their communities. IS researchers have similarly recognized the value of learning by participation (Robey et al. 2000). As the review by Robey et al. (2000) shows, there are myriad of factors that are important in successful implementation, but as Wastell (1999) notes learning by participation is a essential for the success of IS development and implementation.

This learning process means involvement of different stakeholders. Within the developer-user context, the need for effective communication and understanding what the other party wants from the IS has been recognized for a long time (Boland Jr. 1978; Wastell 1999). The political use of emails as a “rebellion” against top managers resulted in the project of introducing emails in a university setting deemed as unsuccessful, showing that though learning took place, stakeholders did not view the system in similar fashion, and that organizational politics play a role in learning (Romm et al. 1996). From a soft system methodology strain, a similar issue is taken by Westelius (2006) in which a large Swedish organisation tries to implement web applications. Though the parties involved agree that the web applications are important and change occurs, how they view the change and what they expect from it differs: for example the local clubs resisting the headquarters, as they see the initiative as a tool for centralisation. Coupled with this issue of different stakeholders, and their different stakes, the automation provided by the IS, and the probability of this leading to de-skilled workforce and loss of knowledge is also a concern touched in the literature (see: Orlikowski and Barley (2001)).

The inclusion of the users to the development/implementation process might be a result of different ideals, as Bjerknes and Bratteteig (1995) argue: to acquire relevant knowledge; to reduce resistance and to increase work place democracy. However, similar to the criticism raised by Contu and Willmott (2003), Mengiste and Aanestad (2013) argue that though the issues related to learning and participation can be found in the literature, power relations and how they affect the learning is not taken into consideration often. As Romm et al. (1996) argue, even the mention of the power relations itself is usually taken as a detrimental factor. Following this brief literature review, following Mengiste and Aanestad (2013), this paper aims to bring the negotiations among the stakeholders and how the power relations were settled in this learning process the journal has gone through.

3 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Similar to Mengiste and Aanestad (2013), social worlds provide a part of the theoretical lens for this research. Social world is a concept used by Strauss (1978) and later by Clarke (1991), and has seen use in various disciplines, with several examples in science and technology studies (for a review see: Clarke and Star, 2008). In Clarke’s (1991) argument, social worlds are “the fundamental building blocks of action” and "at least one primary activity (along with related activities), ... sites where activities occur ... [and] technology (inherited or innovative means of carrying out the social world's activities)” (Strauss, 1978 cited in Clarke, 1991, p. 131). For social worlds there is no formal membership and they might be geographically
Spreading. What ties them, however, is effective communication (Clarke 1991). Social worlds are, in line with the action orientation found in works of Strauss, spaces of “perceptions and action” and “groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals, and building shared ideologies about how to go about building their business.” (Soeffner 1991, p.363)

Social worlds is closely related to the concept of arena: “a field of action and interaction among a potentially wide variety of collective entities” (Clarke 1991, p.128) and are characterized with clashes between the social worlds, a “means of battle” (Soeffner 1991). Arenas are where “conflict, competition, cooperation, exchange, and negotiation” take place, where a negotiated order is achieved. In these arenas, “various issues are debated, negotiated, fought out, forced and manipulated by representatives” of the participating social worlds (Strauss 1991, p.239). Negotiated order is a perspective to look at the interaction between the structure and the human agency. Following from Strauss’ work on mental hospitals, the social order is attained by negotiations among different actors where the members of the team had to hammer out their own “line of action in relation to the team as a whole and to the operational philosophy that came to predominate the ward” (Strauss et al. 1964, p.142). This order is a result of constant negotiations, and thus is saddled with occasional breakdowns, and to attain the order, the stakeholders have to engage with each other. Even rules, Strauss et al. (1964) argue are a result of on-going negotiations, even though they are usually conceptualized as exempt from the negotiation process. In such negotiations, the individuals represent their social worlds in the arena, and negotiate.

It is this focus on negotiation, and the order created as a result, that makes the arena/social world theory a useful tool to look at the implementation of the IS. Following Clarke’s (1991) adoption of boundary object to the social world/arena theory, one can conceptualize the IS as one. Boundary object is a concept to explain things that exist at the junctures where different social worlds meet in an arena of mutual concern (Star & Griesemer 1989). In its role as the boundary object IS acts as an “object that is translated to address the multiple needs or demands placed upon it by the different social worlds that “meet” around” (Clarke, 1991, 134), and acts, as Jonsson et al. (2009) argue more than just a mediator.

As can be seen, most of the concepts mentioned are rather similar to concepts used by other theories mobilised within IS research, among others Giddens’ structuration theory. Similar to structuration theory, social world/arena and negotiated order argue that structure and agents co-create each other, and should not be taken as separate. The agency of the individual is constrained by the structure, but the agents are still autonomous enough to affect the structure. Such similarities between these two theoretical lenses were noted by Carey (2002, p.202) who argued that the sociology promoted by social interactionism – Strauss being a member of this group – was “

(Barley 2008). As such, negotiated order and social worlds/arena theory should be taken as complementary to structuration theory, arguing that it is the situated behaviours that one should focus to observe the changes in structure and agency.

4 Setting and Approach

In this study, a single case study design was selected. As the aim of the study is to highlight the negotiations that took place in the learning process of an organization, the study has longitudinal elements that makes single case study design appropriate (Yin 2009). Another reason that motivated such a design stemmed from the fact that one of the editors of Business Journal works at the same institution as the author, providing ease of access to the case setting. This ease of access, as well as the aim to show how the negotiations took place,
further cemented the use of single case design, which as Siggelkow (2007) argues has the strong potential of displaying dynamic processes.

The study was conducted with an interpretivist approach (Walsham 1995; Walsham 2006), informed by the principles laid out by Klein and Myers (1999). As such the study makes no claims of being objective in the positivist sense. As the construction of meaning between the author and the editors resulted in several iterations of interpretation, the understanding of the case has changed for both parties. Similarly, the interpretation of the case has changed as new data was incorporated to the study. Both of these issues mirror two of the principles laid out by Klein and Myers (1999), and as such deviates from the objective research espoused in the positivist sense.

The data for the study was collected via qualitative semi-structured interviews, as well as observations. The easy access to one of the editors has made it possible to see how the editors engaged with each other as well as other stakeholders as challenges arose during work. More importantly, such access made it possible to see how the editor participated and negotiated with other parties in informal settings, for example in a coffee room talk. The notes taken during the observations were later on re-written and used for the analysis. For the interviews, three out of the five editors were interviewed, with the interviews averaging one hour. The interviews were digitally recorded and were summarised. Follow up interviews were conducted to further clarify some issues that came up during the interviews and observations, resulting in an iterative process of creating a full picture by using parts of the accounts provided. The follow up interviews also provided an opportunity for the editors to check how their accounts were interpreted by the author, giving them the chance of clarifying their accounts as well as to see the Business Journal in a new setting.

5 BUSINESS JOURNAL

Business Journal was founded 5 years ago by a group of colleagues that at the time were working at the same university. This group of would-be editors has decided to establish a journal that has studies of emerging markets as its main focus, with emphasis on empirically grounded papers. Situated in Business Studies and Economics, the Journal has been posed as a venue for studies from varying sectors and backgrounds, and was able to attract papers ranging from macro level studies – oil prices and stock exchange – to micro level studies – concerning value making in a journal.

The role of the IT/IS for the running of the Journal was not something that was consciously touched upon in a strategic manner when the Journal was founded. The role of the IT/IS – and how the editorial team treated it – has evolved through time. For the sake of this study, two episodes relating to the IT/IS decisions taken by the editorial team are presented. While these episodes might seem as two distinct points in time, the decisions taken at the first phase depend on previous decisions, just as the later episode depends upon the first. In the following parts, the decision about using a cloud system, as well as the idea of moving to an open source journal management system, are presented.

5.1 Growing with cloud

As mentioned, Business Journal was founded by a group of colleagues, who at the time were working at the same university. One of the main reasons for establishing the journal was a reaction against the established system. As the would-be editors were starting their academic careers, they felt that they were not getting the support that is needed from their environment. The system argued for publishing more, but at the same time it was set up in a way that favoured senior faculty that have already published papers. From another angle, a general dissent was found among the editorial team and their colleagues that the “gatekeepers” of the publishing industry were, for one reason or another, against them. One way to solve this issue was to set up their own journal.
In the early days, most of the tasks the editorial team did were supported by informal ways: having face-to-face meetings when there are problems, discussing it at one of the rooms, having a chat over coffee. The IT solution that was used predominantly at this time was emails. However, as the journal began to grow, the number of submissions to track increased. The editors were not able to see who was involved with a submitted paper, and what the progress of the paper was within the review system. The issues related to this knowledge management “mess” were further aggravated as the editors kept track of what they had done – and perhaps more importantly why they made a particular decision – mostly in an uncodified, implicit manner.

The unconscious adoption of email for Business Journal turned out not to be enough for the editorial team. Around this time, the cloud services, like Dropbox and Google Drive were gaining more visibility, and one of the editors put the issue on the table. If they would be using such a service, they would be able to see the process of the papers in “real time”, and see who is involved with the paper.

While the agreement to have a cloud service was easily achieved, this did not mean that the emails were to be scraped out. It was the main communications tool among the editors, as well as how they communicated with the other parties involved with the Journal. While the cloud service would be able to handle some communication among the editors, email was a familiar tool for all involved, and necessitated no maintenance on the user side.

Though the agreement was easily achieved, this did not mean that there was only one voice during the discussions. The editors were all familiar with using the office programme provided to them in their universities: should they pick a system where they put the documents in this form like Dropbox, or should they adopt one that has these documents already within as with Google Drive, which included Google Documents?

This small divergence of ideas was expressed as having a full package, where everything can be settled by using the tools the system provided, versus using the tools the editors already used but store the resulting documents in the cloud.

Editor 1 commented in the interview that the choice of going for a cloud service perhaps was not the best decision, but at the time it was the only decision they could have. The editorial team was expecting that they would get some backing from the university, as they felt establishing Business Journal fell within the university’s call for increased internationalization and visibility. However, the response they got from the university was that it was not possible for the university to provide support.

This clash between the university and the editors, situated in different social worlds was one of the more formal points of negotiation. More recognizable for in the academia perhaps is the clash of the expectations that a faculty member has. A quote from Editor 1 highlights these tensions:

_I guess we fall to the same mistakes that we warn our students about. We saw it [cloud service] as a solution, but we didn’t think too much about it somehow. We knew it might not be enough but at the time it was what we did. Tight schedules, exams to correct, you know. You can not not do them, so you give up from your own time to keep the Journal alive. (Editor 1)_

This quote highlights the pressures that arose from different social worlds that the editors belong to. On the one hand they are employed by their respective university/department, meaning that they need to fulfil some officially defined roles. On the other hand, the social world of being an editor of a newly established journal demands that the editors engage with the daily operations of the journal, thus clashing with the university related responsibilities. These responsibilities were further aggravated, as the editors recall, as all of them had to fill some roles – giving lectures, grading exams, supervising students – with very short notice.
In these early phases of Business Journal, IT/IS strategy was not fleshed out. However, as mentioned before, it became clear that the role that IT/IS played came to the forefront of the editors minds. The move from the emails – which was an established form of communicating – to use Google Drive necessitated handling different opinions: what should the spreadsheets contain as information; when is the appropriate time for uploading documents, i.e. copyright notice of the submission, the final draft?

The five colleagues take turns to be the “chief” editor for the volume/issue they are working with. This resulted in the editors playing different roles during the work process of the Journal. While the chief editor is responsible for fulfilling the editorial role, the other editors’ networks were used to find reviewers. In this case, who should contact the reviewer? Should the reviewer contact her friend or the chief editor? Who will keep track of these email conversations? Though all of them felt the frustration of trying to track down who has done what, the problems associated with this lack of knowledge sharing and knowledge management persisted.

Another stream was the issue of security of the cloud. While the editors would benefit from moving some part of the work involved to the cloud service, that would mean that an external party would be hosting the information gathered in the Journal. Aside from the issues related to downtime or loss of the stored documents, this meant that the author’s contributions have to be secured in such a way that there won’t be a breach of confidentiality. This resulted in selecting a well-known provider for the service, rather than the one offered by one of the universities that one of the editors was affiliated with.

These concerns led the editors to consciously engage how they operate, and what the concerns for various parties in the Journals work system could be. They had to negotiate among themselves to see how they could benefit from the system. The cloud system also made them realise that though the solution provided helped to solve some of the issues they faced, other issues persisted. In this manner, going from emails to the cloud enabled the editors to see the Journal from other social worlds – as a reviewer, as an editor, as a faculty member – and resulted in consolidation of what needs to be done for the next step. The use of spreadsheets and what information needed to be put there showed a reflection of the experiences of the editors as “editors” as well as “managers”. As the editing of the submissions progressed the more managerial tasks of keeping track of the process began to take precedence, resulting in the editors trying to balance their quest for good academic papers that fit Business Journal, with adopting work processes to a system so that they could follow the submission.

5.2 Aiming for maturity

As previously mentioned, the learning process is an on-going one, and as the Journal evolved, the need for a more capable IS became apparent. Though the cloud system complimented the email communication, the editors still kept most of their knowledge implicit. The new cloud system enabled them to see if the copyright notice was there, but that presupposed that somebody would put it there. Thus while using Google Drive has complemented the emails, it only offered ad-hoc support. This resulted in another round of negotiations about what to do, and the editors decided a more formal IS was needed.

The issue was put on the table after the editors realized that the cloud system was not providing much of a support to the team. Editor 1 related to this problem as a continuity issue. She argued that if one of the editors left the journal, the newcomers would have a hard time to decipher what is in the cloud service. She argued that especially with the voluntary nature of the work, and with all the other pressures they face in their work lives, they were not able to have a concrete way of establishing a system that would enable them to “pass on the torch” to newcomers. In her own words, “We needed to have a system that I can rely on and understand as a newcomer that hasn’t worked with this journal before” (Editor 1).
However, as mentioned by all the editors, the voluntary nature of the work, and the pressures exerted by other obligations, makes it hard to set up a system that will satisfy all the needs. Another colleague of the author has remarked that the situation is what she faces with her own research, where the studied projects are designed by today’s standards, which might become obsolete as soon as the users of the project changes. This concern about the future resulted in a more intense negotiation phase – this time more consciously done – about how to solve the situation.

One part of the negotiation was the formal request of the editors to have backing of their universities. They felt that if they had such backing it might provide them with more legitimacy. Being hosted by the university, even if the Journal is not recognised as affiliated with it, would make the readership wider. Similar ideas were expressed in earlier stages too, but they were not as consciously sketched out. However, when one of the editors met with the university representatives, the answer they got was not what they expected. The editors thought that by establishing the Journal they were implicitly helping the visibility of the universities they are employed at. Similar to this, they thought being an editor also fulfilled the call for increased internationalisation. The answer that was given to them to their request, however, was that since this was not a university project the university cannot back Business Journal.

This official response led to the editors asking for help from their respective IT departments. They had discussions about the systems that the editors had heard about, and if the IT personnel had an idea about what might be suitable. These brief negotiations helped the team to realise that they might be able to find a suitable solution, where the IT personnel’s knowledge would be used to match the systems to the requirements of the editors. Unfortunately, these helpful instances occurred only when the parties could arrange a time to meet. As the Journal was not a university project, the help the IT departments would give had to be on voluntary basis.

Learning from their experience with the cloud, and realising that just a change of IT/IS might not be enough, the editors also decided to sit down and discuss what the job entails, and what parts the IT/IS can help solve. This resulted, once again, in once again a series of brief negotiations among the editors. The process of shortlisting the journal management systems, the issues about simplicity, and how in the future the system would look like was discussed. The editors that had experience from using such systems for other work, e.g. as a conference chair, were more willing to adopt a system they thought would benefit them and have the functionalities needed. This was countered by the idea that this might mean increased financial costs: the already existing set-up was near free, so any additional system of this magnitude would mean significant increase. As Editor 2 puts it: “In the end we had several options – some matched us better than the others, but if you don’t have the backing of the university, and if you don’t expect the authors to pay for the cost of using such a system, you actually don’t have that many options.”

This negotiation phase resulted in the editors scrutinising how they actually work. Though the existing system was not that intuitive to help them, the team has realised that even the best system would not perform perfectly unless the participants came to an understanding about how to use the system. By arguing over what is needed in their IS the editors entered a phase of learning about publishing and knowledge management. As editor 2 mentioned, “It takes time to get a grip about what you need. You know it [publishing process], but you don’t know it until you are in it. We had to learn the tricks to ease the process.” By forcing the editors to express their wants and needs, and to see the constraints in place – like an unwilling university administration and short term demands posed by teacher roles – the IS played the role of a boundary object that facilitated learning.

Similarly, the IS played another role in pushing the editors to think about the competition. Some time ago, one of the editors has realised that a new journal with a very similar name, and similar scope and aim had been established. This increased competition was introduced to
the social world of the editors and made them aware that now they had to think about how the IS would be seen from the outsiders. By employing some of the journal management systems, they would be able to have a system that would be used not for the internal demands of the editors and reviewers, but would also be able to present a unified, corporate face to the authors and readers. This necessity to show a corporate face was similar to the earlier episode where the editorial role was contrasted with the managerial role – perhaps an ownership role, as the editors’ account showed that they are emotionally engaged with the Journal.

6 A BRIEF ANALYSIS

Following the case description above, this section revisits the case and highlights the issues using the theoretical lens of social world/arena theory. In both of the episodes, the IT/IS, at first a cloud service and later a journal management system, has played the role of a boundary object. In both episodes, these objects resulted in the editorial team being engaged with negotiations, among the team itself, as well as with other external parties.

One such external party was the university that the editors wanted to have as backer of the Journal. The idea that the university might be willing to help them with setting up a journal management system, and providing them with a server, however was shot down quickly. The editors believed that the Journal fits to the University’s strategy, whereas the University argued that the Journal was not a university project. This clash of interest to some extent stemmed from the question of ownership, as the editors did not want to let the Journal be managed by the University, whereas University did not want to commit to a project that it can not influence. This situation can be taken as a power struggle: the editors asking the University a second time, after the Journal solidified itself further can be seen as a tactic to offset the power struggle they faced before, and the University holding its ground. This clash of social worlds resulted in the editorial team taking the matters in their own hands.

This rejection itself has further triggered another set of negotiations, in which the editorial team asked help from the IT departments, to get an idea of what to expect from a journal management system, and to feel out if they would be willing to help if the need arises. This in turn resulted in a mutual learning process of both the IT department and the editors of what needs to be in a system, as well as what can go wrong.

As the help from the IT department would be limited due to the rejection of the University to provide support, this part of the negotiations were rather informal. A more formal negotiation occurred at the same time among the editors. As they were also providing their time voluntarily – and financing the existing systems – there was the issues of how to finance a new system. The shortlisting of the systems that was helped by the IT department – as well as the informal networks the editors used – was negotiated over from the financing issue, with some editors showing reluctance to a new system. A direct result of this discussion was the decision to look at open source solutions for the journal management system.

Through these negotiations, the editorial team not only learning about the IT/IS component of their work system, but also learned about the whole process of publishing. As the case description highlighted, the IT/IS has played the role of the boundary object, through which the editors had to negotiate their different demands due to belonging different social worlds. The experience they had as an author and reviewer for other venues made it possible for them to see the issue at hand from two different but connected sub-social worlds present in the social world around publishing.

Just as this negotiation phase was going on, similar to the ownership dilemma between university and editorial team, the clash of the editors social world and the managers social world necessitated them to map out what their work process is like and create a requirement list, rather than opting for ad-hoc solutions. Though editors, acting from the social world of editor were more interested in attracting good quality papers and the publishing process around it, when they were put into the manager position, they had to see the situation from
another point of view. The need for rationalisation and standardisation, so that a common ground for knowledge sharing can be built upon was realised, not for the ease of operations, but for the future survival of the journal.

As these negotiations shown, the understanding of the editorial team of both the IT/IS and the Journal and its environment itself have changed over time. This learning process, as some of the earlier literature about learning in organisations has not been a smooth process, but has involved multiple parties, coming from different social worlds. The ability – and the necessity – of the editors to shift between different social worlds have highlighted how this process is not a homogeneous, linear one, but rather a fragmented one where the decisions are negotiated. Similar to what is discussed in the social world/arena theory and negotiated order, such decisions are temporally limited, when consequences change, a new order has to be negotiated. One example of such change occurred when one of the editors has realised that competition was increasing, and they needed to have a corporate front to be counted as a legitimate journal. Clashing with the structure that the editorial can not change, the pressures were incorporated to their discussions, and the negotiations had to include a new set of criteria that the IS needs to fulfil.

The negotiations between different social worlds are briefly depicted in Figure 1 below. The figure for simplicity purposes depicts different sub-worlds as distinct from each other. However, as noted before an individual belongs to different social worlds, e.g. the editor can also be a member of university administration, as well as a reviewer. Similarly, for easier reading, boundary objects are connected to the social worlds with lines, whereas they cross boundaries. Several social worlds were only implicated in the negotiations, as shown with dotted lines in connection to the boundary objects, depicted as clouds. Some issues raised during the negotiations and some learning results are depicted in rectangles.

![Figure 1. Social worlds and negotiated order of Business Journal](image)

This paper has followed the stream of research that criticized the conventional understanding of learning as a smooth process, i.e. Contu and Willmott (2003), and followed the recommendation of Mengiste and Aanestad (2013) to use social worlds/arena theory as a theoretical lens. The case presented however, differed from their case, as Business Journal has included fewer participants in their work system, and the negotiations took place in a
microcosm, as opposed to the hierarchical national level agencies found in their research. In this case, there were power structures. However, aside from the University exerting their official power, most of the power struggles remained subtle. This to some extent has been a result of the editors being involved with similar sub-worlds – as an author, reviewer, and editor – thus enabling them to shift between their social worlds swiftly. However, this does not mean the process was conflict-free: when issues related to adopting a system that necessitates further financing, the managerial and editorial views have clashed. Even though all these people have worked together, such differences necessitated them to look at their own work practices, not just the IT/IS components that they intended to discuss.

The tensions shown in a small case such as presented here shows that the issues related to learning in an organization is still not a conflict free area. Though the editors all had very similar goals and to some extent background, their perception of the challenges, and thus how to solve them resulted in a series of negotiations. By playing the role of boundary object the IT/IS has made those differences visible to the editorial team, forcing them to contemplate the issues from other angles to survive, thus facilitation iterative learning cycles with every new negotiation.

7 Conclusions

This study has aimed to and provide an account on how an academic journal invests in an IS, by sketching how the learning in the organization took place as the editors contemplated their IT/IS solutions. In line with the criticism raised by Contu and Willmott (2003), and following Mengiste and Aanestad (2013), the learning process was conceptualized as a series of negotiations, where the end result is a semi-stable order. In such a scenario, going from IT solutions that provided ad-hoc solutions, to a more formal IS similar to a case management system, IT/IS has played the role of a boundary object upon which the actors involved with the Business journal has negotiated their interests.

The case has shown that even though all the editors come from similar background and similar aims, they had different roles during the investment process, shifting from the editor to a manager role, as well as seeing the journal from the perspective of a reviewer or an author. External actors has also shaped the decision process, necessitating a series of negotiations among the editors, University and IT department, through which the editorial team increased their understanding of the IT/IS as well as the Journal and publishing process itself.

Though in Mengiste and Aanestad (2013), the object of the study and the involved parties were on a macro-level, the case has shown that learning in a relatively homogenous organization is not a conflict free process. Conversely, though subtler than the power struggles than noted by them, the case here has shown that power struggles play a role in learning and should be taken into account.

Some implications can be drawn from the case. Adopting social worlds/arena and negotiated order can provide a situated analysis of IS development and implementation in organisations, showing the dynamism how the structure and agency co-create each other. Using negotiations and social worlds, the role of IT/IS as not merely mediating communication but also making the differences that were not visible or spoken about before better understood.

Continuing this strain, the case has highlighted how the IT/IS has played the role of a boundary object. However, of notice is that for the object to play this role, it has to be brought to the table and negotiated over. The case has shown that negotiations are the instantiation of this boundary object role, where the IS’s potential to reveal and bring together the different perspectives occur. This can be taken as an indicator that further research can be focused on the negotiations to study change and IS as boundary objects.
Considering how the issues raised by the editors closely resemble factors for adopting other IS systems, e.g. accommodating increased system capacity, creating a formal face, elimination of delay in ERP literature (Markus & Tanis 2000), use of social worlds/arena and negotiated order can provide a useful lens to look at adoption and implementation processes in general. As mentioned, in its role as boundary object, the IS made the differences among stakeholders visible. This can be taken as a practical implication, highlighting how even in a homogenous group – the editorial team – differences due to different social worlds are present. Identifying the possible stakeholders, and their social worlds would help in anticipating possible scenarios in negotiations, thus easing an organisational change process. By ironing out the differences to the extent that a workable solution can be agreed upon, the wider resistance to organisational change can be mediated, highlighting the need for being open to negotiations and willing to listen to others. From another perspective, negotiations can also highlight the stakeholders that are suppressed and further problematize why such a situation occurs and how this unbalanced representation can be solved.

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REFERENCES


