

Abstract

What really constitutes project success?

– a study of success, failure, evaluation criteria and influencing factors in the context of
IT supported process innovation

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History has shown that IT supported process innovation projects are complex undertakings. Even though there exist dramatic success stories, the failure rate is high. This is despite lots of effort being put into these projects, managing and executing them. The common response to success and failure has been to attempt to uncover the causes to why the project turned out as it did. However, there has been little broad-based research evaluating the success of process innovation initiatives and only a few have carried out in-depth studies on what success is and to whom and thus questioned the ease with which some authors and commentators have attributed success and failure to these projects. Within IS research the literature on the subject refers to different phenomena's when talking about success and failure as well as different measures of the phenomena's. Furthermore, there exist a wealth of differing or contradictory perceptions of what caused the specific outcome (Kwon & Zmud, 1987; Sauer, 1993). Based on these observations, the conception of success and success factors still seems to be inadequate. One objection is that it has not done justice to the actual complexities and various opinions surrounding the concepts. This has given rise to this thesis' problem area. The thesis addresses the concepts of success and failure, evaluation criteria and influencing factors. IT and human beings influence each other in the specific instantiation and there is thus no predictability to which outcome the particular instantiation will have. This has great implications for the study of the success or failure of IT supported process innovation – maybe success or failure can not be engineered in advance or engineered but is rather emergent in the particular context. In order to understand the complexity and ambiguity in relation to the 'success' or 'failure' of an IT supported process innovation project an interpretative approach is adopted. Consistent with this the case study is preferred as the appropriate research method because it allows the researcher to get a deeper insight into a limited unit of analysis – the case –

enabling an explorative uncovering of nuances and shades that will provide a thorough understanding. An inductive approach is adopted both in the generation of the empirical materials and in the analysis. The former is done via interviews while the latter is done utilizing Grounded Theory techniques which allows for understanding of contextual and processual elements and also the actions of key players. 12 projects are included in the study and 4 stakeholders in each have been interviewed. The findings suggest that 3 elements are in play when talking about success:

- Success/failure
- Evaluation criteria
- Influencing factors

The attribution of success and failure seems to be a process rather than a single, discrete event. In the process the individual makes sense out of a number of evaluation criteria in relation to the project, the context, political and cultural elements etc. The outcome of the process is manifested in a decision or a construction (the project is a 'success' or a 'failure'). There is no straightforward 1:1 relation between the evaluation criteria and success/failure; the evaluation criteria are weighed and juggled around in the concrete instance and context. Therefore different stakeholders can come up with different constructs on basis of "the same" project and "the same" evaluation criteria. 5 evaluation criteria categories were found and these can be seen as the building blocks that the evaluation of the project is build out of. The evaluation criteria are found to interrelate; they can both contribute positively to other criteria but also obstruct one another. Furthermore 21 factors perceived as having influenced (both positively and negatively) on the evaluation criteria were found. I term these as 'influencing factors' and not 'success factors', as they do not in them self lead to success or failure, but rather influence the evaluation criteria. The influencing factors are also seen to interrelate and affect one another both positively and negatively. Furthermore, many of the factors can influence on several of the evaluation criteria.