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Abstract

With the continually evolving social nature of information systems research there is a need to identify different "modes of analysis" (Myers, 1997) to uncover our understanding of the complex, messy and often chaotic nature of human factors. One suggested mode of analysis is that of social dramas, a tool developed in the anthropological discipline by Victor Turner. The use of social dramas also utilises the work by Goffman (1959; 1997) and enables the researcher to investigate events from the front stage, reporting obvious issues in systems implementation, and from the back stage, identifying the hidden aspects of systems implementation and the underpinning discourses. A case study exploring the social dramas involved in systems selection and implementation has been provided to support the use of this methodological tool.

Keywords

System selection and implementation, power, politics, IS methodologies, discourse, social drama

INTRODUCTION

The discipline of Information Systems has been evolving and as a result adopted a more social-technical approach to aspects of information systems (Mitev, 2001; Orlikowski, 1992). For example, Mitev (2001) and Orlikowski (1992) have explored the systems implementation process using a social-technical approach. Similarly, Steen and his colleagues highlight the potential influence of socio-technical issues in IT service provision (Steen et al., 2004). In another recent paper (Lichtenstein et al. 2004) socio-technical issues have been shown to be critical to a successful service-oriented requirements engineering approach. The example provided by Lichtenstein et al. (2004) includes service roles and responsibilities, resolution of conflicting requirements and service team structure.

According to Mitev (2001, p. 84), there is a need to consider the social-technical approach in information systems research in order to "move beyond commonsense explanations of failure and success and find more complex and richer ways of understanding the use of IS in organisations through the inclusion of broader social, economic, political, cultural and historical factors" (Mitev, 2001, p. 84). Rather than view aspects of information systems such as requirements engineering or systems implementation from a pure technical approach, or a simplistic categorical approach there is an element of the "social" missing. Like all social processes, these aspects of information systems are inevitably chaotic, messy and encumbered with values, ideology and other social practices.

With this uptake of social-technical research, there is a need to consider different approaches to collecting and analysing data. By adopting a qualitative approach to this research, it is acknowledged that researchers are able to study social and cultural phenomena (Myers, 1997). However, the focus of this paper is not on qualitative data collection methods. Rather, there is a need to explore different data analysis techniques.

In his seminal work, Myers (1997) believes that researchers should, "speak of 'modes of analysis' rather than 'data analysis' in qualitative research." Myers (1997) discusses potential "modes of analysis" such as "hermeneutics, semiotics, and approaches which focus on narrative and metaphor." It is suggested here that one mode of analysis that is proposed is that of social dramas. The concept of social dramas has been adopted from the work by Victor Turner in the anthropological discipline.

The methodological analogy of social dramas will be illustrated in a case study in this paper in order to discuss the obvious sets of events involving power and politics in the systems selection and implementation process. The focus of the study is on the social issues involved in systems selection and implementation, rather than on the system implementation process itself. The technical aspect of systems selection and implementation refers to the tools, methodologies, procedures and techniques utilised to implement a system, whereas the social aspect of systems selection and implementation refers to the human factors involved, such as the political environment.

SOCIAL DRAMAS

The concept of social dramas maintains that a social system and the inherent social relations of people or groups establishes and re-establishes a social equilibrium (Turner, 1957). However, balances are typically disrupted through political, cultural and social challenges. As a result, social disequilibrium or imbalance occurs. Readjustments need to happen in order to restore the balance. As Turner (1957) argued, when readjustments are made "profound modifications" may occur. In other words, the new social equilibrium is rarely a replica of the old equilibrium. By viewing systems implementation as social drama, we are able to vividly observe how social movements operate in practice (Turner, 1980). According to Turner (1957, p. 161), "the interests of certain persons or groups may have gained at the expense of others…certain relations between persons and groups may have increased in intensity, while others may have diminished." We are essentially seeing challenging and political movements inside the social system. People, or groups object to one another, initiating a social drama.

The concept of a social drama refers to a series of events in which there are shifts in power, views or opinions, and changes in social groups in which the social drama is operating (Turner, 1957, 1974, 1980, 1982; Corbitt, 1995, 1997). Social dramas occur within groups of persons who "share values and interests and who have a real or alleged common history" (Turner, 1980, p. 149). As an idea is contested it leads to a challenging of what currently exists. The actors act out social dramas by developing their interpretation of what has happened and what should happen. Social dramas occur in a context that is defined geographically by location (arenas) and by the underlying values, social constructs and meanings attached to statements and action by each of the actors involved. In the implementation of a system there appears to be a series of events, contestations, struggles, discourse setting, crises or 'social dramas,' which the actors in the implementation process go through (Corbitt, 1997). It is argued that implementation is rarely an ordered or sequential process. Actors within implementation contest and reconstruct the system to achieve their goals, to maintain their ideologies, to change programs, to change existing ideologies or to shift real power.

A post-structuralist application of the concept of social dramas can provide a useful tool for the systems analyst to describe these events and crises that occur throughout the systems implementation process. Corbitt (1995) argued that the concept of social drama needs to be remoulded, removing the structuralist approach given by Turner (1957). Rather than identifying order and structure in the social drama, the researcher needs to provide a framework to identify patterns and the unstructured and unordered nature of human social relations (Corbitt, 1995). The researcher intends to use the concept of the social drama as a means of dealing with, and making sense of, the complexity involved with systems implementation. This will allow the systems analyst to look at the process itself rather than just at the inputs and outputs, or the interactions and contestations of the process (Corbitt, et al., 2005). Similar to the traveller metaphor offered by Kvale (1996) for data collection, the use of social dramas is only an analogy used in this research to identify key events that occurred in the system selection and implementation process.

In similar vein, the researcher wishes to draw upon the work of Turner (1979), who adopted the work by Goffman (1959; Goffman, et al., 1997) suggesting that actors in organisations act in a manner of calculated performance. Providing the analogy of a stage, actors prepare backstage (behind the scene or social setting) acting in an unconcealed way expressing reservations. Actors in this setting are often critical of others or of what they are to do.

In a systems implementation context, the actors could be critical of those handing down, developing or implementing the changing policy or could be critical of the policy texts. Actors then move to the front stage (within the social setting), where they are more conforming. Those actors involved in implementing a system, when confronted with the authors of policy texts or those charged to ensure implementation can become less critical and ameliorative towards the policy. Life, Turner (1957) argued, is a series of dramas acted out in social settings. When conflict or crisis arises in the process, there are shifts in the policy, and a state of flux is created. Again, the researcher wishes to use the analogy of the frontstage and backstage of system selection and implementation in order to identify the obvious exercise of power and the hidden exercise of power, which is developed through discourse.

By utilising social dramas as a tool to analyse data, we are able to approach the themes and issues from two perspectives. The first perspective is the obvious, or what Goffman (1959) claims is, the front stage. This is what is apparent to all and is plainly visible; it is what is written in policy as text, what happens in meetings, and what happens in front of an audience. This is the context of contestation. The second perspective is the hidden, or backstage. This is where the politics and discourse lie. This is where discourse emerges, is constructed and reconstructed. In the backstage of social relations in an organisation, discourse creates the intersubjective context for the front-stage, and fosters ideologies and values that inform the politic nature of the dramas acted out in public. It is this moving from the hidden to the obvious that enables the actors, academic staff and administrators, to recontextualise and institutionalise practice and exposes the discourse underpinning action.

Turner (1974; 1982; 1985) accepted that a social drama is essentially a power play however his exploration of what power is limited. To strengthen the analytical value of social dramas, more refinement of the role of power is needed (Corbitt, 1995; 1997). According to Forester (1989), drawing on the work of Foucault (1976; 1977; 1978; 1980; 1982), claims that power may be exercised in a number of ways including decision-making, agenda setting, and in the shaping of felt needs. In the implementation process, power can be exercised through misinformation and resistance. The communication of information and arguments can be distorted in the implementation process by the use of ambiguity, deceit, insincerity, misinterpretation, confusion, unresponsiveness, withholding information, manipulation, lack of accountability, mystification and complexity, and misrepresentation (Forester, 1989). Forester (1989, p. 45) ultimately saw power as political communication and concludes that:

> Power works through the management of competence, or obfuscation; or trust, or false assurance; of consent, or manipulated agreement; and of knowledge or misrepresentation. Each of the three modes of power works in this way, either to thwart articulate democratic participation and encourage positivity, or to encourage articulate political action and the rationalization of a democratic planning (policy) process.

The social drama concept has been adopted in this study as it allows the researcher to create a framework to view the political nature of the systems implementation process. By ultimately breaking down the public episodes of tensional irruption into smaller periods, the researcher can examine the power relations and political nature of that period through the eyes of the members involved in the study. By employing the technique of social dramas, the researcher can also note the transforming power relations, according to Foucault (1976; 1977; 1978; 1980; 1982) from period to period.

METHODOLOGY

In qualitative research, there are different research methods available to collect and analyse information. The choice of research method informs the way in which the researcher collects data. Specific research methods also imply different skills, assumptions and research practices (Creswell, 1994). The objective of this research is to provide a rich understanding of the power and politics involved in systems implementation. As a qualitative approach has been adopted for this research, the researcher wishes to tell the story of the selection and implementation of an enterprise-wide learning management system at the University of the Eastern Antipodes. The ability of telling this story can be either by being a participant and reporting the story as it unfolds, or as an observer, interviewing members of the selection and implementation team re-telling the story from the members' perspective.

A case study methodology was employed, thus enabling the researcher to get inside the organisation and conduct multiple interviews and document collection in order to increase the rigour and credibility of the research. This approach also enabled the researcher to describe the organisation from the members point-of-view, reducing the distance between the researcher and the members of the study. By being immersed in the organisational activities, the researcher was able to gain richer information and explore the power relations created in a systems selection and

implementation group, and how these power relations transform over time. Sixteen members of the systems implementation team were involved in this research out of 23 potential members.

In conjunction with the social drama metaphor, discourse analysis was also employed to make sense of, and analyse the collected interviews and documents. According to Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000, p. 4), discourse analysis refers to "the practice of analysing empirical raw materials and information as discursive forms. This means that discourse analysts treat a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic data – speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events, interviews, policies, ideas, even organisations and institutions – as 'texts' or 'writings'." In other words, discourse analysis puts words into work, giving them meaning, constructing perceptions and formulating understanding and ongoing courses of interaction (Gubrium and Holstein, 2000).

According to Fairclough (2001, p. 25) discourse analysis "has a common concern with how language interconnects with other elements of social life, and especially a concern with how language figures in unequal relations of power, in processes of exploitation and domination of some people by others." Discourse analysis allows the researcher to understand the language and authority of members involved with the study. By utilising discourse analysis as a method to analyse, it is noted that the researcher does not start discourse analysis from texts and interactions, but from social issues and problems, problems which face people in their social lives, issues, according to Fairclough (2001), which are taken up within sociology, political science and/or cultural studies. To perform discourse analysis, "empirical data are viewed as sets of signifying practices that constitute a 'discourse' and its 'reality', thus providing the conditions which enable subjects to experience the world of objects, words and practices" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 4).

THE SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN ENTERPRISE-WIDE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The illustrating case study provided here is the selection and implementation of an enterprise-wide learning management system in the University of the Eastern Antipodes. This learning management system was implemented, according to members interviewed, in order for academic staff to purportedly manage learners, the students, by keeping track of their progress and performance across all types of training activities. The learning management system allows staff to create learning resources, deliver content, monitor student participation and assess student performance.

This learning management system was implemented following a push by the senior members of the university to centralise the processes of the university and create a sense of uniformity across the various schools and faculties. However, as was discovered, this push ultimately came from the Australian Federal Government who were demanding compliance with new directions in Australian Higher Education, based on a discourse of free market competition and graduate outcomes directed to economic rather than social goals (Lingard, 1991, 1993; Lingard, et al., 1993; Corbitt, 1995; Angus, 1984, 1988).

The University of the Eastern Antipodes was formed via a push in the late eighties as a result from the Dawkins reforms. These reforms were initiated in an attempt to rationalise the higher education system in Australia (Australia. Dept. of Employment Education and Training, and Dawkins, 1988). Due to the high number of universities and tertiary institutions in Australia and the high number of unmet demand for higher education, the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins, created a policy to create a unified national system of educational providers.

This merger brought about a number of issues to the University of the Eastern Antipodes. One of the early issues was deciding who the target market was for the University of the Eastern Antipodes. Would the university focus, like so many other Australian universities, on the on-campus students, or would the university follow in the likes of other, newer Australian universities and start promoting courses to off-campus students. This decision was made difficult because the universities involved in the merger had a different target market. Members of the university were divided into the two different teaching methods – those who believed that on-campus students were more important than the off-campus students, and vice versa – which mirrored the focus of the mergers. Many members of the University of the Eastern Antipodes believe that there are still remnants of the strong campus identity, affecting the way that units are taught, either on-campus or off-campus.

Phase one of three, of the selection and implementation occurred in the University of the Eastern Antipodes towards the mid- to late nineties. A decision was made by senior members of the university to centralise systems, creating further problems. Each faculty was operating their own learning management system, depending on what focus that

faculty had - either on- or off-campus. This resulted in the selection of the enterprise-wide learning management system, EducateOnline, which, according to members, was poorly selected and rushed in. Some members mentioned that EducateOnline was selected in order to gain an international business contract. However, according to members interviewed, EducateOnline was the only system that fulfilled the Department of IT-led requirements of running on Oracle.

In 1999 a new Deputy Vice-Chancellor was appointed and pushed the corporate line of having one enterprise-wide learning management system that ran on Oracle. Members from the largest faculty in the university, the Faculty of Commerce and Administration, and users of another learning management system, CommunicateOnline, criticised this decision, but the Deputy Vice-Chancellor kept pushing for a centralised system. After EducateOnline ran for one year, it was discovered that they were moving out of the higher education market and into the corporate training market. In conjunction with this, EducateOnline reneged on many promises made to provide continual support for the system. In 2000, members of the university declared their frustration with the system and the senior members of the university started another search for an enterprise-wide learning management system.

Phase two of three saw the creation of an evaluation group to oversee and evaluate the potential learning management systems. This group contained members from each faculty and service division. Requirements for the new enterprise-wide learning management systems were established, which, according to members interviewed, was one of the least political aspects of the selection process. Each member of the university was given the opportunity to submit their key requirements as to what they would look for in an enterprise-wide learning management system. Teaching staff and students were then given the opportunity to rate each requirement, producing a list of eight key requirements in conjunction with the technological requirements of running on Oracle.

Sixty-four potential learning management systems were identified and this list was quickly reduced down to a working subset of five systems. At one stage of the elimination process, CommunicateOnline was not going to be considered as a serious contender for the enterprise-wide learning management system. This caused problems for the CommunicateOnline advocates. Technological and pedagogical arguments were had between the members of the evaluation group. Eventually, a report from the financial evaluation group was given to the evaluation group, which eliminated CommunicateOnline from further consideration, claiming that CommunicateOnline was not financially viable.

Two potential systems remained: OnlineTeacher and ChalkItUp. Both companies performed demonstrations, highlighting little difference between the two products. OnlineTeacher was deemed by members interviewed as being more user-friendly, but did not allow for flexibility to enhance online teaching and learning. ChalkItUp had more flexibility than OnlineTeacher, but was more difficult to use. The evaluation group finally decided that greater flexibility was more important for future developments in online teaching and learning, and recommended ChalkItUp to the senior members of the university.

The final phase, phase three, saw the implementation of the new enterprise-wide learning management system. When the implementation process was originally planned, it was envisioned that the implementation of ChalkItUp would be enterprise-wide by semester one, 2005. The then Vice-Chancellor retired, and a new Vice-Chancellor was appointed. Shortly after this appointment, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor resigned and a new Deputy Vice-Chancellor was eventually appointed.

Two further changes were made by the new Vice-Chancellor – all units across the university had to have an online presence by semester one 2004, shortening the proposed timeline by twelve months, and providing only six months to train all teaching staff. The second change saw the implementation of a new policy, requiring all units to have either a basic online presence, an extended online presence, or a wholly online presence.

After initial bugs and problems, the faculties migrated their units across from their respective system to ChalkItUp. The Faculty of Commerce and Administration was the most disgruntled faculty, whereas other faculties utilised this opportunity to review their online teaching methods and migrate to ChalkItUp.

However, the greatest issue for staff was that of workloads. Staff had little time to attend training sessions to learn a new system and therefore increased the stress as they felt that they were falling behind in knowing how to use the system. The Union was called in to represent members who felt they were being treated poorly. ChalkItUp has been in operation for four semesters and although has had bugs, has not suffered any major problems. As members of the University of the Eastern Antipodes accept ChalkItUp, further aspects of functionality will be added, strengthening ChalkItUp.

UTILISING SOCIAL DRAMAS AS A MODE OF ANALYSIS

In a social drama, obvious issues are apparent to everyone (Turner, 1957). The obvious front stage issues that emerged in this first phase of the implementation of the enterprise-wide LMS at the University of the Eastern Antipodes included: the process of selecting and implementing EducateOnline; the appointment of a new Deputy Vice-Chancellor; the directive from the senior members of the university to implement an enterprise-wide LMS as a corporate solution to the variety of systems operating inside the University of the Eastern Antipodes; and the decision to prescribe Oracle as the technological infrastructure platform of the university. Each of these issues underpinned a sequence of social dramas. Each drama was a key event that affected the social relations operating within the university. Each social drama was connected to the key directions and purpose of the university - that of being a provider of high quality distance education.

In this first phase, there were four particular social dramas that appeared to be of more significance than the others. These were firstly, the continuous debates about implementation of a policy requiring all IT systems in the university to run on an Oracle platform. Secondly, there was a drama concerning the discussions about whether the various LMS's were being supported appropriately or in any planned way. Thirdly and fourthly, there were a series of dramas associated with the appointment of senior staff to senior positions.

The social dramas that emerged in the second phase of the systems selection and implementation of the enterprise-wide LMS at the University of the Eastern Antipodes included the formation of the evaluation group; the elicitation of requirements from users, including academic staff and students; making the decision and putting forward that recommendation to the senior members of the university.

The third phase of the systems selection and implementation of the enterprise-wide learning management system at the University of the Eastern Antipodes was marked again by a series of dramas. These included events and decisions associated with and the impact of the new Vice-Chancellor; the process of adoption of ChalkItUp by academic staff; the enactment of policy requiring all academic staff to use ChalkItUp; and the process of migrating units from existing systems to ChalkItUp. Of these social dramas, the first three were significant events and will be discussed in detail.

As the story is long and complex this paper can only focus on one small aspect of the system selection and implementation process. The social dramas uncovered in phase two of the system selection and implementation process, the actual system selection process, provide a detailed account of how social dramas can be used as a mode of analysis to uncover the chaotic, messy and complex aspects of information systems.

As the evaluation group was being established, there was a strong belief that all stakeholder groups be represented. Subsequently, staff that had a vested interest in learning management systems were appointed to this group, together with students. Once established it became obvious that this drama merged with other tensions over the criteria for selection of the learning management system, and over the continually argued existing strength of CommunicateOnline. There was contestation amongst members of the evaluation group about which system should be selected. There was also continual debate over the importance of each requirement that was listed as important and especially debate over the technology parameters that had to be met. The obvious extent of concerns about various learning management systems emerged during these meetings when participation in testing occurred, following presentations by vendors.

The most serious social drama in the second phase of the selection process emerged when the evaluation group had to recommend a decision. Initially, tension focused on whether CommunicateOnline should be considered a serious contender as the enterprise-wide learning management systems at the University of the Eastern Antipodes. The CommunicateOnline advocates were initially confused as to why the University of the Eastern Antipodes was looking for a new learning management system, as they believed that CommunicateOnline was the obvious choice, based on their criteria. However, the requirements process had produced a more comprehensive list that included criteria that CommunicateOnline was not able to meet. The apparent narrow focus in CommunicateOnline on communications was the source of the tension that emerged and which was challenged by the list of requirements that emerged from the university-wide elicitation process. As a result, the various groups of stakeholders and technology-user factions contested each others sets of requirements. Ultimately, when ChalkItUp was recommended by the evaluation group, it was selected on the comprehensive list of requirements, including pedagogy, technology and financial, that had been evaluated by all groups and tested on each alternative learning management systems.

Three sets of criteria were contested publicly in this process, pedagogy, for which there was never going to be a consensus as different stakeholder groups had differing opinions; technology, about which there was a deep, long-

held dispute, concerning IT support for a specific university-wide infrastructure based on Oracle. This too was never going to be resolved as the argument was long held and unresolved; and the financial viability of the companies providing the software. It was the last criteria that forced the supporters of CommunicateOnline to accept that it was not a viable alternative. It was the sustained advocacy of one member of the evaluation group that persuaded the decision to recommend ChalkItUp. However, these obvious deliberations were being informed by political processes and the wielding of power that was set within more substantial discourse.

The discourse of discipline appeared to be underpinning the decisions taken in the creation and composition of the evaluation group. By incorporating advocates of other learning management systems, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor wanted to coerce the advocates of other systems into the new enterprise-wide learning management system. Politically, it was important that the university objectives of centralisation and uniformity were achieved. The discourse of centralised rather than differentiated control was now foremost in the actions of the senior members of the university. The discourse of differentiation and diversity, so much a part of the early university, was being replaced by a discourse of integration and sameness. This was most probably a response to the policies of the Federal Government who were demanding compliance with new directions in Australian Higher Education, based on a discourse of free market competition and graduate outcomes directed to economic rather than social goals (Lingard, 1991, 1993; Lingard, et al., 1993; Corbitt, 1995; Angus, 1984, 1988). The State was attempting to coerce universities to 'toe a corporate line' and meet the demands of business, challenging the traditional discourse of universities of intellectual freedom and the betterment of society (Davis, 2004).

Although the advocates of other systems were members of the evaluation group, there was still an element of confusion and disintegration amongst academic staff. There was no clear statement from the senior members of the university about what type of university the University of the Eastern Antipodes is. Staff were still confused as to whether the University of the Eastern Antipodes was an on-campus university, providing some units to off-campus students, or whether the university was still targeting off-campus students as its prime market. There was still a focus politically on the academic emancipation. Academics sought emancipation from the directed policies of both the senior members of the university and the heavily criticised policies of the Federal Government, where there was a discourse of sameness and uniformity, enforced by compliance requirements through reporting to the Department of Education, Science and Training.

The senior members of the university, it appeared, were attempting to modify and limit academic emancipation by centralising processes and systems inside the university. The academic staff were still working individually; still working to their individual agendas and not towards the strategic goals of the university. Essentially, it could be argued that the senior members of the university wanted to coerce staff politically to comply with the requirements of government policy as the government had attached disciplinary penalties to non-compliance. However, the senior members of the university did not directly drive this. They were required to adhere to government requirements, which had flow on effects for the academic and general staff within the University of the Eastern Antipodes. It is through these flow-on effects that academic staff end up with less power than general staff and the senior members of the university. The academic staff were required to adhere to requests by members of the divisions operating within the university.

However, most academic staff objected to being forced into one central system. This was brought into the front stage in this process through the resistance offered by the CommunicateOnline advocates who resisted any attempt to lose the learning management system they were already using. Compliance with requirements to have one system only, they believed, eliminated their academic emancipation. The discourse of standardisation driving the actions of the senior members of the university was perceived by the academic staff to be disempowering of their responsibilities as academics. Thus they contested this with a discourse of academic emancipation and differentiated choice, expressed openly as debate about pedagogy, about technological compliance and about what learning management system best suited their individual and faculty needs. Politically, there were two distinct discourses in operations within the university during this time. The bases of the contest were fundamental to both sides in the debate and thus the debates in meetings and forums of the university were intense and emotional. There was an essential contest of the driving ideology of the university and about what had served the university well to this stage in its history.

These challenges were ultimately overturned, as the senior members of the university strongly believed that academic staff needed to be using one central system. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor continued the drive to achieve standardisation in teaching and learning across the university. The senior members of the university wanted to create an environment of all staff, academic and general, working together towards the same goal, pushing the requirement for academic staff to comply with the newly selected enterprise-wide learning management system and create

uniformity and ultimately control over the academic staff. Thus, at the point of implementation of an enterprise-wide learning management system, the discourses contested in the open forums of the university were to have a significant impact.

CONCLUSION

A set of dramas occurred in the selection process of members of the evaluation group and in the dramas associated with the selection of ChalkItUp. Academic staff created the dramas again because their practice and academic authority were challenged. They argued that the real demand for a new system was not necessary. They also challenged any need for a single system across the university. The university had made its reputation of what it was already doing in teaching and learning. There was no obvious reason to change that. However, the committees were established and a selection process commenced. The academic staff had to recontextualise their practice and accept that power relations about teaching and learning had been, and were again changing. Power was now vested in the selection committee and those advising it. The differentiated set of power relations existing within the university had been usurped by directive and placed, with the authority of the senior members of the university.

The case study indicates that the systems selection and implementation process transforms through the struggles for the exercise of power. This challenges the existing view of systems selection and implementation, that transforming processes are consistent with iteration. In the political realm of organisational power relations, complexity creates chaos. The attempted subjugation of staff is challenged by those actors as a means of political emancipation from control. This search for emancipation by the academic staff was ultimately to enforce structural change in the system itself as management imposed structural parameters on the system which, in effect, restricted its use by academic staff. The selection and implementation of the new enterprise-wide learning management system spanned two and a half years. This time period saw a number of changes and shifts in leadership, resistance and challenges within discourse. This transforming nature of power and politics and the complexity that results in systems selection and implementation is not identified in the systems implementation literature.

The use of social dramas has essentially enabled the researcher to investigate the events in each phase of the selection and implementation process from the front stage, reporting obvious issues in systems implementation, and from the back stage, identifying the hidden aspects of systems implementation and the underpinning discourses.

In the front stage (Goffman, 1959) of systems selection and implementation the role of power relations are expressed either openly, or are enforced through rules, statutes and policies. Inevitably, the intent of this study is to establish the role of discipline (Foucault, 1977), in order to understand the power relations and the role of these power relations and politics in systems selection and implementation. Policy, rules, statutes and decisions reinforce the power status of the decision maker and attempt to subjugate the actors.

However, it is through the role of discourse, or the practices of talk, text and argument, that continuously form that which actors speak. The challenge to discourse typically emerges as resistance to the new system. Members of an organisation oppose change and will attempt to resist the new system by a series of social dramas. It is the recognition of the human factors and more importantly the rich view of power and politics in system selection implementation, which is needed to improve the systems implementation process.

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