How CIOs Overcome the Competing Values Challenge: Irish CIOs' Perspectives

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Abstract:

Competing values are a fact of organizational life. However, there are gaps in our understanding about how these opposing beliefs hinder influence processes. This article draws on interview data to demonstrate how Irish Chief Information Officers (CIOs) are able to convince their colleagues to support new projects within their firms in the face of competing values. Focused interviews were used to explore the influence process and the competing values phenomenon, since this type of research is at an early stage and qualitative methods and analysis serve as a rich source of theory development. The data showed that the CIOs who did not face competing values were able to successfully influence other executives to support proposed projects. Additionally, half of the remaining CIOs who did face competing values were also successful at influencing their colleagues. In these cases, several features of the situation existed, including (a) small relative project size, (b) projects that were consistent with both external and internal environmental conditions, (c) the use of upward influence, and (d) the right combination of influence behaviors. Finally, we suggest actions that CIOs can use to successfully influence other executives when faced with the challenge of competing values.

Keywords: Chief Information Officers, competing values, executive influence, focused interviews

I. INTRODUCTION

Within top management ranks, interactions among senior executives are important for the generation and selection of new ideas and, ultimately, their successful implementation. As such, many think this decision-making process is the life blood of a modern firm and, when these ideas involve changes in direction, the stakes for companies may rise even higher. Consequently, it's no surprise that executives often invest tremendous amounts of energy to persuade their colleagues about the merits of their ideas for moving the firm forward [e.g., Conger, 1998; Enns et al., 2001]. Despite their importance, however, not all influence attempts are the same. For instance, executive influence attempts fail more than they succeed, with indirect resistance, direct opposition, or other poor outcomes being the result [Williams and Miller, 2002]. This is the case because to effectively build support for their ideas, executives must understand their business context extremely well and possess outstanding influence abilities and political skills [Ferris et al., 2007]. A detailed understanding of the business context is a prerequisite for creating ideas that will help the company stay competitive. Likewise, talent in the form of influence skills is essential for moving projects forward.

However, many executives come up short with respect to their influence skills. There are many reasons for their lack of success. They may do a poor job of assessing colleagues, fail to execute certain influence behaviors successfully, or not prepare sufficiently or at all. Additionally, the internal "influence environment" that exists on the top management team may either help or hurt decision-making [Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996]. Executives in organizations often face a multitude of difficult, high-stakes decision challenges, frequently while operating under cultural norms (e.g., conflict avoidance) that compromise real debate on new initiatives [O'Reilly et al., 1993]. This internal environment naturally lends itself to the presence of competing values among executives, even if such clashes about company direction or the value of a specific project do not come to the surface, competing values may still hinder the influence process. Thus, due to the combination of executive skill deficits and environmental constraints, successful influence among executives—particularly about new ideas and initiatives—may be less than optimal in many organizations.

The paradox is that companies more than ever need to make better decisions, often because they face volatile economic conditions and daunting competitive challenges [Eisenhardt et al., 1997]. As a result, being able to develop and implement new ideas quickly may mean the difference between success and failure for the firm. This is an important point to make because research has largely ignored the impact of competing values in the development of new ideas and instead looked at executives' functional areas such as finance, marketing, operations, Information Systems, and human resources [Enns and McFarlin, 2003] or CIO technical background [Enns et al., 2003] to move projects forward. Finally, there has been little focus on initial resistance to executive influence attempts that come from various points and levels in the organization (i.e., upward, lateral, and downward). Instead, most executive influence research has focused on lateral influence efforts [e.g., Enns and McFarlin, 2003; Enns and McFarlin, 2005; Enns et al., 2007].

As far as we are aware, no studies have examined resistance in the form of competing values between executives and their targets. Thus, the current study focused on the following two research questions: (1) Does the presence of competing values reduce the likelihood of a successful influence attempt when CIOs are presenting new ideas to peers and superiors? and (2) If so, what accounts for successful influence when competing values are present? In the next section, we provide a brief literature review of the importance and impact of competing values in executive influence contexts and provide some preliminary research propositions.

II. COMPETING VALUES AND PROPOSITIONS

Quinn's [1984, 1988] competing values framework offers guidance for understanding executive influence. It suggests that in most cases, influence among executives will likely involve competing values of some kind. Knowing this, executives would be well-served to identify any opposing beliefs they have with potential targets (e.g., other executives). When competing values are present, such as when a new idea somehow conflicts with strong beliefs of another executive, resistance will be much higher than when competing values are absent [Quinn, 1988]. Such value conflicts may be caused by a host of factors, including power differences with another executive or because of membership in different political coalitions. And competing values may also exist when new ideas could adversely impact target peers or their units—something that may prompt considerable resistance from that target of the influence attempt. For example, a new idea may consume scarce resources under the target's control, an outcome that could directly affect their unit or personal goals and performance.

All in all, we believe that a target executive with competing values might be highly motivated to take several steps to oppose a project proposed by a CIO. As a result, we believe that our discussion of competing values leads to the following prediction.

Proposition 1: Everything else being equal, influence attempts are less likely to result in commitment to the new initiative when competing values exist between CIOs and the target(s) of their influence attempt(s).

Dealing with Competing Values

Research shows that executives often take into consideration the anticipated reaction of the target when preparing influence attempts [Yukl, 1994]. Yukl and Tracey [1992], for example, contend that the effectiveness of an influence attempt is partially dependent on the amount of target resistance connected with the request. Specifically, if the request is consistent with the target's needs and is perceived as legitimate, resistance is less likely. Additionally, Harsanyi [1962] found that when calculating the perceived odds of a successful influence attempt, people consider whether the target can resist or block the attempt. For instance, if a CIO believes that target resistance will be weak (i.e., because competing values are absent), then their influence attempt preparations are likely to be less or even minimal. As levels of expected resistance rise, however, the breadth and depth of executives' preparation efforts should increase. For example, Liden and Mitchell [1988] suggested that the level of resistance expected might impact how much supporting documentation an executive will gather in preparation for an influence attempt, among other preparation efforts.

Many cases of CIO influence occur in a context of competing values. To increase their chances of success, CIOs seeking to exert influence need to accurately discern those values in targets. Then, they must deliberately select influence behaviors that can overcome any associated objections. As such, CIOs' influence success will depend, at least in part, on how skilled they are at diagnosing target values. For example, inaccurately assessing a target's potential for resistance can lead to ineffective influence attempts [see Williams and Miller, 2002].

Other research suggests that executives pay attention to competing values and try to adapt accordingly. For instance, Enns and McFarlin's [2005] results suggest that CIOs recognize when competing values represent an obstacle to be overcome as they solicit support for their new initiatives. That said, executives are likely to increase their preparation efforts when competing values exist. For example, a series of rational arguments designed to overcome a peer's self-interest may require more extensive preparation activities (e.g., information must be collected, organized, and vetted) than a personal appeal designed to take advantage of a friendship with another executive (i.e., to tap an existing level of personal credibility). As suggested earlier, development and refinement activities may be driven by the executive's need to overcome competing values.

Executives who are more successful than others at influence may implicitly consider potential value conflicts when deciding how to promote their ideas with other executives. We believe that some effective CIOs will be aware of the target executive's competing values and take steps to overcome these competing values. This does not automatically guarantee success, however, since CIOs must also present appropriate proposals and behaviors to diffuse or deflect competing viewpoints. Therefore, we believe that our discussion of competing values leads to this prediction:

Proposition 2: The impact of competing values on the target's response will be moderated by the CIO's influence approach. Skilled CIOs who take appropriate steps are more likely to overcome competing values and obtain commitment, while unskilled CIOs who make the wrong moves reduce their chances to obtain commitment.

III. METHODOLOGY

Our initial goal was to investigate the two propositions regarding CIO influence attempts, based on preliminary theoretical arguments from the competing values literature. One especially useful approach, in lieu of strongly established theory for studying the impact of competing values on influence attempts by CIOs, is the use of qualitative methods. Qualitative research is designed to help researchers understand complex relations among people and the cultural and social contexts they work in. The methods associated with qualitative research are intended to assist researchers in comprehending the complexities involved in why people act the way they do [Myers, 2009]. Myers also suggests that an important outcome of this approach is that qualitative methods enable an investigator to observe the context which surrounds the decisions and events that take place. Human decisions and events can often be better understood in their contexts for these settings assist the researcher to clarify why somebody acted like they did. Further, contextual understanding is often obtained through a detailed understanding of a participant's perspective. In fact, qualitative researchers maintain that it may be a mistake to not speak with those involved to "test" relationships in complex settings. Said differently, qualitative researchers contend that in

order to understand people's rationale for action and the contexts for these actions (and associated beliefs) in a deep way, qualitative research methods are the best way to accomplish these goals.

Qualitative research is used to discover the nature of the phenomena by understanding and describing it from the participant's view [Leedy, 1997]. In fact, Kaplan and Maxwell [1994] suggest that the purpose of understanding a phenomenon from the standpoint of the participants and their social context can actually be confused when textual data are quantified. Qualitative research involves the use of interview and document data (among others) to study and explain social phenomena [Myers, 1997], an approach that may be fruitfully applied in this setting. Thus, we employed qualitative methods to study CIOs in their cultural and social context, from their perspective, and to examine if the concepts of interest (such as competing values) applied in Information Systems contexts.

Another goal of our study was to refine theory associated with CIO influence and competing values, especially since this stream of research is in its infancy. A qualitative methodology is appropriate to achieve this type of goal [Glaser and Strauss, 1967]. For instance, a qualitative approach is especially useful in the initial steps of theory development when data and theory are iteratively connected [Eisenhardt, 1989]. In addition, qualitative research methods become more suitable as the focus of Information Systems research moves from technological to managerial issues [Myers, 1997], which is the concern of the present research. Finally, a qualitative study may be well suited for examining the nuances and subtleties of executive influence in interactions with other executives.

In terms of data collection, we initially chose to gather data from primary sources via interviews of twenty-three Irish CIOs. To investigate issues of influence and competing values in executive contexts, we had to study a set of CIOS relatively high in the organization. Sampling of CIOs is naturally difficult, often resulting in outright refusals and low response rates. Accordingly, for a first detailed look at this issue, our aim was to examine these rich and complex interactions in a small set of CIOs that may provide the impetus for more elaborate and larger samples in subsequent studies. The interview form of data collection is consistent with other qualitative studies that have successfully investigated leadership issues [Parry, 1998]. Also, the interviews were a source of validity since we were able to interview multiple subjects on the same topic [Silverman, 1993]. Finally, since in-depth interviews are comprehensive data collection procedures often used in a variety of qualitative research settings and a procedure of choice for qualitative researchers [Myers, 2009], we suggest that this technique is well-suited for our study and research questions.

Access to these Irish CIOs was gained via personal networks established in Dublin, Ireland. A focused interview methodology was used since, at present, there are significant methodological and definitional gaps in the executive influence literature. For instance, the main methodology that has been used in the very small body of published executive influence research has been surveys [e.g., Enns et al., 2003]. In addition, since this is the first study that looked at the impact of competing values on executive influence attempts in multiple directions, a focused interview methodology is well-suited for this endeavor [Judd et al., 1991].

Focused interviews are categorized as partially structured or semi-structured interviews [Judd et al., 1991]. They are utilized to obtain a deeper understanding of informant perceptions, motivations, and attitudes. These kinds of interviews are useful to determine what the essential issues are, how informants conceptualize a topic, the terminology used by participants, and their stage of understanding. In a focused interview, interviewers know in advance the topics they want to cover. These are derived from the formulation of the research problem, theory, and knowledge that the respondent has gained via experience with the phenomenon of interest. A major purpose for conducting focused interviews is to assist in the creation of appropriate hypotheses for further research studies.

Focused interviews can be differentiated from structured interviews in a number of ways. For instance, structured interviews usually entail asking the informant to respond to questions contained in a standard questionnaire or protocol. In addition, structured interviews require the interviewer to (a) ask each question precisely as worded; (b) not engage in impromptu explanations of the questions; and (c) repeat the questions when inadequate responses are received [Judd et al., 1991]. In contrast, focused interviews allow for elaboration and clarification of questions that are raised and permit dialogue to go beyond the specific questions asked. The chief advantage of focused interviews is that they provide some structure and thus allow for some consistency among respondents in terms of the topics covered in the interviews. Another advantage is that the focused interview allows for improvisation when necessary, especially when the interviewee has important insights that emerge as the interview unfolds [Myers, 2009].

The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol appropriate for use in focused interviews [Judd et al., 1991]. At the outset of the interviews, the CIOs were asked some basic questions about their managerial background, who they reported to, the competitive environment their organizations faced, as well as the internal organizational environment. Key questions for these interviews focused on influence attempts made by these

executives. Thus, questions were raised about the nature of the initiative (description of the project, project size, those involved in the project), characteristics about the executives the CIO approached and tried to influence about the project (why this executive was chosen, the direction of the influence attempt), and the actual influence behaviors they used in their efforts. Nine of the twenty-three CIOs were part of the top management team; the other fourteen were one level below.

Based on previous research that reflects the executive influence process [Enns and McFarlin, 2005], the CIOs were interviewed about how they assessed their targets. In addition, the CIOs were asked about the influence preparation efforts they used to ensure that they highlighted the fact that their proposals were aligned with their organization's strategic direction. Of course, the interviews also delved into the competing values they believed were present between them and the executive they were trying to influence. Finally, the interviews also explored how the CIOs attempted to influence other executives (i.e., superiors, peers) about IS initiatives and what the outcomes were. Thus, the interview protocol was consistent with the qualitative research method in general since the probes focused on the CIOs' perspective of events in their social context [Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994; Leedy, 1997].

Each of the twenty-three interviews lasted approximately one hour each, and were subsequently transcribed. Given the sometimes sensitive nature of the subject matter and Irish norms, the interviews were not taped. However, extensive notes were taken during the interviews. Those notes were subsequently transcribed quickly following the interviews, a technique successfully utilized in past research [e.g., Eisenhardt and Bourgeois III, 1988; Silva and Hirschheim, 2007; Walsham and Sahay, 1999]. The transcripts were reviewed and follow-up discussions were held with the CIOs, when necessary, to fill in any gaps. Follow up was undertaken in approximately 35 percent of the interviews.

The impact of competing values on the executive influence process was an important focus of the interviews [cf., Enns and McFarlin, 2005]. The first stage in the process suggests that the target of an executive's influence attempt must be assessed. For example, a CIO may choose a target based on a good relationship with that executive or because the executive has resources required to facilitate the CIO's initiative. In addition, other judgments can be made about the extent to which resistance might be expected during or after the influence attempt, including competing values.

The second stage involves preparation for the actual influence attempt, including the content of the proposal and selection of appropriate influence behaviors. The third stage involves the influence attempt itself and the use of the influence behaviors chosen. It is generally recognized that there are ten basic influence behaviors, including rational persuasion; apprising; consultation; collaboration; inspirational appeal; personal appeal; exchange; legitimating; coalition; and pressure [e.g., Yukl, 2002; Yukl, Chavez, and Siefert, 2005]. In Table 1 we present the working definitions of most of these influence behaviors as well as a specific example taken from the CIO interview transcripts. Notice that personal appeal (which occurs when the executive leverages the colleague's feelings of loyalty and friendship) and exchange (which happens when the executive offers to trade favors, indicates a willingness to reciprocate at a later time, or promises a share of the benefits if the colleague supports the proposal) were not observed in this study. The outcome of the process may be favorable for the executive exerting influence (i.e., commitment), neutral (i.e., compliance), or unfavorable (i.e., resistance), as identified by past research [e.g., Falbe and Yukl, 1992].

The research on the executive influence process is incomplete in many ways. For example, the bulk of the executive influence research conducted to date has focused on lateral influence (i.e., executives to business peers). However, executives operate in complex environments and need to simultaneously influence a range of powerful individuals in disparate groups. For example, when the initiation and deployment of an IS project proves problematic, it is almost certain that the factors which sustain and energize such difficulties are firmly rooted in dysfunctional dynamics between different managerial groups [McDonagh and Coghlan, 2006; Schein, 1996]. Groups of particular importance in that regard include executives at all levels in the organization. Consequently, upward, lateral (i.e., peer-to-peer), and downward influence episodes were explored in this study.

These interviews were supplemented by other documents such as annual reports and information posted on the organizations' websites to determine if the topics and themes covered in the interviews were consistent with these other information sources and to glean further insights into the company context during specific influence attempts. This secondary form of data collection is consistent with qualitative methods used by other researchers to complement primary data collection [e.g., Silva and Hirschheim, 2007; Setsikas, 1999]. While the interviews and archival data often provided the same perspective about how the IS initiative was aligned with current business strategy, this supplemental data did offer clarity in some cases. In general, the methodology was able to capture data that richly described the connections between target assessment, influence attempt preparation (such as the

Table 1: Types of Executive Influence Behaviors		
Influence behavior	**Definition**	**CIO Transcript Example**
Rational Persuasion	when an executive uses logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade a colleague that a proposal is viable and likely to yield significant benefits	"We can opt for the Siebel solution which is less expensive and is a smaller version of the solution you are looking for. If we go with this route, it will be a Divisional project. The other option is to go with the IBM solution, which involves a large spend. But this option does not make sense from a purely divisional perspective."
Apprising	when the executive explains how the colleague will benefit personally, such as advancing his or her career by supporting the proposal	"SDM/ Business Objects perhaps is going into pensions, which is in your line of business, so we would be developing systems for your line of business next ... doing the system is in your own best interests."
Inspirational Appeal	involves couching the initiative in emotional terms, and linking it to ideological values, ideals, and a vision for the future	"I was enthusiastic and I wanted to remain positive so I also explained the opportunities to go beyond the systems and build on them in the future."
Consultation	when the executive seeks participation in planning a strategy, activity, or change. The executive is willing to modify the planning to address any concerns or suggestions	"He also suggested that I take some of the divisional finance directors to other organizations to demonstrate to them how this could work."
Collaboration	takes place when the executive offers relevant resources and assistance if the colleague will carry out a request or support the executive's proposal	"I suggested that we could reprioritize the projects that we were working on and not look for additional funding. We would stop or slow down projects so that we could add this to our list of projects."
Ingratiation	involves using praise, flattery, friendly behavior, or helpful behavior to get the colleague in a good mood or to think favorably when asking for something	"We spent a few minutes catching up and exchanging niceties. I remember asking him for some free golf lessons, he is a very good golfer."
Legitimating	involves attempting to establish the legitimacy of the new initiative by connecting it to precedent, firm policies, or role expectations	"This is what is causing the problem. This will delay not only your releases but also others as well. I need to be consistent with all the others and their request for projects."
Coalition	occurs when the executive seeks the aid of others to persuade the colleague to support the proposal, or the executive uses the support of others as a reason for the colleague to also agree	"When we got to the new system topic, I started out by saying that I was in agreement with the Managing Director that the new system should be on the agenda of the Management Committee meeting."
Pressure	involves the executive using demands, threats, frequent checking, or persistent reminders to influence the colleague to support the proposal	"I included a discussion of the risks associated with not going forward and that the consequences could be bad. I used the 'risk' card and outlined the necessity of doing this."

evidence CIOs found effective in support of the influence attempt), influence behaviors, and their effects on outcomes.

Finally, data was gathered (either from public sources and/or during the course of the interviews) about the industry that defined the organization, the number of employees it had, its revenue, and so on. Ten of the firms were in the public sector, eight were in financial services, three were in the telecommunications industry, and two were manufacturing enterprises. The average number of employees in these organizations was 9,350. The average revenues were €9.8 billion (about $14 billion US). The average size of the IS project being proposed by executives was €31 million (the range was €40,000 to €500 million).

Interview Coding and Analysis

The interview data was systematically and comprehensively analyzed. NVivo© software, which is designed specifically for analysis of qualitative data, was used for this task. It provides a sophisticated workspace that lets researchers work on the data they have collected with purpose-built tools that classify, sort, and arrange detailed textual data. For example, NVivo© allows researchers to query data so that patterns of relationships can be detected and predictions tested [Silva and Hirschheim, 2007]. The interviews were analyzed using techniques similar to those described in Silva and Hirschheim. First, the interview transcripts were organized and classified. Nvivo was used for this step as well as steps two and three.

The second step involved the initial coding of the transcripts and, among other things, categorizing the outcomes (i.e., commitment, compliance, or resistance) and the direction of the influence attempt. Before the interviews were

coded, we developed a "start list" [Miles and Huberman, 1994] of categories based on the influence and competing values literature. For example, we included categories representing each behavior in Yukl's [2002] taxonomy of influence behaviors (see Table 1 above). Likewise, we derived categories for influence attempt preparation based on studies of executive influence [e.g., Conger, 1998]. The objective was to develop an initial coding scheme that would allow interview comments to be systematically placed into appropriate categories for subsequent analysis [Miles and Huberman, 1994].

Next, all twenty-three transcripts were independently coded by one of the authors and one graduate assistant using the coding scheme. The graduate assistant was trained to recognize the influence tactics assessed, but was completely unaware of the research questions and basic process framework guiding this research. Such an approach is common in qualitative research. For instance, Atwater et al. [2001] coded interviews using research assistants who were unaware of the hypotheses associated with their study. We continued to refine the coding scheme inductively [Miles and Huberman, 1994], adding codes as new categories emerged in the transcripts.

Our coding procedures involved a series of steps. First, all coders independently read an interview transcript and used the coding scheme to code these interviews. We included both explicit (i.e., an executive used the exact words in the subcategory definition or label) and implicit (i.e., the comments described the essence of the subcategory) mentions when coding transcripts. Following Dutton et al. [2001], only categories mentioned in at least 10 percent of our sample of influence incidents were included in the results. This allowed us to eliminate infrequently used categories and subcategories. After independent coding was completed, a pre-discussion calculation of inter-rater agreement (98 percent) was derived [Riffe, Lacy, and Frederick, 1998]. The coders then held a series of meetings to reach consensus about how to code the parts of the influence episodes where there was disagreement [cf. Dutton et al., 2001; Riffe et al., 1998]. Disagreements were discussed until a consensus (i.e., 100 percent agreement) was reached [Atwater et al., 2001; Dutton et al., 2001; Miles and Huberman, 1994].

The third step involved categorizing the interviews by whether competing values existed or not. The CIOs that did have competing values with the executive they were attempting to influence often elaborated on their answers. Two examples of the competing values discussed by these CIOs are presented below.

1. "He was onside in terms of the need for a change, but his view was very prescriptive in terms of what the change would look like. His view was driven by the current issues and was focused on where the initial issues were. He wanted to implement change in his way. For example, he wanted to get something done very quickly and thought we should build as much flexibility into the system as possible. My view was that if you build in flexibility into the system, this is an 'abdication of responsibility.' This would cause us to build more into the new system than was necessary. My view was more strategic and future oriented. Also, I wanted to clarify what needed to be done before we started developing the application."

2. "Yes, he had no interest in improving the current processes; this was not one of his strengths. He did not see these processes or their improvement as an integral part of his function. He was not interested in leading the changes required. Later on I found out that he had told his staff that my staff needed help for our systems when in actual fact we were there to help improve the existing processes for his staff."

IV. RESULTS

Of the twenty-three interviews transcribed and analyzed, competing values were absent in ten. In all of these ten cases, commitment was gained by the CIO as a result of the CIO's influence attempt. With one exception, competing values were clearly present in the remaining interviews.[1] And when competing values were present, the influence results for executives were much less positive. While commitment was the outcome in half the cases involving competing values, the outcome in the other half was either resistance or compliance. Both resistance and compliance are "unsuccessful" outcomes in this study since the goals of the CIOs were to motivate the other executive to commit resources (e.g., time, people, capital, etc.) to the projects. Compliance is a neutral outcome and does not lead target executives to provide these types of resources. Overall, this result supports Proposition 1 (i.e., commitment is less likely when competing values exist).

Nevertheless, in half the cases where competing values were present the CIO was still able to overcome this situation and obtain commitment from the target. This result naturally leads to an exploration of the second proposition. Specifically, what in particular accounted for successful CIO influence when that CIO faced an executive with competing values?

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[1] In one case, the CIO interview was cut short and so there was no time to explore the competing values question.

Influence Success with Competing Values

To examine the question above, post hoc analysis of the data was undertaken. Specifically, environmental conditions, relative project size, influence direction, CIO goals, preparation activities, and influence behaviors were all examined as potential factors that might help account for differences between successful and unsuccessful CIO influence attempts in the presence of competing values. This analysis consisted of categorizing the data (i.e., the environmental conditions, relative project size, influence behaviors, etc. mentioned immediately above) already captured in Nvivo©. As in the first level analysis, two researchers coded the categories during the post hoc analysis, with inter-rater agreement of 91 percent. The coders then held a series of meetings to reach consensus about how to code the parts of the transcripts where there was disagreement [cf. Dutton et al., 2001; Riffe et al., 1998]. Disagreements were discussed until a consensus (i.e., 100 percent agreement) was reached [Atwater et al., 2001; Dutton et al., 2001; Miles and Huberman, 1994]. A number of the data categories demonstrated differences between successful (i.e., commitment) and unsuccessful influence. These were summarized in terms of the practices that the CIOs used to counteract the competing values encountered with the executives they were trying to influence.

The first results of the analysis suggested that project consistency with both the external and internal environments was useful when overcoming competing values. When the project was both consistent with the external environment (i.e., consistent with beating back competitive forces) and the internal environment (e.g., consistent with internal initiatives or with a coalition), commitment was more likely to occur. The successful CIOs formed coalitions that created or leveraged the internal environment to be consistent with their proposals. For example, one CIO suggested that he chose the target so that the target's backing could be relied upon later. According to this CIO:

> "Because the COO is my boss, I had to make sure that he knew what was going on. I make it a point of keeping him reasonably well updated about what is going on in the IT area. If he supported the smaller business case, he would be more likely to support the expansion of the project down the road."

At the same time, if a project was consistent with the external environment, but inconsistent with the internal environment, the influence attempt failed. For instance, one CIO suggested that:

> "The previous CIO had drafted an internal IT strategy that had been approved by the executive team, but the business units had not approved it. So, when one of the business units was considering the upgrade, where the system was housed became a big issue. This business unit did not trust IT to handle things if problems arose."

The results of the second round of post hoc analysis demonstrated the following possible reasons for differences between successful and unsuccessful CIO influence attempts when competing values were present. First, relative project size was different in the successful cases. The successful cases tended to have smaller projects (relative to the size of the company) than the unsuccessful cases. One obvious explanation for this is that it may be easier to gain commitment for smaller projects than larger ones. Also, in the successful cases, most of the CIOs in this subsample wanted to have the target be part of a coalition that supported the project. Recruiting a target executive to be part of a coalition seems to be an effective strategy. This might be because the target may be interested in being part of a project that is gaining momentum within the firm (i.e., for political reasons) or the target may realize that this is an opportunity to share the risk with others and reduce the resource burden necessary for the project (i.e., for practical reasons).

Furthermore, the directions of influence was mostly upward in the successful cases and mostly lateral in the unsuccessful cases, suggesting that gaining commitment is tougher when competing values are present and the target is a peer. This result seems counterintuitive; after all if someone with more power than you also has competing values, this may make it even tougher to obtain commitment. Part of the answer to this mystery may lie in the use of "trial balloons." In the cases where competing values were present in an upward influence context, some successful CIOs used "trial balloons" to ascertain possible areas of resistance early on in the process. Trial balloons consisted of the CIO mentioning the project in informal contexts to gauge the target executive's interest in and support for the project prior to formal discussions about it. The use of trial balloons allowed the CIO to be more fully prepared to address issues brought up by the target executive when the project was formally discussed. Thus, the use of trial balloons in upward influence contexts may provide the executive with enough information to prevail over competing values.

Finally, in terms of influence behaviors, the following patterns were discerned. Consultation was used frequently, inspirational appeal was used sometimes, and apprising was used rarely in cases involving commitment. In contrast, consultation and inspirational appeal were rarely used and apprising was used frequently in the unsuccessful cases. A further review suggested that when apprising was used in these unsuccessful efforts, the CIO described intangible benefits that would accrue to the target if he or she would go along with the initiative. Intangible benefits did not appear to motivate the targets to action. Furthermore, in one case, the target did not believe the tangible benefits

would accrue. In the one case where apprising was used in a successful influence attempt in the face of competing values, apprising consisted of a description of tangible benefits for the executive target. The appropriate use of apprising may be a key element to overcome competing values.
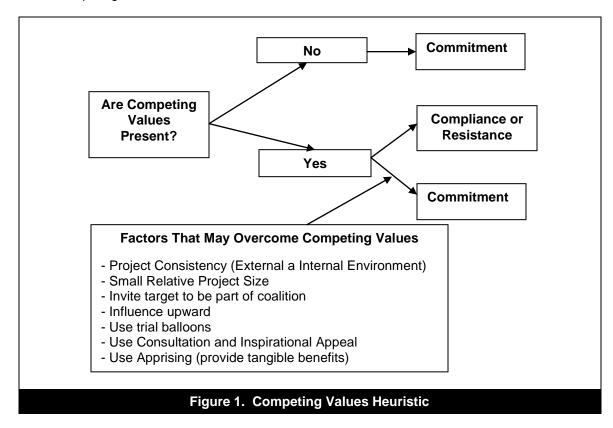
V. DISCUSSION

Some of the practices used by the CIOs to overcome competing values were consistent with suggestions made by previous research [Earl and Feeney, 1994; Enns et al., 2007; Lederer and Mendelow, 1988]. For instance, CIOs have been encouraged to communicate with other executives to work on developing a shared vision for IS. This can be done by using selective external success stories that indicate to top executives that the CIO understands the strategic direction the organization is taking and how IS can be used to leverage that strategic direction. Furthermore, CIOs should partner with other executives to carry forward IS initiatives in the best interest of the organization and that are not seen as forwarding their own career.

In addition, the current study suggests that several practices may be useful for soliciting commitment and overcoming competing values among target executives. CIOs that align initiatives with both the external and internal environments may enhance their capability to successfully influence non-IS executives when competing values exist. Also, smaller projects, inviting the target to be part of a coalition, and upward influence attempts may work in the CIO's favor. Finally, judicious use of trial balloons, along with consultation, inspirational appeal, and apprising, may also be used to overcome competing values.

Directions for Future Research and Limitations

This study was largely investigative since few studies on this specific topic exist. To be sure, one main purpose here was to help guide more systematic and quantitative research efforts in the future. We believe we met this goal and can provide a number of avenues for further research. For example, subsequent research could verify if the following heuristic holds (see Figure 1). If there are no competing values, executives will find it easier to convince other executives to go along with projects. If competing values are present, success is more elusive. However, it appears that competing values can be overcome with a project that is consistent with the environment (both external and internal) and by using appropriate behaviors. Note that the "skilled use" of these behaviors by executives may help overcome competing values.

Figure 1. Competing Values Heuristic

As mentioned earlier, a limitation here is that we interviewed and coded transcripts for only a small sample of executives. On the one hand, this approach permitted us to delve deeply into the influence experience of CIOs, as well as the influence experience's constituent elements. And, since this research was qualitative in nature, the study

lent itself to focused interview data collection methods. On the other hand, however, researchers should seize any opportunities to further study these influence phenomena in larger studies of executives to replicate and expand on our results. While contact with busy CIOs is a difficult research challenge, past research shows it can be accomplished. In addition, the current results have limited generalizability since, among other things, it exclusively studied Irish CIOs. Hence, other executives in other countries could be studied to determine if the findings hold true for non-Irish CIOs and other functional heads such as CFOs, COOs, and the like.

Finally, as noted, the CIO was the only executive interviewed, and some of the answers could have been biased because of their functional perspective. At the same time, however, a number of CIOs were candid and explained that their influence attempts were not successful, suggesting that they were not very biased in their responses to the questions. To further address the bias limitation, the supplementary data collection (i.e., archival data from company reports and websites) provided the same perspective about how the IS initiative was aligned with current business strategy as the interviews did. For instance, the initiative was sometimes mentioned in the annual report. Nevertheless, future researchers could interview both the executive that is attempting to influence a target as well as the target to further address the bias issue.

Practical Implications

Since this study was investigative, caution should be used when drawing strong practical conclusions from this study. Nevertheless, dealing with a project and executive where no competing values are present clearly provides a greater chance for success, everything else being equal. However, when competing values are present, the influence challenge is much harder. Yet skillful executives can overcome this form of resistance to successfully influence other executives. For instance, executives should ensure that the initiative is consistent with the external competitive environment (e.g., helps the organization compete against rivals) and with the internal environment (e.g., leverages existing initiatives, is consistent with a coalition's view). Proactive CIOs created favorable conditions for success in this internal environment. For example, they utilized or created coalitions that were consistent with their project proposals, and invited their targets to join these coalitions. If the projects were inconsistent with the internal environment, success was elusive.

Also, in terms of preparation and influence behaviors, the judicious use of trial balloons, consultation, inspirational appeal, and apprising provides an opportunity for CIOs to overcome competing values. For instance, apprising may make the most sense when tangible benefits can be pointed out. Raising the value of intangible benefits when using apprising did not appear to convince other executives in our sample.

VI. CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the outset, this qualitative study is the first to examine connections between executive influence processes and competing values. This study has shed some light on this phenomenon and has provided the impetus for further research into this theoretically interesting and practically relevant challenge. A necessary follow-up step is to explore whether the findings hold across larger samples of different types of executives. However, the preliminary evidence does suggest that it is easier to gain commitment when competing values are not present. If competing values are present, this study has provided some clues as to how these competing values can be overcome. Competing values are a reality of organizational life; however, their presence is not always strong enough to stop projects when managed properly.

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