Analysis of the ERP Project Champion Role and Criticality

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June 2001
Technical Research Report

Abstract.

Existance of an adequate project champion role has been identified as a critical success factor in ERP implementation projects. However, the figure of project champion is not yet quite well understood. Some authors relate it with the project sponsor figure while others relate it with the project manager figure. This paper tries to clarify these concepts. Our research framework was based in ERP literature review and a web survey. The findings of this survey show that the adequate project champion role is that of the project sponsor; respondents also think that both project manager and project sponsor are critical to the success of an ERP implementation project.

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1 Introduction

The concepts of Chief Project Officer (CPO), project champion, project sponsor, project leader and project manager are commonly used in Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementations and there is still confusion about their similarities and differences. Researchers such as Sumner (1999) and Parr et al. (1999) have identified the project champion role as a critical success factor (CSF) in ERP implementations. Bancroft et al (1998) defined that a project manager should be capable as a CSF. We have unified this CSF and others in a CSF unified model in ERP implementations (Esteves and Pastor 2000). Then, we have studied the relevance of each CSF along the phases of SAP implementation projects (Esteves and Pastor 2001). This study shows that an adequate project champion role CSF has the highest relevance along the phases of a SAP implementation project.

This ongoing research paper tries to clarify these concepts and to analyse their criticality in an ERP implementation. We followed a qualitative research approach to answer these problems. We started the research by reviewing the related literature and then, we created a web survey based in the research problem and the preliminary analysis.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we describe the project sponsor and project manager role in ERP implementations. Next, we explain the research problem. Then we explain our research problem and framework. Finally, we provide two working definitions and present some conclusions and further work.

2 Project Champion Overview

Project champions represent a category of key persons (or key roles) identified in the literature of innovation (Schon, 1963; Rothwell et al., 1974). Although the term "project champion" is widely used in research articles, it is often studied wihout a clear definition and rigorous identification process. Roure (1999) made a literature review (see table nº. 1) related with project champion definition. He discovered that definitions of a champion found in the literature reveal wide variations among researchers (table 1).

Authors	Definition
Ettlie et al. (1984, p.687)	"A person advocating" for the project
Markham et al. (1991, p. 219)	"A role where individuals are strong advocates for a project and generate positive behavioral support for an innovation during its development or work on behalf of the project in the face of organizational neutrality or opposition"
Maidique (1980, p. 64)	"A member of an organization who creates, defines or adopts an idea for a new technological innovation and who is willing to risk his or her position and prestige to make possible the innovation's successful implementation"
Day (1994, p.149)	"The agent who helps the venture navigate the socio-political environment inside the corporation"
Shane (1994a, p. 29)	"An advocate whose goal is to promote the innovation".
Chakrabarti and Hauschildt (1989, p. 166)	"The Champion (process promoter) acts as a linkage. He has the knowledge of the organization and knows who should be concerned with the innovation, thus connecting the sponsor with the expert. His strength is the ability to translate the technical language of the innovation into one which is commonly used in the organization. By becoming a salesman of the new idea , the champion is able to develop a plan of action. His diplomatic talents provide access to different people within the organuzation"
Rothwell et al. (1974, p. 291)	"Any individual who made a decisive contribution to the innovation by actively and enthusiastically promoting its progress through critical stages".
Schon (1963, p. 84)	"Essentially the champion must be a man willing to put himself on the line for an idea of doubful success. He is willing to fail. But he is capable of using any and every means of infromal sales and pressure in order to succeed".
Smith et al. (1984, p. 25)	"Sells idea to obtain resources. The major salesman to management for accelerating progress towar