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POLITICAL MANEUVERING DURING BUSINESS PROCESS TRANSFORMATION: A PLURALIST APPROACH

ABSTRACT

For years, managers have tried to improve organizational performance through Business Process Transformation (BPT), and their experiences have informed IS research and practice. Although extant theory acknowledges the political nature of these dynamic transformation initiatives, researchers have yet to empirically investigate and theorize how organizational politics impacts BPT behaviors and outcomes. Drawing on a pluralist methodology, we present an embedded case study of a company-wide BPT project across four business units at the high-tech firm *Terma*. First, we apply different perspectives on organizational politics to develop detailed accounts of each business unit's response to the transformation initiative, revealing four distinct patterns of BPT politics: *applying-the-hammer*, *struggling-to-engage*, *walking-the-talk*, and *keeping-up-appearances*. Next, we combine the empirical findings with extant literature to theorize how transformation agents and process users engage in politics during BPT implementation. As a result, our research leverages a pluralist approach to show how alternative political perspectives and forms of politics can help managers maneuver BPT initiatives in their roles as transformation agents and process users.

Keywords: Business Process Transformation, organizational politics, power, pluralist approach, embedded case study

POLITICAL MANEUVERING DURING BUSINESS PROCESS TRANSFORMATION: A PLURALIST APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

Business Process Transformation (BPT) is the latest strand in a long tradition of improving business performance through adoption of technology and implementation of new ways of managing, organizing and executing work (Grover and Markus, 2008). As such, BPT requires alignment between IS on the one hand with business needs and transformation goals on the other. BPT is a particular form of organizational change, requiring the use of IS for process transformation purposes and reinforcing the complex interplay between technology and people related issues. As an important area of IS research (Broadbent et al., 1999; Kettinger et al., 1997; Lee et al., 2008; Mani et al., 2010; Venkatesh and Bala, 2012), BPT covers both incremental and radical transformation initiatives (Davenport, 1993; Venkatraman, 1994), referred to in the literature as continuous improvement (Deming, 1986) and process innovation (Deming, 1986; Hammer and Champy, 1993).

There is overwhelming evidence that BPT breeds political tensions (Grint et al., 1995; Kelley, 1976; Knights and McCabe, 1999; Knights and McCabe, 2002) and that organizational actors therefore need to understand and engage in BPT politics to promote their interests and to respond appropriately to stakeholders (Buchanan, 1997; Dhillon, 2004; Grover et al., 1988). However, extant research has not adequately leveraged theory on power and politics to empirically investigate BPT. Although the literature offers a variety of heuristics and lessons (Brown, 1998; Kautz et al., 2001; Willcocks and Smith, 1995), there are no theories dedicated to understanding and managing BPT implementation politics. This is a problem in light of industry reports showing that organizational politics prevents one-third of BPT efforts from becoming successful (Gartner, 2012).

In response, we analyze behaviors and outcomes as the Danish high-tech firm *Terma* implemented a corporate-wide BPT project over a two-year period. Four of *Terma*'s business units—Aerostructures (AES), Airborne Systems (ASY), Integrated Systems (ISY), and Radar Systems (RSY)—undertook this project to address problems of keeping systems development efforts on schedule and within budget, and to respond to customers' demand for documentation of business process maturity. Observing significant differences in how the project was impacted by and dealt with power and politics, we explain the observed behaviors and outcomes based on a pluralist approach in which we apply multi-perspective analyses to reveal political tensions and maneuvering and to verbalize, synthesize and extend the ways we think about politics in IT-based BPT implementation (Bradshaw-Camball & Murray, 1991; Lapointe & Rivard, 2005, 2007; Mingers, 2001). As such, we relied on multiple research methods to capture how complex political processes manifested and unfolded over time (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Mingers & Brocklesby, 1997), starting out from the first author's engagement as an employee and action researcher within *Terma* (Mathiassen, 2002; Susman & Evered, 1978), adopting an embedded case study design to report the empirical findings (Yin, 2003), and advancing new theory through a pluralist approach inspired by metatriangulation (Lewis & Grimes, 1999).

As a result, our research complements existing studies that attempt to explain variations in IS implementation across business units in an organization based on how actors engage and respond to further their own interests (Barley, 1986; Robey and Sahay, 1996). Hence, following Gregor (2006) we provide analyses and descriptions of BPT politics and prescriptions for managing BPT politics in response to the following research question: *How can knowledge of organizational politics help understand and manage business process transformation behaviors and outcomes?*

Acknowledging that our understanding of politics is shaped by the concepts we use and that politics

cannot be grasped as a one-dimensional concept, we base our investigations on Bradshaw-Camball & Murray's (1991) framework of pluralist¹, rationalist, interpretive, and radical politics—each representing competing sociological paradigms. Our application of multiple perspectives fostered both empirical and theoretical insights and resulted in two distinct contributions to the literature. First, we present rich, contextual accounts of BPT politics in each of *Terma's* business units and identify four distinct patterns of politics: *applying-the-hammer*, *struggling-to-engage*, *walking-the-talk*, and *keeping-up-appearances*. Second, we theorize the interplay between transformation agent and process user politics during BPT implementation as a reflection of shifts in alignment of process needs and compliance with transformation goals. Hence, although extant theory acknowledges the political nature of technology-enabled change efforts (Jasperson et al., 2002), our research is the first within the IS field to systematically adopt a pluralist approach to empirically investigate and theorize how organizational politics impacts behaviors and outcomes in such initiatives.

Next, we review the literature on organizational politics related to BPT implementation. We then describe the Bradshaw-Camball and Murray (1991) framework used for analysis of the BPT implementation at *Terma*. We summarize the empirical analysis in the next section, followed by the development of new theory based on the empirical findings and extant literature. We conclude with a discussion of theoretical contributions and managerial implications. In particular, we advise managers to proactively maneuver BPT efforts by taking their intrinsic political nature into account rather than passively reacting to political moves.

¹ Note: The use of the term 'pluralist' here is based on the categorization of sociological paradigms by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and it differs from the concept of 'pluralism' in reference to multi-perspective, multi-method approaches to conducting research.

ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS AND BPT

In the following presentation of the literature, we first outline the characteristics of BPT as a particular technology-enabled form of organizational change. We then delineate BPT politics as a literature stream in the intersection between organization and IS theory. Lastly, we describe state-of-the-art knowledge on politics in BPT.

BPT

BPT is a collective name for ongoing, cross-functional, process focused change initiatives. Because such initiatives are information intensive, coordination and information management are main challenges. This requires complex alignment of processes, information and systems as work practices change through adoption of IT to accommodate emerging information needs. BPT is the latest strand of management approaches to organizational innovation, including Business Process Reengineering (BPR), Total Quality Management (TQM), Six Sigma, Lean, Software Process Improvement (SPI), and a variety of industry specific maturity models (Hackman and Wageman, 1995; Hammer, 1990; Tennant, 2001; Womack et al., 2007). The Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) (CMMI Product Team, 2010) is a widely used BPT approach to reducing costs, increasing speed, and improving quality of software and systems development. The five CMMI levels of maturity signal technical competence in well-defined areas. In general, BPT is an IT-based approach to organizational innovation, spanning a continuum of incremental and radical approaches (Davenport, 1993; Deming, 1986; Hammer and Champy, 1993). More specifically, it is an organization-wide approach that "requires redesigns in which IT, business processes, and other organizational elements are aligned and jointly optimized" (Grover & Markus, 2008, p. 8). Compared to other management approaches, BPT takes a broad perspective by paying attention to intra- as well as inter-organizational business processes with a focus on redesigning the use of IS to

manage knowledge. Further, it heralds an evolution from first to second generation process management—from "a radical, intra-organizational, IT-led, mechanistic, and inspirational approach" to "a contingent, interorganizational, IT-enabled, holistic, and systematic approach" (Grover & Markus, 2008, p. 45).

BPT is highly relevant to IS researchers (Broadbent et al., 1999; Kettinger et al., 1997; Lee et al., 2008; Mani et al., 2010; Venkatesh and Bala, 2012) because of its information- and technology-intensive nature with advanced use of IS to support coordination and management. Extant research on BPT is informed by various strands of IS literature emphasizing the need to take technical, organizational, social, and managerial aspects into account. In particular, state-of-the-art BPT literature shows that "lack of attention to social-political and organizational issues are major reasons" (Grover & Markus, 2008, p. 50) for the failure of BPT projects. Recognizing that BPT is an IT-based approach to organizational innovation, we review the literature at the intersection between politics in organization and IS theory (see Figure 1). We draw on both literature streams to take stock of state-of-the-art knowledge of BPT implementations: triggers of BPT politics, politicking during BPT, and the impact of politics on BPT (see Table 1).

Politics

For decades, scholars have been interested in organizational politics (Drory and Romm, 1990) as a multidisciplinary research topic that encourages application of different perspectives (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Jasperson et al., 2002). Definitions of power and politics abound (Drory and Romm, 1990). Pfeffer, for example, refers to power as the capacity to influence (e.g. by controlling information), while politics refers to the use of power (e.g. by disclosing information) (Pfeffer, 1981: 7). Individuals and groups may engage in organizational politics to construct, reproduce, and change organizational and technological realities (Knights and Murray, 1994). As such, political

behavior is seen as "an accepted rather than an objectionable dimension of the change agency role" (Buchanan and Badham, 1999: 609). However, the impact depends on actors' ability to mobilize and use various resources, including expertise, information, political access, and informal networks (Krackhardt, 1990; Pettigrew, 1975; Schein, 1985). Moreover, organizational politics is a catalyst for (Knights and Murray, 1994; Mintzberg, 1983) as well as a consequence of organizational change (Pettigrew, 1973; Pfeffer, 1981) and it is about opposition to managerial intervention as well as management and prevention of conflict (Hardy, 1996). Last, but not least, Drory & Romm (1990) suggest that organizational politics is dynamic in nature and is characterized by a combination of elements, namely the presence of an element of influence, use of informal means in the pursuit of outcomes, and conflict (Drory and Romm, 1990).

Figure 1: Research on Politics in BPT

Extant research has identified numerous triggers (see Table 1) of organizational politics in BPT initiatives. In fact, BPT breeds politics (Grint et al., 1995; Kelley, 1976; Knights and McCabe, 1999; Knights and McCabe, 2002) despite claims to the contrary (Knights and McCabe, 1998) and attempts at replacing conflicts with shared goals (Knights and McCabe, 2002). According to Keen,

IT-based transformations “alter relationships, patterns of communication and perceived influence, authority, and control” (Keen, 1981: 24). When existing power relations are challenged, BPT becomes an increasingly political activity in which outcomes remain uncertain (Knights and McCabe, 1999; McCabe et al., 1998) as stakeholders try to further their self-interests (Grover et al., 1988).

BPT Politics

Management-led initiatives like BPT are resisted for numerous reasons (van Offenbeek et al., 2013; Rivard and Lapointe, 2012), including conflicting interests (Boudreau and Robey, 1996), politicized solutions based on self-interest (Buchanan, 1997), turf-guarding and identity threats (Goldenson and Herbsleb, 1995; Grover et al., 1988; Stelzer and Mellis, 1998), fear of vulnerability due to increased transparency and data accessibility (Hart and Saunders, 1997), and threats to existing political structures (Currie and Willcocks, 1996; Lapointe & Rivard 2005, 2007) and expert power (Wilkinson and Witcher, 1993) (Table 1). Although IT-enabled change may involve participation and collaboration across organizations, BPT is resisted when it threatens existing power structures. “Simply put, power trumps technology” (Watson et al., 1999: 63). From an employee perspective, BPT may indeed be seen as a “managerial attempt to oppress labor” (Boudreau and Robey, 1996: 52), and managers may hide the real purpose of a BPT initiative “by justifying actions on rational grounds and honoring the appropriate organizational rituals” (Franz and Robey, 1984: 1203). Hiding behind rhetoric about empowerment and efficiency, managers may implement systems that increase transparency and subsequently their control over business processes and employees. Consequently, employees may engage in politics not only to resist and guard their turfs, but also to constructively protect existing work practices against management-led BPT initiatives (Keen, 1981; Nielsen and Nørbjerg, 2001a; Nielsen and Nørbjerg, 2001b). From a bird’s eye perspective, BPT

initiatives are vehicles for ongoing struggles between competing groups and individuals which may reinforce or challenge existing power relations (Knights and McCabe, 1999; McCabe, 2000). Similarly, BPT initiatives may reflect competing institutional interests as “the institutional power to influence and regulate can be linked to ideologies governing supply-push and demand-pull approaches to innovation” (King et al., 1994: 162).

With regard to politicking (Table 1), organizational politics is enacted by multiple stakeholders during BPT (Keen, 1981; McCabe et al., 1998). Managers therefore need both technical and political skills to balance and negotiate competing stakeholder interests, garner support, build commitment, and ensure the legitimacy of chosen solutions (Buchanan, 1997; Dhillon, 2004; Schein, 1985). Management must deal explicitly with conflicts and engage proactively in politicking to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. Otherwise, a power vacuum may emerge in which publicly announced goals and values may be undermined by self-interests (Levine and Rossmore, 1994). As various stakeholder groups engage in politicking, managers must “recognize and deal with the politics of data and the likelihood, even legitimacy, of counterimplementation” (Keen, 1981: 24). Employees may support BPT when it is seen as suiting their needs (Nidumolu et al., 1996: 208). Different stakeholder groups may use narratives to further their interests during BPT (Brown, 1998), and they may frame communication and information flows to manipulate perceptions of an initiative (Brown, 1995). In fact, socio-political actions centered on mobilization of discursive and symbolic resources are inherent to BPT implementations (Bloomfield and Danieli, 1995: 23). Although, resistance may be minimized by experimenting with and designing solutions in accordance with organizational goals, power distribution, and culture (Kautz et al., 2001; Lapointe & Rivard, 2005, 2007; Markus, 1983; Markus and Pfeffer, 1983), BPT is subject to different interpretations depending on the roles and interests of key stakeholders. Stakeholders may influence the change effort differently depending on their interests in reducing

uncertainty and supporting organizational goals (Sillince and Harindranath, 1998). Accordingly, Willcocks and Smith (1995) suggest three specific politicking tactics for BPT management: (1) regularly carry out power audits and determine the feasibility of various transformation mechanisms, (2) monitor politics and identify changing opinions and shifting moods, and (3) mobilize power to ensure proper momentum and counter opposition (Willcocks and Smith, 1995).

Table 1: Knowledge of BPT Politics

Triggers	Politicking	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conflicting (self-)interests ▪ Turf guarding and identity threats ▪ Fear of transparency ▪ Threats to existing political structures and power relations ▪ Managerial oppression of labor and increased control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Negotiating competing interests ▪ Framing communication and information flows through narratives ▪ Mobilizing discursive and symbolic resources ▪ Designing solutions aligned with goals, power, and culture ▪ Management of organizational responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Power redistribution ▪ Transformed organizational structures ▪ Transfer of influence to managers ▪ Equalization of power and influence ▪ Transformed interorganizational relationships

By shaping the transformation process, organizational politics inevitably impacts BPT outcomes (Table 1). Focusing on the role of IT in BPT, research highlights how transformation initiatives impact organizational structures and power distributions (Burkhardt and Brass, 1990; Saunders, 1981) which in turn challenges implementation (Cavaye and Christiansen, 1996; Markus, 1981; Markus, 1983). The use of IS like Group Support Systems (GSS) is an illustrative example. On the one hand, GSS may transfer influence to managers whose actions may intentionally or unintentionally be motivated by their own agendas (Griffith et al., 1998). On the other hand, such technologies may “exert an equalizing force on power and influence by (1) increasing participation in the decision-making process, (2) improving access to information, (3) improving access to

persons, (4) reducing the ‘power distance’ to key individuals, and (5) providing increased opportunities to influence the opinion of others” (Williams and Wilson, 1997: 911). IS support for business processes may also influence interorganizational relationships. Supply chain management systems can, for example, be used coercively to increase the level of control over trading partners (Hart and Saunders, 1997), and such interorganizational systems may consciously be adopted for that purpose (Premkumar and Ramamurthy, 1995).

In summary, BPT is a management approach to organizational innovation (Grover and Markus, 2008). However, BPT challenges existing power relations, and organizational politics shapes both behaviors and outcomes. BPT is thus a highly uncertain socio-technical activity and stakeholders need to understand and engage in organizational politics as they implement, adapt to and use the technology. Although the literature offers a variety of managerial heuristics and lessons (Brown, 1998; Kautz et al., 2001; Willcocks and Smith, 1995) and demonstrates how to apply discourse theory to understand BPT politics (Knights and McCabe, 1998; Knights and McCabe, 1999; Knights and McCabe, 2002), there is no theory on BPT implementation politics. Buchanan & Badham (1999) lament "the limited value of checklists of "power tactics" found in some of the politics literature" (Buchanan and Badham, 1999: 624).

FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

Bradshaw-Camball & Murray (1991) propose three perspectives on organizational politics that represent different sociological paradigms: functional, interpretive, and radical (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Furthermore, they distinguish between two main schools of thought within the functional perspective: the pluralist and rationalist. The well-cited Jasperson et al. (2002) article applied the pluralist, rationalist, interpretive and radical perspectives in their review of the IS literature on politics, suggesting that this multi-perspective framework offers a comprehensive view

of power and politics in IS research. Of the 82 articles they reviewed, five were placed within the radical, 15 within the interpretive, 39 within the rationalist, and 42 within the pluralist perspective, which underscores the importance of distinguishing between the two functionalist schools. Hence, we use the four theoretical perspectives as alternative analytical lenses for understanding important aspects of organizational politics. Well-aligned with our pluralist research methodology, the Bradshaw-Camball & Murray (1991) framework is unique in offering competing perspectives that allow for an in-depth investigation of the complexities and multi-faceted nature of organizational politics. Table 2 summarizes the alternative perspectives, the role of key concepts in understanding politics, and references to IS studies that apply them. In this study, we focus on structure (e.g. who the political agents are, what their interests are, what means of influence they have), process (e.g. how this influence is exercised), and outcome (e.g. what the consequences are).

From a pluralist perspective, organizations are made up of people who pursue personal interests with less regard for organizational goals (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Conflicts are an intrinsic and inescapable part of organizational life. However, they can play a constructive role by highlighting different opinions, identifying potential problems, and garnering acceptance of joint undertakings. Power is seen as a source of and a means to resolve conflicts among individuals and groups through negotiation and coalition formation. The pluralist perspective draws attention to the physical, concrete manifestations of politics by asking: “Who are the key players in the game (stakeholders), how much power do they have, and what basis of power do they utilize?” (Bradshaw-Camball and Murray, 1991: 381). Sources of power—such as relationships, information, and control of critical resources—are recognized by stakeholders and used in political game playing. In terms of outcomes, the emphasis is on power and resources, while broader organizational ramifications are often ignored. An advantage of the pluralist perspective is that it draws “attention to the surface, revealing more conscious conflicts and bases of power” (Martin, 1992 quoted in (Lewis and

Kelemen, 2002: 266)). It is “concerned with evolutionary as opposed to catastrophic change” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 359). An example of pluralist politics is provided by Hart & Saunders (1997) in their investigation of the role that power and trust play in EDI adoption and use. Their study looks at how companies use coercive power to force trading partners to adopt EDI.

Table 2: Perspectives on Organizational Politics

Perspec- tive	Concept	Goals	Conflicts	Application Emphasis	References
Pluralist	Political game playing (e.g. bargaining and coalition formation) in which stakeholders mobilize power (e.g. control of critical resources) to further their interests and resolve conflicts	Stakeholders pursue their own different goals	Conflicts often manifested at the surface level but may be resolved through negotiation	Reveals surface-level conflicts and bases of power	(Bamber and Lansbury, 1988; Burkhardt and Brass, 1990; Hart and Saunders, 1997; Howell and Higgins, 1990)
Rationalist	Legitimate and formal authorities handle disagreements through routine decision-making and rational appraisal of arguments vis-à-vis organizational goals and objectives	Organization-level goals dominate	No apparent conflicts	Emphasizes formal authority and standard operating procedures	(Brown and Magill, 1998), (Nault, 1998), (Dean et al., 1992; Sambamurthy and Zmud, 1999)
Interpretive	Influence exerted by constructing meaning and controlling the thought patterns of others through social use of language, symbols, myths, and stories	Creation of perception of common goal	Latent conflicts may exist at a deeper structural level, but are not manifested because of perceived common goals	Focuses on processes that shape shared goals	(Bloomfield and Danieli, 1995), (Brown, 1998), (Nidumolu et al., 1996)
Radical	Power embedded in deep societal structures represents intrinsic contradictions	Conflict of goals at societal level manifests	Conflicts represent deep structures within	Emphasizes deeper social structure	(Boudreau and Robey, 1996), (King et al., 1994), (Knights and McCabe,

	between opposing forces which eventually lead to radical change	within organization	society and upheaval ensues		1999)
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From a rationalist perspective, organizations are “instruments of rational and purposeful activity” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 202). Conflicts should be controlled—if not entirely eliminated—because they are viewed as disruptive to the harmonious nature of organizational interests. Grounded in authority and control, power is a neutral resource that managers employ to achieve common interests and shared goals. Politics plays out through data-driven arguments to support value judgments and decision-making. Hence, the rationalist perspective adopts a surface-level view of structure by attributing power to hierarchical positions, organizational roles, and expertise. Conflicts are contained or dealt with through standard operating procedures or by decisions made by those higher up in the hierarchy. With regard to outcomes, goal achievement is measured through information and control systems. Thus, the strength of the rationalist perspective is its emphasis on formal authority in organizational politics. An example of rationalist politics is provided by Nault (1998) who investigates the impact of information technology on organization designs. IT influences formal decision-making by providing decision-makers with information or by redesigning monitoring and incentive structures.

From an interpretive perspective, organizations do not exist in a literal and concrete sense. Instead, they emerge as individuals create and recreate a shared social reality based on experiences and subjective interpretations (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Structures and other organizational characteristics are expressions of ongoing social construction, and politics focuses on communication, persuasion, and influencing the perceptions of others; “the parties involved exert influence by constructing the meaning of what others experience” (Bradshaw-Camball and Murray,

1991: 382). Politics shapes interpretations of common goals through language and symbols rooted in organizational culture. Power is the ability to construct and maintain a shared social reality by ascribing meaning to the experiences of others. Outcomes focus on the status quo and its retention through symbolic processes. There is little apparent conflict since all are presumed to be working toward a shared goal. Thus, the interpretive perspective's strength is its focus on the communicative processes that shape the shared goal. It delves deeper than the pluralist and rationalistic perspectives since it focuses on "more subconscious processes of structuring reality that maintain illusions of power" (Martin, 1992 quoted in (Lewis and Kelemen, 2002: 266)). An example of interpretive politics is the study of an IT implementation by Brown (1998), which focuses on how group narratives are deployed in attempts to preserve and further perceived interests.

From a radical perspective, organizations are structural elements of society and mirror their wider social settings (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Structurally, organizations are seen as concrete and relatively persistent. Changing the status quo is disruptive and only possible when economic and political crises occur, conflicts peak, and radically new social forms emerge. Politics focuses on social structure, resource control, radically different goals, and oppression versus emancipation in the struggle for power. The radical perspective draws attention to the deeper structure of politics by emphasizing societal constraints on individual and organizational actions as the result of decisions made by those in power (Bradshaw-Camball and Murray, 1991). It views the 'superstructure' of capitalist society as "the medium through which the consciousness of human beings is controlled and molded to fit the requirements of the social formation as a whole" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 297). The emphasis is on oppression by means of ideology as expressed, for example, through market forces, technologies, government regulations, or ideas proposed by the dominant class of society. In a class-based society, conflicts escalate into revolts if the dominant class fails to hold the less powerful in check through oppression. Outcomes focus on how macro-level politics leads to

tensions that shape practices at the organizational level. Thus, the radical perspective's strength is its emphasis on the impact of deeper social structures on organizational politics. In their study of power, politics, and resistance to TQM, Knights & McCabe (1999) shows that TQM both influences and is conditioned by power relations, and that it is a vehicle for the struggle between opposing individuals and social groups.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our research grew out of a wider action research project conducted at *Terma* over a two year period. The project was organized as collaborative practice research (Mathiassen, 2002), a particular form of action research that emphasizes close collaboration between practitioners and researchers to improve organizational practices. Becoming aware of the many different interests in the BPT implementation during our research engagement, we decided to investigate the role of politics as a means of understanding surprising BPT outcomes such as when organizational goals were achieved despite misalignment of strategies and interest between a business unit and the organizational change project.²

In line with collaborative practice research, we organized the research as a case study for a number of reasons. First, case studies are well-suited to investigate “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2003: 13), and our goal was to understand how organizational politics impacted BPT implementation at *Terma*. Second, multiple data sources and theory-driven analysis are key characteristics of case study research (Yin, 2003), and we had access to very rich data from multiple sources at multiple levels. Third, the case study method is advantageous in situations where investigators are asking “how” or “why” questions about events over which they have little

² We thank a reviewer for this observation.

or no control (Yin, 2003). Specifically, we organized our research as an exploratory, embedded multiple case study of BPT politics in four business units within the same company. Fourth, According to Walsham (1995) case studies can also be used to build new theory or extend existing theory (Walsham, 1995).

Inspired by Jasperson et al. (2002) who used metatriangulation (Lewis and Grimes, 1999) to guide their review of the IS literature on politics and to synthesize across multiple theories, we applied a pluralist methodology (Mingers, 2001) for the purpose of data analysis and theory building. Hence, following Mingers we applied multiple theoretical perspectives to understand and theorize on BPT implementation politics, breaking away from our initial or "home" paradigm of critical realism (Mingers et al., 2013; Mingers, 2004). Mingers argues that "the real world is ontologically stratified and differentiated, consisting of a plurality of structures that generate the events that occur (and do not occur)" (Mingers, 2001: 243). Consequently, it is necessary to apply multiple perspectives that focus on different aspects of the situation. This approach afforded a better understanding of BPT outcomes by assisting us "in recognizing, cultivating, and accommodating diverse paradigmatic insights" (Jasperson et al., 2002: 402). In summary, our pluralist approach allowed us to triangulate across both theoretical perspectives and methods (Fingeld-Connett, 2010).

Unrestricted access to quantitative and qualitative data from the corporate level and all four business units allowed us to analyze each case from multiple perspectives. Our data sources included audio recordings of 16 management meetings (2-3 hours each) over an 18-month period during the BPT implementation and 21 post-implementation interviews with all key stakeholders at different organizational levels. The interviewees included the CEO, the corporate BPT manager, all project managers charged with implementing new processes, the implementation manager from each business unit, and the business unit Senior VPs. The semi-structured interviews lasted 1-2

hours each and provided comparable data across the four units to support theory building. All audio recordings of meetings and interviews were transcribed, resulting in more than 500 pages of transcript. We also had access to more than 2,500 documents, including project status reports, minutes of meetings, BPT plans (for each business unit and for the overall project), and process maturity assessments (conducted under the auspices of the corporate BPT manager).

For the purpose of developing distinct accounts of BPT politics within each business unit at *Terma*, we applied multiple theoretical perspectives to the data set based on Bradshaw-Camball & Murray's (1991) framework. Data coding and analysis followed a five-step process. First, we developed a comprehensive case study protocol, including a data analysis guide (Table 3) and a coding scheme (Table 4). The data analysis guide contains key questions and concepts that helped us apply the four political perspectives to understand how politics played out within each unit at *Terma*. The questions are derived from Bradshaw-Camball & Murray's (1991) framework and reflect how the perspectives apply to BPT initiatives. The coding scheme includes codes that identify the transformation agent or process user making a political statement (Interviewee), what unit the statement is about (Organizational Unit), and the political nature (Perspective) of the statement. This coding scheme allowed us to select and present any type of political statement by organizational actors, concerning either one of the four business units or corporate services. The coding scheme facilitated data management by categorizing political statements according to type and by helping us sort empirical data into manageable chunks (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Second, we used the coding scheme to conduct multi-perspective coding of the data, yielding nearly 600 expressions of organizational politics ranging from a single sentence to half a page of transcript. We coded the data by (1) identifying political statements using the data analysis guide, (2) coding statements based on the coding scheme, and (3) checking and recoding statements based

on political perspective. We identified all expressions of politics and subsequently coded each expression in accordance with the coding scheme. We also attached comments to each expression to justify the coding and to provide preliminary interpretations of the political content, thereby increasing intra-coder reliability (Miles and Huberman, 1994). We then sorted all expressions of politics according to political perspective, evaluating internal consistency and homogeneity and recoding them as needed. Specifically, one audio recording was recoded and compared to the initial coding. Additionally, the data sets for one business unit were coded independently by the authors, and differences were discussed and resolved. This process brought definitional clarity to the coding scheme. Both intracoder (close to 90%) and intercoder (estimated at 80%) reliability were strengthened through this process of recoding and “check coding” parts of the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Table 3: Data Analysis Guide

Perspective	Questions	Concepts
Pluralist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are conflicting interests between involved stakeholders expressed and negotiated during the initiative? How do differences in powerbase between stakeholders influence the process and its outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders Interests Powerbases Conflicts Negotiation
Rationalist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are goals expressed and data collected and used as a basis for evaluating options during the initiative? How are choices between alternative processes and outcomes made based on legitimate and formal authority structures? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals Data Authority Value judgments Decision-making
Interpretive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do actors make sense of the initiative based on past experience and symbolic expressions? How do actors use symbols to socially construct the process and influence its outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiences Symbols Sensemaking Social constructions Organizational culture
Radical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are actors influenced during the initiative by the ideologies and constraints of the firm's environment? How does the resulting struggle between opposing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideology Constraints Struggle Oppression Emancipation

	forces influence the process and its outcomes?	
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Third, we described the BPT implementation process and outcome in every business unit from each of the four political perspectives, yielding sixteen distinct accounts. To facilitate these analyses, we selected all expressions related to a specific unit and a particular political perspective and organized these into sixteen tables (four perspectives on four units). Each table (exemplified in Table A.1 in the Appendix) contained quotations from BPT participants at the corporate, unit, and project level. These tables helped us systematically compare statements using Yin's (2003) pattern matching strategy and describe the BPT process and outcome for each business unit and political perspective in juxtaposition with one another.

Table 4: Coding Scheme

Organizational Unit	Interviewee	Perspective
▪ Corporate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corporate management ▪ Corporate BPT management ▪ Corporate BPT agent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interpretive ▪ Pluralist ▪ Radical ▪ Rationalist
▪ AES ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AES management ▪ AES BPT management ▪ AES implementation management 	
▪ ASY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ASY management ▪ ASY BPT management ▪ ASY BPT agent ▪ ASY implementation management 	
▪ ISY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISY management ▪ ISY BPT management ▪ ISY BPT agent ▪ ISY implementation management 	
▪ RSY ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RSY management ▪ RSY BPT management ▪ RSY implementation management 	

³ No BPT agent was appointed for this business unit.

Fourth, we synthesized the four distinct analyses for each unit into an overall storyline with an explanation of what happened and why. Table 5 shows the qualitative impacts of the political perspectives on the overall storylines. These impacts are described in greater detail in the next section. In doing so, we relate each story to a metaphor that encapsulates the observed organizational politics and highlights its key characteristics (Kendall and Kendall, 1993; Morgan, 1980; Morgan, 1996). “Metaphors are like the magical incantations of old. By using words that people understand and believe in to make linkages with the new and unfamiliar, the speaker provides the ability to envision the world in a new way” (Kendall and Kendall, 1993: 149). The metaphors are descriptive and heuristic devices that at an aggregate level express the sequence of political moves and countermoves that played out in the business units. As such, the metaphors represent an understanding of organizational politics that goes beyond the underlying perspectives and thereby facilitates theorizing of BPT implementation politics. These metaphors encapsulate the synthesized accounts of BPT politics at *Terma*. Different metaphors might better describe other political patterns unfolding under different circumstances in other companies.

Table 5: Impact of Political Perspectives on Synthesized Stories

	Political Metaphor	Pluralist Politics	Rationalist Politics	Interpretive Politics	Radical Politics
AES	<i>Applying-the-hammer</i>	Minimal	Major	Dominant	Minimal
ASY	<i>Struggling-to-engage</i>	Dominant	Some	Some	Minimal
ISY	<i>Walking-the-talk</i>	Minimal	Dominant	Some	Some
RSY	<i>Keeping-up-appearances</i>	Major	Minimal	Dominant	Minimal

Fifth, we theorized how actors engage in political practices during BPT implementation through a creative, iterative process of extrapolating from empirical data, comparing results with extant theory, and engaging in “disciplined imagination” (Weick, 1989). This was a two-step process

involving constant consideration of the four synthesized stories, the related patterns of BPT politics, and the four underlying political perspectives (Bradshaw-Camball and Murray, 1991). As a first step, we listed similarities and differences among the four cases in order to break simplistic frames (Eisenhardt, 1989), deepen our understanding, and create possible explanations (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As a second step, we considered extant theory on organizational politics and BPT to generalize insights from each case and to integrate these into a comprehensive view of BPT implementation politics. During this process of creative thinking and discussion, we relied on Bacharach's definition of theory (Bacharach, 1989) and Eisenhardt's guidelines (Eisenhardt, 1989) to deepen our understanding and arrive at possible explanations (Miles and Huberman, 1994). We furthermore follow Rivard (2014), Weber (2012), and Gregor (2006) in defining the type of theory we are offering, specifying the boundary of our theory, providing conceptual definitions of concepts, and offering propositions in specifying the relationship between concepts. As a third step, we applied the practice of alternating "between abstractions and specific instances of the explanation of the phenomenon under study" (Rivard, 2014: viii) as a theory building heuristic. We engaged in theory building with two goals in mind. The first goal was analysis and description. We wanted to contribute theory as an analytical tool for understanding BPT politics. The second goal was prescription. We wanted to build theory as a practical tool for managing BPT politics. As a result, we developed a theoretical model of BPT implementation politics and derived nine propositions from it that describe how process users react politically to BPT implementations, how transformation agents engage with process users, and the interplay between the two.

FINDINGS: BPT AT *TERMA*

The following account provides an overview of the corporate-led BPT project, including goals, organization, as well as key characteristics of the process within each of the four business units.

Subsequently, we provide a detailed account of how organizational politics impacted behaviors and outcomes within each unit. In addition, we provide examples of the dynamic and emergent nature of organizational politics (Drory and Romm, 1990) and change during the BPT implementation process. Empirical evidence of the link between structure, processes, and outcomes is shown in the Appendix.

Overview of BPT at Terma

Founded in 1944 as a small manufacturer of thermometers and manometers, *Terma* has grown to employ more than 1,000 people in the United States, Singapore, The Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark, where the company headquarters are located. Today, *Terma* offers a wide range of mission-critical, off-the-shelf systems and products for civilian and military use. Even though *Terma's* business units have considerable latitude in selecting, planning, and executing systems development projects, all company employees are expected to comply with the Terma Management System (TMS), a comprehensive ISO-9001-certified quality system containing more than a thousand development and management processes. Since the company-wide ISO 9001 certification in 2003, *Terma* had engaged in several smaller process initiatives. These initiatives were either limited to a single business unit or focused on large joint-venture projects with business partners. However, due to a lack of management commitment, insufficient resources, ill-defined goals, and over-reliance on grassroots tactics, the sustained impact of these initiatives on *Terma's* development and management practices was quite limited. When the BPT project was initiated in 2005, some—if not all—of these conditions had changed. The project was conceived by a corporate Senior VP and CTO who possessed the clout and will to push for ambitious, corporate-wide BPT. Given his reputation of being a “tough dog”, the Senior VP had the leverage needed to initiate the BPT project with the CEO's blessings.

The BPT project ran for two years and was based on the CMMI. CMMI is a model for evaluating and improving software and systems development processes (Chrissis et al., 2003; CMMI Product Team, 2010). Although used globally today, the CMMI was originally initiated by the U.S. Department of Defense as a methodology for assessing the process maturity of defense contractors in developing information systems (see, e.g., <https://www.sei.cmu.edu/about/statistics/history.cfm>). It is an incremental approach to BPT that can be used to guide improvement efforts at both project and organizational levels (CMMI Product Team, 2010). The model: (1) distinguishes between five levels of process capability; (2) describes a considerable repertoire of processes within different areas (e.g. Configuration Management, Measurement and Analysis, Process and Product Quality Assurance, Project Monitoring and Control, Project Planning, Requirements Management, and Supplier Agreement Management at CMMI level 2); and (3) offers practical guidance for evaluating and improving an organization's current processes. Although the CMMI is adopted across industries, it has historically been associated with the defense industry, where the U.S. Department of Defense has actively promoted the model as *the* approach to improve and benchmark supplier capabilities.

Terma's project is a textbook example of a BPT initiative in the sense that the processes being transformed through organizational innovation were information intensive, requiring IS support. TMS, for example, contains technological tools for project management. In addition, actual information systems were used in support of the processes within and across business units and projects. The BPT project at *Terma* had two primary goals: to bring processes into compliance with the CMMI and to reach level 2 where basic project management processes are stable and repeatable. These two BPT project goals were corporate-level goals. The degree of a priori alignment (Kelley, 1976; Pettigrew, 1973) of perceived process needs between stakeholders differed significantly across the four units (Table 6). The Aerostructures (AES) unit's interests diverged from those of the

BPT project in three key ways: AES operates within segments of the aerospace industry where the CMMI is not widely used for improvement and benchmarking, most projects were blueprints with little focus on development, and the unit's management tradition was not strong on stability and control. The Radar Systems (RSY) unit's interests also diverged from those of the BPT project: the civilian customer base had no interest in the CMMI, most projects focused on servicing radar systems with little emphasis on development, and the unit's management tradition put strong emphasis on ingenuity and creativity rather than the CMMI's focus on repeatability. In contrast, both the Airborne Systems (ASY) and Integrated Systems (ISY) units had vested interests in the BPT project, because both were suppliers within the military industry which recognized the CMMI as the model of choice for BPT and benchmarking purposes. In both ASY and ISY, most projects were IS development projects with a significant focus on software engineering. Also, management within these two units traditionally emphasized stability and control.

From a bird's eye view, the BPT project was led by a corporate BPT manager assisted by a group of process experts and orchestrated through an extensive network of people at the corporate, business unit, and project levels. Initially, small teams were tasked with making existing TMS processes compliant with the CMMI, and the new processes were deployed and revised in pilots before implementation. Based on the generic processes resulting from these corporate level activities, each unit planned its own BPT implementation to ensure ownership of new processes. The projects within each unit were charged with adapting the generic processes and putting them into practice. Each implementation project's compliance with CMMI level 2 was measured continuously. Table 6 highlights differences and similarities across units in terms of business domain, BPT plans, alignment of process needs, and BPT outcomes. ASY and ISY decided to follow the generic plan set forth by the corporate BPT manager. In AES, the generic processes were translated into a cookbook (containing instructions, checklists, and templates) to provide implementation guidance

for project managers. RSY unit managers established a lightweight version of the generic processes to help tailor them to needs within the unit.

The BPT project led to varying degrees of transformation goal compliance across the four units as reflected in the assessments of their process maturity based on standard appraisal guidelines (CMMI Product Team, 2010; Rose et al., 2008). Assessments in the form of electronic surveys were performed regularly, in essence making them technology based implementation drivers. Comparing assessments at the beginning and the end of the project, the process maturity within AES increased, stopping just short of being CMMI level 2 compliant; within ASY, the process maturity decreased and the unit did not reach CMMI level 2 compliance; ISY implemented improvements consistently throughout the project and increased its process maturity to become CMMI level 2 compliant; and RSY was CMMI level 2 compliant at the beginning of the BPT project, but its efforts resulted in a decreased process maturity at the end of the project.

Table 6: Four Cases of BPT at *Terma*

	AES	ASY	ISY	RSY
Business domain	Aerostructures for commercial and military customers	Aerospace technology for military customers	Integrated systems for military customers	Radar systems for civilian customers
BPT plan	Process tailoring through guidelines, checklists, and templates	Generic implementation plan	Generic implementation plan	Management-driven tailoring to suit RSY needs
Software development	Limited	Major	Major	Limited
Goal alignment	A priori low	A priori high	A priori high	A priori low
BPT outcomes	Process maturity increased; not CMMI level 2 compliant; met BPT goals	Process maturity decreased; not CMMI level 2 compliant; did not meet BPT goals	Process maturity increased; CMMI level 2 compliant; met BPT goals	Process maturity decreased; CMMI level 2 compliant; did not meet BPT goals

Applying-the-Hammer (AES)

AES designs and manufactures aerostructures such as roof sections, wing parts, pylons, pods, and engine components for both commercial and military aircraft and delivers them to systems integrators, known as airframers. At the time of BPT, AES was undergoing organizational restructuring and problems were mounting: the economy was in poor health and people were being laid off. Although AES management traditionally saw generic corporate processes and CMMI as inapplicable to AES, the project was perceived by AES management as a means to solving existing problems by reducing risks and increasing project predictability. Hence, social construction played a dominant role (Table 5) within AES in forming a shared vision of the BPT project as both a welcome solution to existing problems and a symbol of the unit's future directions. Having encouraged the formation of a shared vision, the AES Senior VP pursued BPT with an emphasis on rationalist politics, seeking to improve the unit's process maturity by relying on a cookbook approach, adapting *Terma's* generic processes to the local context. Following the adage, "when you have a hammer, the world looks like a nail", BPT was an opportunistic and welcome solution to existing problems. Even though their process needs did not perfectly align with the BPT changes, AES managers realized value in successfully maneuvering the BPT implementation to their benefit. They were in a proverbial sense *applying-the-hammer*, leaving a strong impact on AES projects. The appreciation for areas of overlapping goals and the lack of manifest conflicts left no room for emphasizing pluralist or radical politics.

The AES Senior VP became a symbol of decisive action. He attempted to discursively construct the BPT project as an answer to current challenges and poor project practices in the past. The project was an expression of interpretive politics based on skillful use of language and symbols. Indeed, his management style became known as "the John way". According to the AES implementation

manager, “the AES Senior VP is a very systematic person, very methodical.” AES participants accepted and understood the reasons behind his decisions and followed his lead. During BPT, the AES Senior VP also used symbols to facilitate the process and influence outcomes. For example, he created an image of success by likening AES to ISY—the unit that was, in his eyes, the unofficial process champions at *Terma*—by frequently comparing maturity assessment results and showing the two units to be on par. Both the AES implementation manager and the project managers bought into the AES Senior VP’s vision and approach, and praised the cookbook’s usefulness despite implementation problems. They saw value in implementing BPT because it promoted AES interests. In the words of the AES implementation manager, “the kind of project management I’ve seen out here has been diddly-squat ... so right away, I accepted that this is the tool.”

Having secured commitment to the BPT project, the implementation proceeded in a rational manner. Based on legitimate and formal authority, AES made decisions between alternative implementation choices as the unit developed the process cookbook to facilitate BPT. These decisions were based on value judgments of the applicability of new processes and knowledge of project managers’ current strengths and weaknesses. In the corporate BPT manager’s words, “AES is taking a different approach. Generally speaking, they run things pretty tough and rigidly. They want to establish checklists and that sort of thing in realization that it is the only way to push things through.” The cookbook development and implementation were management-driven and executed faithfully by the involved project managers—even when delays occurred because of problems with adapting processes to the local culture. The cookbook approach was initially developed and adapted continually throughout the BPT implementation as a response and pro-active means of problem-solving to wavering goal compliance. This response was conceived and executed by the AES Senior VP and AES implementation manager. According to AES project manager #2, “it’s like our management says that we have to implement the BPT project, and it has to be part of every

program.” Consequently, the BPT project strongly impacted both participating and future AES projects. The AES Senior VP stated, “we see a positive trend in the projects that have been subjected to [the new processes] in terms of requirements management, customer relations, managing and monitoring projects. They have also led to very positive discussions about baselines when starting new projects.”

Struggling-to-Engage (ASY)

ASY is a global provider of advanced aerospace technology for fighter aircraft, transport aircraft, and helicopters, with a focus on integrating defensive aids and systems to sustain pilots’ comprehensive battlefield overview. During BPT, ASY encountered new business opportunities that required attention. Resources were already being stretched to the point where employees were complaining about stress and a poor working environment. To address this situation, conflicting interests had to be prioritized and negotiated. Although the ASY Senior VP voiced support for the CMMI ideology (in the sense of a set of ideas about management accepted as best practice within the industry) and the underlying management philosophy, he questioned the necessity of a CMMI appraisal. Instead he focused on maintaining customers’ perception of ASY as a credible and trustworthy market player as evidenced by their long-standing customer relationships. The real struggle played out at the project level, where project managers saw the CMMI as adding administrative burdens and detracting attention and resources away from more valued practices. The combination of new business opportunities, the ASY Senior VP’s ambivalence toward the BPT project, and the project managers’ struggle against the CMMI ideology resulted in futile efforts to resolve conflicts and strike a responsive chord with multiple stakeholders. In this way, BPT in ASY was dominated by pluralist politics (Table 5) although the underlying conflict of interests was neither escalated nor resolved. As a result, ASY was unsuccessfully *struggling-to-engage* during the

entire project. During this struggle, the unit displayed a few signs of rationalist and interpretive politics, whereas the emphasis on radical politics was minimal.

Overall, ASY's commitment to the BPT project was limited and results were modest. There was a conflict of interest between the BPT project's goals and process focus, and ASY's strategic interests and customer focus. Conflicting interests were expressed on several occasions and resulted in lack of management commitment to and employee participation in the project. Despite frustrations, the ASY implementation manager accepted this lack of support and involvement, and ASY project managers were content to conduct business as usual. The ASY implementation manager conceded, "if you have a customer who is paying for something, it is a different matter. It is easier to postpone [an internal BPT project] even though it is equally important in the long run. It is easier to ask for absolution. There is no immediate cost of postponing these processes." In the end, it was differences in powerbases among the stakeholders that influenced BPT results. The corporate BPT manager and his local allies—one ASY project manager and the ASY implementation manager—were unable to change the degree of ASY's BPT engagement and the ASY Senior VP's priorities. Given this, the corporate BPT manager had no choice but to accept the ASY Senior VP's decision to scale down his unit's BPT implementation. In the face of competing forces, the corporate BPT manager and his local allies were unable to build a coalition based on converging BPT goals and provide the necessary resources during the BPT implementation as a response to competing interests and lack of goal compliance. Later, the ASY Senior VP justified his prioritization of customer projects; "when I look back, I think it was the right thing to do because we would have received a much more negative response from the organization if we had tried to implement broadly at a time when people were extremely busy."

Although the ASY Senior VP bought into the CMMI ideology and supported the underlying management philosophy, he did not give in to the dominating process discourse within the defense industry and continued to question the business value of CMMI assessments. Both he and the ASY implementation manager regarded the CMMI as nice but unnecessary. The ASY Senior VP argued, “CMMI is non-essential. We’d like to have it, but if you ask if I could argue that we’ve lost an order because of it, I cannot ... it can’t be used for much else than to indicate that you’re a player within the industry.” At the project level, a struggle was evident as most project managers openly criticized the CMMI and the new processes. ASY project manager #1 said, “you can disregard everything—disregard the whole TMS and not do anything about the things you’re supposed to be doing. People ignore everything. They simply don’t give a damn.” However, the conflict between corporate management’s desire for increased control and local project managers’ dislike for increased administrative burdens never manifested itself and was therefore never negotiated. Instead, the BPT project in ASY displayed some evidence of a combination of rationalist politics (by developing plans, performing assessments, and participating in meetings) and interpretive politics (as evidenced by key actors expressing good intentions and not escalating conflicts). Because the corporate BPT manager also had reservations about the applicability of company-wide processes, the decision to give low priority to BPT was met with little opposition outside ASY despite the CEO’s view of the CMMI as a necessary tool for increasing efficiency and documenting organizational maturity.

Walking-the-Talk (ISY)

ISY provides integrated solutions for managing air, ground, and naval operations through large-scale projects for military customers. Coinciding with the BPT project, ISY faced market demands for proof of process maturity. The CMMI was, therefore, highly valued as both a means and an end. ISY accepted the defense industry’s maturity discourse and embraced the CMMI ideology

wholeheartedly without any signs of struggle. ISY demonstrated support both in words and in action. Based on a priori goal alignment, ISY's degree of participation in BPT was high and its timetable was ambitious. Having analyzed gaps between existing practices and the CMMI requirements, and using all available information about implementation progress, ISY process champions effectively established new, mandatory project practices. Confronted with questions about how to implement processes into projects, the implementation champions (the ISY implementation manager and the ISY training manager) intervened and supported each project manager individually. By adopting the CMMI ideology and rationally executing BPT, ISY was *walking-the-talk*. The unit followed *Terma's* chain of command in implementing new processes, leaving a strong impact on ISY projects. Hence, BPT in ISY was dominated by rationalist politics supplemented by some radical (the influence of the maturity discourse) and interpretive politics (creating a belief in CMMI as basis for the unit's operation) (Table 5). The emphasis on pluralist politics was minimal since there was little need to resolve conflicts of interest.

Indeed, ISY's BPT implementation was greatly influenced by the CMMI ideology and market constraints within the defense industry. In particular, the CEO, ISY Senior VP, and corporate BPT manager pointed to contract negotiations in which ISY's lack of a CMMI appraisal had been a problem. According to the CEO, "we simply cannot deliver to certain customer segments if we're not at CMMI level 3. So we must have it. This is the case for ISY in particular." The ISY Senior VP added, "it is crucial for us to be at CMMI level 2 and be able to say that we are in control of what we develop ... it is not enough to have a certificate, because I can only live off that for a short while. It's burning the furniture to heat the house—it doesn't work in the long run. It's about the economic benefit." Accordingly, ISY management adopted the CMMI ideology as a means to increase process predictability and efficiency. In the words of the ISY implementation manager, "it's important for us to be efficient, and it's important for us to be able to manage a business that's

predictable.” Moreover, the CMMI ideology was not seriously challenged by ISY’s project managers. Only scattered attempts at struggle surfaced during implementation, and the issues that emerged were immediately addressed through intervention by and effective communication from the ISY implementation and training managers. During the BPT implementation, the ISY implementation and training managers were thus constantly scanning their environment and reinforcing the shared BPT goal as a response to criticism and implementation difficulties.

As ISY was committed to the BPT goals and the new processes, the project was planned and monitored like other projects within the business unit, and corrective actions were taken based on available maturity assessment data. For example, after evaluating implementation progress and problems—including lack of training and information about new processes—the ISY implementation and training managers modified BPT project plans. As described by ISY project manager #4, “it was the ISY training manager and the ISY implementation manager who had already planned such an implementation sequence to keep us on track.” They spotted a need for guidance, identified gaps between existing practices and new processes, and, to ensure CMMI compliance, they leveraged their formal authority to establish solutions across all projects.

Keeping-up-Apearances (RSY)

RSY provides radar systems for surveillance applications, including antennas and transceivers, to a mostly civilian market. In RSY, competing social constructions of the BPT project existed side by side: the RSY Senior VP emphasized that the new processes might change project practices for the better while the RSY implementation manager criticized the standardization ideal and the BPT project organization. These tensions resulted in discrepancies between RSY’s self-representation as supporters of the BPT project and maturity assessments documenting a weak implementation impact on RSY projects. Although the CEO and the corporate BPT manager questioned RSY’s

engagement, RSY's BPT efforts were dominated by interpretive politics (Table 5) as they continued *keeping-up-appearances* by signaling commitment without making a whole-hearted attempt to reach BPT goals. As an expression of pluralist politics, the situation in RSY was characterized by conflicting goals and interests. However, rather than seeking confrontation and negotiation within the corporate-wide BPT project, RSY maintained a socially constructed image of being fully committed but only implemented minimal BPT processes in a few projects. The mixed messages and passive resistance (Marakas & Hornik, 1996) rendered it impossible to develop a shared understanding between RSY and the corporate level. This lack of a shared understanding at a deeper level below the appearance of commitment led to a failure to negotiate, prioritize, and resolve conflicts. Accordingly, there was minimal emphasis on rationalist and radical politics in RSY.

The RSY Senior VP made no secret of the fact that the BPT project was of little value and in conflict with RSY interests. The focus on repeatable project management processes was ill-aligned with RSY's emphasis on customer relationships, and the focus on process standardization was at odds with the VP's preference for tailoring processes to each unit's needs. In his own words, "all the time, the [business units] have to sort out the kind of structure that results from standardized documents and processes and decide whether they can be used as is or whether they have to be adjusted. Do it the other way around. Let the units optimize each process area themselves." Moreover, the focus on process compliance contrasted starkly with RSY's history of rewarding project managers for meeting deadlines and satisfying customer demands. The RSY implementation manager said, "on an everyday basis, people accomplish certain things that bring home the bacon and earn them the thumbs up from the people they work for. This is a high priority for everyone ... it's not a priority for a project manager to implement these new processes if he also has a project to complete." The tensions were manifest at the project level where project managers were asked only to implement processes that they considered to be value-adding. The RSY implementation manager

shielded RSY projects from the administrative burden associated with new processes, but project managers were left to fend for themselves and received limited guidance and information. The RSY implementation manager elaborated: “Part of our tailoring has ensured that the required activities are reasonable given the size of each project. I have, therefore, cut down on project reporting to fit the size of the projects.” The corporate BPT manager attempted to retain control of BPT implementation in RSY by monitoring progress, communicating non-compliance, and offering support. However, differences in powerbases between him and RSY stakeholders rendered the strategy ineffective. According to the corporate BPT manager, “RSY claims they will reach the goal in time. However, I have heard nothing else from them. Yesterday, I saw something the RSY implementation manager has written about their interpretation [of processes]. So, apparently something is happening. But the participating projects have not come very far. Some have, others have not. It is really difficult to ascertain.”

The competing social constructions of the BPT project made monitoring the unit’s progress difficult. On the one hand, the RSY Senior VP emphasized the BPT project’s positive impact on existing practices—a social construction that RSY project manager #1 contributed to by describing his implementation experiences as positive. On the other hand, the RSY implementation manager criticized not only the emphasis on standardization, but also the organization of the implementation effort. In particular, he disputed the reliability and value of maturity assessments and used various symbols (such as “rolling snowball”) to portray the BPT project as a juggernaut, ill-aligned with RSY’s organizational culture. In his own words, “with such a process apparatus, you start out by making a snowball and get it rolling, and then you expect it to yield a positive result somewhere down the line. The problem is that you’ll never be able to measure it because it will be three years before it is implemented.” Based on past experiences, the RSY project managers responded to these expressions of pluralist politics by trying to reconcile the apparent ambiguity toward the BPT

project. They implemented processes only hesitantly. RSY project manager #1 described the ambiguity: “things have changed—from being something that management said we had to do, to being something management says we’re not going to do. Such mixed signals are very confusing.” For his part, the corporate BPT manager accepted the status-quo, but expected that maturity assessments would eventually challenge RSY’s alleged process maturity. During the BPT implementation, the corporate BPT manager did not escalate the conflict and exercise his power and corporate mandate as a response to deal with the lack of goal compliance despite the espoused support for the overarching BPT goal. Instead, he relied on the assessments to identify constraints and lack of implementation progress.

In all four cases, corporate and business unit managers leveraged their powerbases based on their hierarchical position and control of resources. Though the corporate managers were positioned higher in the organizational hierarchy and used their power based on authority and control of corporate resources, the business unit managers had additional leverage from catering to customer interests. The implementation managers relied on power vested in their roles and based on their expertise. The project managers were lower than the others in the organizational hierarchy and had relatively fewer powerbases. Hence, they tried their best to comply with the demands of other powerful stakeholders.

THEORIZING BPT IMPLEMENTATION POLITICS

Relying on a pluralist methodology (Mingers, 2001), we leveraged our empirical analyses and extant literature to theorize BPT implementation politics (Eisenhardt, 1989). As such, we moved from empirical description and existing theory toward new theory of how stakeholders engage in politics during BPT implementation (Lee and Baskerville, 2003). Consistent with our engagement at *Terma*, our aim was to offer concepts and relationships to analyze (Gregor, 2006) how

stakeholders engage in politics during BPT implementation through different process user responses and transformation agent counter responses and to prescribe (Gregor, 2006) how reinforcement, accommodation, persuasion, and confrontation politics may be combined to proactively influence BPT behaviors and outcomes. Our key concepts are defined in Table 7.

Table 7: Key Theoretical Concepts

Construct	Definition
Process user	Change recipient as party most directly affected by a change initiative.
Transformation agent	Change agent as party responsible for initiating or driving a change initiative.
Process user response	Political reaction of process users to change initiative, including rationalist, pluralist, interpretive, and radical politics.
Transformation agent counter response	Political reaction of transformation agents to political actions taken by process users, including reinforcement, accommodation, persuasion, and confrontation politics.
Goal compliance	Degree to which process user responses converge toward the goals promoted by transformation agents on behalf of management.
Goal alignment	Degree to which the goals promoted by transformation agents on behalf of management offer solutions to the perceived problems of process users.
Powerbase	Source of power that enables one party to compel another party to do something, including hierarchical position, control of critical resources, expertise, and knowledge.
Deep structure politics	Political activity which is deeply embedded within organizational or societal structures, including institutional logics, discourses, and ideological beliefs.
Success	State at which process goals of the initiative are achieved.

Basic Premises

BPT are technology-enabled management-led initiatives that target organizational goals (Davenport, 1993; Grover and Markus, 2008; Venkatraman, 1994) by transcending both vertical boundaries from management to operations and horizontal boundaries between different organizational units (Boudreau and Robey, 1996; Franz and Robey, 1984; Knights and McCabe, 1999; Knights and Murray, 1994; McCabe, 2000). As such, they change how work is organized and they are therefore often in conflict with key stakeholder interests (Boudreau and Robey, 1996; Buchanan, 1997; Grover et al., 1988). The resulting interactions between stakeholder groups are captured in Keen's (1981) response-counter response view of BPT implementation and in the

general idea that organizational change initiatives result from ongoing interactions between change recipients and change agents (Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Bartunek et al., 2006; Stensaker et al., 2008). Thus, we assume BPT implementation politics plays out as follows:

***Premise 1:** Politics in BPT implementation initiatives unfold as ongoing interactions between process user (change recipient) responses and transformation agent (change agent) counter responses.*

Further, our analyses at *Terma* reveal that each unit developed its own, unique response to the corporate initiative. ISY, for example, fully embraced the BPT initiative and collaborated closely with the corporate BPT team, drawing upon shared resources and maturity assessments to support progress. In contrast, RSY held the corporate BPT team at arm's length, keeping interactions to a minimum while continuously communicating their commitment to avoid confrontations over lack of progress. These variations suggest BPT implementation politics depends on the goal alignment between the process goals of the initiative and the process needs of users (i.e., the extent to which BPT implementation initiatives offer solutions to perceived problems). This observation is consistent with the recommendation in the literature to compare process goals with perceived strengths and weaknesses of existing practices at the very start of BPT initiatives (Chrissis et al., 2003; CMMI Product Team, 2010). When the goal alignment is high, less conflict and more collaboration is expected than if the process goals do not meet process users' perceived needs (Boudreau and Robey, 1996; Buchanan, 1997; Currie and Willcocks, 1996). While this logic is true in principle, the variations across units at *Terma* suggest that user responses may differ from this pattern. Although the perceived needs of ISY and ASY were well-aligned with process goals while those of AES and RSY were not, the responses of ISY and AES were less conflictual and led to greater goal compliance compared to those of ASY and RSY. Hence, goal alignment is an indicator of the *likely* political response to BPT implementation whereas goal compliance is an indicator of the *actual* response. Consistent with this observation, the BPT literature suggests continual

monitoring of goal compliance through regular process assessments (Chrissis et al., 2003; CMMI Product Team, 2010), leading to our second premise for theorizing BPT implementation politics:

Premise 2: *BPT implementation politics is contingent upon goal alignment and goal compliance.*

Process User Responses

As illustrated by Figure 2, ISY's *walking-the-talk* response should be understood in the context of the industry's preference for the CMMI. Terma's CMMI-based process goals were consistent with perceived process needs within ISY as evidenced by high level of CMMI level 2 goal compliance throughout the project. Essentially, the maturity discourse motivated and influenced ISY's BPT implementation, serving as a shared reference point for process users and transformation agents. In AES, there was a priori low alignment with the CMMI-based process goals, but the Senior VP and his allies changed this situation by constructing an image of BPT as a welcome solution to existing problems, leading to the *applying-the-hammer* response and eventually to high goal compliance. In ASY, the Senior VP's support for BPT implementation was synonymous with high a priori goal alignment. However, the unit's *struggling-to-engage* response was a consequence of prioritizing emerging business opportunities over the BPT project, thereby adversely affecting goal compliance. Finally, RSY's *keeping-up-appearances* response effectively concealed low goal alignment, continually signaling commitment to BPT implementation despite giving priority to product development and customer service. Not surprisingly, this led to decreasing goal compliance during implementation.

Figure 2: Exemplar Process User Responses

	HIGH GOAL ALIGNMENT		
HIGH GOAL COMPLIANCE	Business unit. ISY Politics: Walking-the-talk	Business unit. ASY Politics: Struggling-to-engage	LOW GOAL COMPLIANCE
	Business unit. AES Politics: Applying-the-hammer	Business unit. RSY Politics: Keeping-up-appearances	
	LOW GOAL ALIGNMENT		

Although political analyses tend to rely on a one-dimensional understanding of power rooted in resources as expressed in pluralist politics, Hardy (1996) argues that there are other equally important sources of politics (Hart and Saunders, 1997; Pettigrew, 1975; Schein, 1985). Power rooted in organizational structures and processes may manifest as rationalist politics (Ngwenyama and Nielsen, 2003); power grounded in deeply rooted cultural values may be expressed through interpretive politics and the ongoing creation of meaning among stakeholders (Brown, 1995; Brown, 1998); and, power deeply embedded in the structure of society may lead to organizational repression or emancipation (McCabe, 2000) through radical politics. These perspectives on organizational politics may be combined to make sense of BPT implementations. For example, Nidumolu et al. (1996) observed that a functional perspective was more useful in understanding IS evaluation, whereas a symbolic perspective better helps explain IS implementation; Franz and Robey (1984) found rational and pluralist politics to be mutually reinforcing in successfully carrying out implementation efforts and in avoiding blame in unsuccessful BPT initiatives; and Sillince & Mouakket (1997) used different political perspectives to analyze the development and implementation of a housing information system. Consistent with these findings, the four units' responses to *Terma's* corporate BPT project reflect combinations of rationalist, pluralist, interpretive, and radical politics (Bradshaw-Camball and Murray, 1991) that represent different paths toward BPT outcomes. Uncovering the patterns through which a group of process users

respond to BPT initiatives may thus provide transformation agents with important indicators of whether the group is moving toward high goal compliance. Overall, these insights suggest:

Proposition 1: BPT initiatives will more likely succeed if transformation agents monitor how different groups of process users respond to BPT implementation through patterns of rationalist, pluralist, interpretive, and radical politics.

Looking closer at the particular patterns of political responses to Terma's BPT initiative (Table 5), it is interesting to consider the responses from two business units that eventually achieved high goal compliance. ISY responded mainly through rationalist politics that relied on structures created by interpretive and radical politics, and AES responded through rationalist politics enabled by dominant interpretive politics. Both cases were influenced by deep structure politics. In contrast to activities at the surface structure of politics, which were guided by consciously recognized interests, other actions were influenced by meanings and interpretations, which were embedded at a deeper structural level. In one of the cases, mutual understanding was fostered through symbolism and social construction, and in another case daily operations were governed by institutionalized ideological beliefs. In ISY, these influences manifested through radical politics grounded in industry-wide process maturity ideologies combined with interpretive politics to disseminate these ideologies within the unit. For example, CMMI is institutionalized at the industry level as a way to complete projects more effectively. In AES, the deep structure influences manifested through the senior VP's effective use of interpretive politics to construct an image of BPT as a welcome solution to the unit's existing problems. In both cases, these influences paved the way for moving the BPT agenda forward inside the unit through rationalist politics. These findings suggest:

Proposition 2: BPT initiatives will more likely succeed when process users pave the way for rationalist politics through deep structure influences based on interpretive or radical politics.

In contrast, none of the two units that eventually achieved low goal compliance seriously engaged in rationalist politics, which presupposes a common purpose or goal. Instead, ASY responded by

engaging in pluralist politics with some rationalist and interpretive politics, and RSY's response reflected a combination of interpretive and pluralist politics (Table 5). In both these cases pluralist politics was prevalent (dominant or major), albeit for quite different reasons. ASY's goal alignment was high, but the unit struggled to engage seriously because of competing commitments, whereas RSY's goal alignment was low, but the unit concealed its interests by appearing to be seriously engaged in the BPT initiative (Figure 2). These patterns of process user responses suggest:

Proposition 3: *BPT initiatives will more likely fail when process users conceal low goal alignment through interpretive politics.*

Proposition 4: *BPT initiatives will more likely fail when process users give priority to competing interests despite high goal alignment.*

Transformation Agent Counter Responses

The literature emphasizes the importance of active political involvement of transformation agents. Buchanan (1997) stresses effective BPT management requires both technical and political skills. Keen (1981) and McCabe et al. (1998) argue that politics is fundamental to BPT; it motivates behavior and can have beneficial organizational outcomes. Although the focus has traditionally been on political conflict, Hardy (1996) points out it is equally important for transformation agents to engage in politics to prevent conflicts from arising, build relationships, and create shared meanings. Accordingly, Willcocks and Smith (1995) suggest transformation agents monitor politics during BPT, carry out power audits regularly, and continuously sustain political momentum. Thus, consistent with extant research we propose transformation agents should respond actively to process user politics through different types of counter responses (Figure 3). Proposition 5 addresses counter responses in general while the remaining propositions focus on exemplar combinations.

Proposition 5: *BPT initiatives will more likely succeed if transformation agents respond actively to process user politics through combinations of confrontation, accommodation, persuasion, and reinforcement politics.*

Figure 3: Transformation Agent Counter Responses

	HIGH GOAL ALIGNMENT		
HIGH GOAL COMPLIANCE	Reinforcement politics Threat: Weakening powerbases Opportunity: Reinforce overarching BPT goal that is broadly shared; environmental scanning	Persuasion politics Threat: Competing forces Opportunity: Build coalitions based on converging BPT goals; provide resources	LOW GOAL COMPLIANCE
	Accommodation politics Threat: Emerging conflicts Opportunity: Sustain coalition by promoting common aspects of BPT goals; pro-active problem-solving	Confrontation politics Threat: Escalation of conflicts Opportunity: Construct motivational accounts; exercise power to push BPT goals and identify constraints	
	LOW GOAL ALIGNMENT		

In case of low goal alignment and indications of decreasing goal compliance, transformation agents may engage process users through *confrontation* politics (Figure 3). These conditions are illustrated by RSY where process users continually signaled BPT commitment while giving priority to product development and customer service. Although the corporate BPT manager questioned RSY's progress and attempted to retain control of the unit's BPT implementation by monitoring progress, communicating non-compliance, and offering support, RSY successfully exploited differences in powerbases to conceal its interests. In such situations, where process users hide diverging interests and avoid conflict (Brown, 1995), BPT is likely characterized by little progress toward goal compliance and unsatisfactory results (Knights and McCabe, 1998; Willcocks and Smith, 1995). As a first step, transformation agents may use project audits and maturity assessments to identify and highlight discrepancies between process users' espoused commitment and the actual outcomes of their engagement. Next, they may confront process users with the results and activate a strong powerbase to negotiate an acceptable BPT involvement. Transformation agents may also exert

influence through “repressive relations of power” (Boudreau and Robey, 1996; McCabe, 2000), especially when transformation agents’ source of power is relatively high compared to that of the process user. Such escalation may lead to all out warfare between transformation agents and process users. Either way, *confrontation* politics can escalate conflicts and eventually lead transformation agents to forfeit the political game and terminate the project.

Proposition 6: *When goal alignment is low and there is decreasing goal compliance, BPT initiatives will more likely succeed if transformation agents can leverage a strong powerbase to engage process users in confrontation politics.*

When there are indications of increasing goal compliance despite low goal alignment, transformation agents may engage in *accommodation* politics (Figure 3) to downplay differences between stakeholders and instead focus on shared goals and advantages of cooperation. This situation is illustrated by AES where corporate transformation agents supported the Senior VP and his allies in tailoring processes to local conditions and needs. Such accommodation was possible because the process users had accepted the image of the BPT initiative as a welcome solution to their problems, allowing implementation to proceed through rational means. To avoid conflicts in these situations with low goal alignment, transformation agents should continuously nurture an image of BPT as contributing to problem-solving and pay attention to competing social constructions that support conflicting images. Hence, transformation agents must be watchful of speech acts that use language and symbols to discursively construct BPT in both favorable and unfavorable ways (Brown, 1995; Brown, 1998). To build and maintain powerful coalitions (Kelley, 1976) with process users, transformation agents can themselves use political narratives to communicate how BPT contributes to solving process users’ perceived problems. In addition, they may proactively monitor emerging issues, continuously adapt solutions to address perceived problems, and redistribute resources in favor of process user interests. Such pragmatic problem-solving requires active involvement of the process users (Grover et al., 1988) to secure BPT

commitment and counteract shirking that risks degenerating into subversive behavior as displayed by RSY's *keeping-up-appearances* response. Similarly, if transformation agents eventually fail to sustain the coalition that holds the BPT initiative together, their engagement with process users may shift toward *confrontation* politics. These considerations motivate:

Proposition 7: *When goal compliance is increasing despite low goal alignment, BPT initiatives will more likely succeed if transformation agents engage process users in accommodation politics.*

Turning to situations characterized by decreasing goal compliance despite high goal alignment, transformation agents may focus on *persuasion* politics (Figure 3). This is illustrated by ASY where process users, despite alignment with BPT goals, struggled to engage because customer demands took precedence. Although corporate transformation agents tried to persuade ASY to commit to the BPT implementation, differences in powerbases forced them to accept the ASY Senior VP's continued prioritization of customer needs over BPT. As long as competing interests remain latent as in ASY, this *struggling-to-engage* pattern is likely to dominate with wavering commitment and dwindling resources (Knights and McCabe, 1998; Willcocks and Smith, 1995). When handling competing interests, transformation agents must pay attention to discrepancies between intentions and actions during BPT and carefully consider whether conflicting demands challenge process users' ability to honor BPT commitments (Willcocks and Smith, 1995). Once competing interests become manifest, transformation agents may negotiate conflicting demands and build coalitions (Keen, 1981; Kelley, 1976). This involves explicitly negotiating resources and business priorities with process users and it may require reassigning people from other projects or units or prioritizing BPT involvement at the expense of potential business opportunities. It is important to show how local goals might negatively affect BPT goals, and, if possible, consolidate shared meanings among process users at a deeper structure level. If such *persuasion* politics is unsuccessful due to failure to accommodate process user interests, insufficient resources, or a weakening powerbase,

transformation agents may change the scope and timetable of the BPT initiative to realistically reflect circumstances. At the extreme, they may forfeit the political game and terminate the project.

Proposition 8: *When goal compliance is decreasing despite high goal alignment, BPT initiatives will more likely succeed if transformation agents engage process users in persuasion politics.*

Finally, transformation agents may engage in *reinforcement* politics when goal alignment is high and there are indications of increasing goal compliance (Figure 3). These conditions are illustrated by ISY where transformation agents stimulated and supported BPT implementation through regular maturity assessments, by providing guidance to project managers, and by means of ad hoc problem-solving. While transformation agents may reinforce BPT implementation by cooperating with process users in solving complex and emerging BPT problems, *reinforcement* politics is threatened by process users' weakening powerbases. Given sufficient resources and consensus, transformation agents may proactively support BPT implementation by promoting organizational benefits and by engaging in environmental scanning to detect such weakening powerbases. If resources dwindle and disagreements arise, they may sustain progress by negotiating additional resources or by influencing perceptions through pluralist and interpretive politics.

Proposition 9: *When goal alignment is high and there are indications of increasing goal compliance, BPT will more likely succeed if transformation agents engage process users in reinforcement politics.*

A Summary Model

Figure 4 summarizes our theorizing. Politics is an intrinsic part of dynamic BPT implementations that is contingent upon and impacts goal alignment and goal compliance throughout the process. It unfolds over time through interactions between process user responses and transformation agent counter responses. As transformation agents initiate BPT in pursuit of organizational innovations, process users may respond using combinations of political perspectives in support or opposition of BPT goals. Transformation agents may engage in counter responses that support or challenge

process user responses, which in turn triggers new responses and counter responses. Although our theorizing supports the management of BPT implementation, it also serves the general purpose of raising awareness and helping stakeholders “learn how to use power to protect *their* interests. Pretending that power does not exist does not make it go away” (Hardy, 1996: 14). Indeed, Krackhardt (1990) argues that understanding an organization’s informal political network is itself a significant powerbase above and beyond power associated with the hierarchical positions of stakeholders. As a result, our theorizing affords stakeholders important “indirect power derived from knowing and using the power others have to influence the target” (Krackhardt, 1990: 359).

Figure 4: Model of BPT Implementation Politics

DISCUSSION

Although extant theory acknowledges the political nature of BPT initiatives, research has not adequately leveraged theory on power and politics to empirically investigate BPT. Moreover, the literature offers no theories dedicated to helping managers understand and manage BPT implementation politics. Motivated by these considerations, we applied existing theory on organizational politics to conduct detailed analyses of BPT within four business units at *Terma*.

Asking *how knowledge of organizational politics can help understand and manage business process transformation behaviors and outcomes*, our goal was to provide insights into BPT at *Terma* and to synthesize our findings to advance theory on BPT implementation politics. Inspired by Jaspersen et al. (2002), we applied Bradshaw-Camball & Murray's (1991) rationalist, pluralist, interpretive, and radical perspectives on organizational politics to arrive at multi-perspective explanations of how politics had shaped BPT within each of *Terma's* four business units. We subsequently went beyond the four political perspectives to theorize how process users and transformation agents, make sense of and engage in politics during BPT implementation (Figure 4). By doing so, our theorizing answers the call to integrate differing perspectives on organizational politics in "understanding and diagnosing organizational events" (Bradshaw-Camball and Murray, 1991: 396). It also highlights that some perspectives are more dominant in some organizational contexts than others. For example, in Bradshaw-Camball & Murray's (1991) suburban hospital setting, the rationalist perspective was not emphasized to any extent. In contrast, in our BPT setting which focused on implementing processes for project planning, monitoring, and control in systems development, rationalist politics was highly prevalent in two units (AES and ISY).

Following a pluralist research methodology, we first leveraged the political perspectives to identify four distinct patterns of BPT politics among process users across *Terma's* business units, metaphorically described as: *applying-the-hammer*, *struggling-to-engage*, *walking-the-talk*, and *keeping-up-appearances*. We arrived at these patterns by developing distinct accounts of BPT implementation in every business unit from each of the four political perspectives and subsequently synthesizing these into overall storylines of how politics had shaped BPT within each unit. Table 5 summarizes how the four perspectives contributed to the synthesized account of BPT politics within each unit. The patterns encapsulated in the metaphors highlight key aspect of the situation and display variations in their emphasis on the four political perspectives. For example, *walking-the-talk*

may rely (dominant or major impact) on either interpretive or radical politics, both operating on a deeper structure level. However, given different perspectives on the goal of BPT, it is unlikely that rationalist politics becomes dominant in cases where pluralist politics are already influential (e.g., the *struggling-to-engage* or *keeping-up-appearances* patterns). Considering the observed patterns in Table 5, it also is easy to imagine other political patterns unfolding under different circumstances. Drawing on Sabherwal & Grover's (2009) study of politics in systems development projects, one may for example envisage a *tug-of-war* pattern in which multiple parties with relatively equal power strive to gain control over a BPT project, or an *empire-building* pattern in which a BPT project is used instrumentally as a means to building powerbases. Likewise, it is possible to envisage numerous other patterns like "when the lion prowls, the vultures gather" describing a situation in which stakeholders use the opportunity to assume control when BPT is imposed on a failing department (Sabherwal and Grover, 2009). Although these patterns were not observed at *Terma*, we acknowledge their existence and influence given other circumstances.

Next, we related our empirical findings to extant theory on organizational politics to theorize BPT implementation politics. Relying on Bacharach's (1989) definition of theory as a system of concepts and variables in which the concepts are related to each other by propositions (Bacharach, 1989: 498), we summarized our theorizing in a model of BPT implementation politics. The model describes organizational politics as constituted through process user responses (expressed through combinations of pluralist, rationalist, interpretive, and radical politics) and transformation agent counter responses (expressed through combinations of *reinforcement*, *accommodation*, *persuasion*, and *confrontation* politics) as dependent upon and impacting goal alignment and goal compliance within a particular BPT implementation context. Moreover, we expressed the relationships between concepts in nine propositions and illustrated those in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

Our theorizing builds on and extends the IS literature on resistance management. For example, Rivard & Lapointe (2012) develop a taxonomy of implementers' responses to user resistance to IT Implementation, which comprises four categories: inaction, acknowledgment, rectification, and dissuasion. This taxonomy provides a "theoretical explanation of the patterns of relationships observed between implementers' responses and user resistance" (Rivard and Lapointe, 2012: 916). Compared to our contribution, their framework is, however, purely descriptive and does not include stakeholder motivation (interests) and response strategies (politics). The framework by van Offenbeek et al. (2013) is another example. Their framework links acceptance and resistance research, distinguishing between four categories of user reactions: supporting users, resisting users, supporting non-users, and resisting non-users. The framework allows for describing and analyzing behavior during IS implementation. The authors suggest that the framework can be used "as a tool to assess and monitor people's behaviours during IS implementation and to develop differentiated interventions" (van Offenbeek et al., 2013: 447). Meanwhile, the framework does not include perspectives on specific implementation strategies responding to user reactions.

Although our empirical analyses were limited to *Terma*, we leveraged the possibility of generalizing from description to theorizing (Lee and Baskerville, 2003; Yin, 2003). Following Mason, the theoretical generalization is based on the quality of our pluralist analyses; "whatever else you do, you should make some claims for the wider resonance or generalizability of your explanations which are based on the rigor of your analysis" (Mason, 2002: 196). Thus, we not only provide analyses and descriptions of BPT politics but also prescriptions to help managers understand and effectively manage BPT politics (Gregor, 2006). Still, our theorizing of BPT implementation politics is limited to conditions similar to those at *Terma*—i.e. incremental BPT within large, hierarchical, and project-based organizations focusing on systems development and service delivery. A second limitation of our model relates to the application of Bradshaw-Camball &

Murray's (1991) perspectives on organizational politics. Their framework, capable of capturing the multi-dimensional nature of BPT politics, limited our empirical analyses and theorizing to four specific, albeit widely-accepted, perspectives on organizational politics.

Considering these contributions and limitations, our investigation suggests interesting avenues for future research. *Terma's* CMMI-based project gave us an opportunity to study incremental BPT—identifying current business problems, adopting step-by-step changes through employee involvement, and implementing new processes based on best practices for systems development. Future studies of BPT politics should investigate other approaches to BPT, including radical transformations. One promising approach is neo-humanism, as a radical humanist view which is related to critical theory (Hirschheim and Klein, 1989). Future explorations of BPT politics from other perspectives, including a critical perspective, might yield additional important insights.

From a practical point of view, our investigation emphasizes that BPT implementation involves complex and highly uncertain activities that challenge existing power relations and that politics is intrinsically tied to BPT behaviors and outcomes. BPT managers may draw on our concepts and propositions to understand and manage process user responses through transformation agent counter responses, depending on the organizational context of transformation goal alignment and compliance. An enhanced understanding helps managers make better sense of such complex organizational change initiatives and enact interventions that serve their interests. Such interventions also benefit from key insights from our analyses of BPT politics at *Terma*. Successful BPT implementation requires creation of a political environment in which the deeper structure of shared meanings and symbols are consistent with the surface structure of power. Moreover, goal alignment does not guarantee successful BPT implementation and divergence of interests does not necessarily preclude positive outcomes. When process politics unfolds, outcomes become truly

unpredictable if left to chance. Hence, rather than taking a passive role and reacting to circumstances as politics plays out, managers are advised to proactively maneuver BPT efforts by taking their intrinsic political nature into account (Buchanan, 1997; Dhillon, 2004; Keen, 1981; Willcocks and Smith, 1995).

APPENDIX: SAMPLE EVIDENCE

To further document our coding of data, Table A.1 contains sample expressions related to AES and the interpretive perspective on organizational politics. The table links the key concepts from the data analysis guide (Table 3) to “Example Quotations”, having used the coding scheme to categorize statements by BPT participants (“Interviewee” in Table 4). The table also contains comments and observations (“Observed Interactions”) that were made during analysis, helping to explain outcomes.

Table A.1: Sample Evidence of Interpretive Politics in AES (1 of 16)

Concepts	Example Quotations	Observed Interactions
Sensemaking	“Our project managers have come to realize that the BPT project gave them some tools that were actually useful” (AES implementation manager).	Sensemaking activities among AES managers led them to see the BPT project as a solution to the crisis situation in AES.
Symbols	“Speaking of the cookbook—at one point in time we realized that we needed to understand all this, and then we established a CMMI guideline for the projects to use. We wrote down what it is all about” (AES implementation manager).	The AES Senior VP became a symbol of decisive action
Social constructions	“I see it as a leap forward that each development process has been thoroughly defined ... it commands greater respect” (AES project manager #1).	As part of social construction , AES managers continuously communicated the BPT project as the unit’s future.
Organizational culture	“My fear is that having this cookbook will stop people from asking: ‘What	AES management decided to adapt the generic processes

	does all this mean to me?’ and make them follow it blindly ... my belief is that, in AES, they don’t have the maturity to reflect upon processes” (corporate BPT manager).	to AES’s organizational culture based on past experiences with project managers’ inability to adopt off-the-shelf processes
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To further document our use of theoretical framing, Table A.2 exemplifies how we linked the primary concepts (structure, process and outcomes) of Bradshaw-Camball & Murray’s (1991) framework during the analysis of the empirical material.

Table A.2: Sample Evidence of Structure, Process, and Outcomes

Structure (political actors)	Process (how influence is exercised)	Outcomes (ensuing consequences)
AES Senior VP	Make BPT implementation a symbol of a solution for existing problems; create vision; Use authority to apply a standard set of implementation steps	Achievement of CMMI level 2 rating; “[AES management] wants to establish checklists and that sort of thing in realization that it is the only way to push things through” (Corporate BPT manager).
AES Implementation Manager	Apply expertise to support implementation	Achievement of CMMI level 2 rating; “the kind of project management I’ve seen out here has been diddly-squat ... so right away, I accepted that this is the tool.”
ASY Senior VP	Focus on maintaining customers’ perception of ASY as credible market player; Apply persuasion as influence tactic	Failure to resolve conflicts; lack of business unit leadership commitment; scaled-down BPT implementation; “the CMMI is non-essential. We would like to have it, but if you ask if I could argue that we have lost an order because of it, I cannot.”
ASY Implementation Manager	Concede to lack of support and involvement because of low powerbase	Recognition of lack of power to move BPT implementation forward: “if you have a customer who is paying for something, it is a different matter. It is easier to postpone [an internal BPT project] even though it is equally important in the long run. It is easier to ask for absolution. There is no immediate cost of postponing these processes.”
ISY Senior VP	Point to contract negotiations in which ISY’s lack of a CMMI appraisal had been a problem;	Achievement of desired CMMI level 2 rating; “it is crucial for us to be at CMMI level 2 and be able to say that we are in control of what we develop... It’s about economic benefit.”
ISY Implementation Manager	Answer questions and support each project manager individually; leverage power derived from formal authority and expertise to establish project solutions	Achievement of desired CMMI level 2 rating: “it was the ISY training manager and the ISY implementation manager who had already planned such a implementation sequence to keep us on track” (ISY project manager #4).
RSY Senior VP	Emphasize that new	Conflicting goals; lack of BPT implementation

	processes might improve project practices, but did not provide support for BPT implementation; emphasize customer relationship and tailored processes	progress; conflicting signals; "do it the other way around [compared to BPT]. Let the units optimize each process area themselves."
RSY Implementation Manager	Criticize standardization ideal and organization of BPT implementation project based on expertise; Left project managers to fend for themselves;	Implementation limited to few projects; conflicting goals and confusing situation for project managers; "with such a process apparatus, you start out by making a snowball and get it rolling and they you expect it to yield a positive result somewhere down the line. The problem is that you'll never be able to measure it because it will be three years before it is implemented."

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