How contextual factors shape organisational change implementation
Abstract

This paper presents configuration to the contextual perspective specifically the context of change when implementing electronic government. Literature investigation has been indicated that change leaders and planners need to rethink on the traditional contextual theory with its classic dichotomy to the context of change as internal and external levels. An empirical case study will be applied to understand profoundly the theoretical investigations and findings.

Keywords: managing change, contextual perspective, electronic government

1 Introduction

The attention to study change factors, aspects, variables and measurements is propelled to the front of practitioners’ concerns by many triggers such as technological change, economical, political, and societal changes (Wischnevsky, 2004). Such trigger events, and because of their features and characters, “they unbalance established routines and evoke conscious thought on the part of organisational members... and bring people’s mindsets into arena of change” (Isabella, 1992, p.19). Accordingly, justifying the need to understand the nature of those forces, and finding out the dynamic and mutual interaction with organisational systems are vital steps to come with a holistic view regarding change phenomena (Pettigrew 1985; Haveman, 1992; Wischnevsky, 2004). The context of change and the nature of the trigger of change label the overall components and outcomes where change introduced. This research intends to focus on investigating themes and implications of change triggered by the implantation of Electronic Government (EG). This large scale initiative represents the trend to deploy and utilise information and communication technologies in order to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of
governments’ functions (Holms, 2001; Culbertson, 2005; Batangar, 2004; Heeks, 2006).

Having said that, and because of the multidimensional levels of change brought by the implementation of EG, analysing this phenomena using contextual framework is therefore the appropriate lens to cover the whole picture. To do so, the contextualist approach and/or Context, Content and Process (CCP) framework (see figure I) provide a holistic standpoint in order to examine the nature of change and analyse profoundly the dynamic interaction between the organisational change variables (Pettigrew 1985, 1987, 1990, Child & Smith 1987, Clark et al 1988, Dawson, 1994).

Change content, context and process are the three main sources and bases of this analytical approach. Because "it is too narrow to see change just as a rational and linear problem-solving process… explanations of change have to be able to deal with continuity and change, actions and structures, endogenous and exogenous factors, as well as the role of chance and surprise" (Pettigrew, 1987, p. 658). Based on a critical review to the relevant literature and employing a case study from the implementation of EG project in Oman, new insights have emerged regarding the classic configuration to this perspective particularly regarding its contextual dichotomy (internal and external). The aim of this study is to extend theoretically and empirically the current conceptualisation and contributions to this perspective.

2 Literature review
The implementation of EG is linked with many shifts and changes in the workplace (Culbertson, 2005), this stems from the reforms triggered by the implementations of information technology projects which impacts organisational tangible and intangible assets (Raymond et al, 1995, Clegg et al, 1996). Moreover, it stems from the premise
that technological-based change represents a special case as an ongoing complex process where change is unpredictable, and traditional approaches, therefore, to manage it are insufficient (Orlikowski, 1996). EG is a large scale project and it is considered as a radical societal shift, because it is more than providing services online to the public and provide internet-based opportunities. It represents a large scale shift and transition from the industrial society to the knowledge-based and information society (Holms, 2001). Managing this transition is a critical success factor, according to Bhatnagar (2004); technology occupies only 20% from the whole process of the implementation of EG, whereas change management required 40%, and 30% for process re-engineering and 10% for managing partners. Ultimately, change that triggered by the implementation of EG is beyond the organisational borders where the whole context is involved in such transition, and where dynamism labels the interactions of the variables of the phenomena in unpredictable and non linear changes. Context is defined as the "surrounding associated with phenomena" (Cappelli and Sherer, 1991 p. 56), these surroundings are critical in determining the success or failure of any organisational change, and this stems from the idea that context might work as a catalyst for change or might work as an inhibiting factor that constrains transition to the required behaviour and/or attitude in organisation (Johns, 2001). Context is also defined as the elements and triggers that are anticipated to impact the content and the process of change (Pichault, 2007).

Resistance to change and change acceptance can be understood and justified by analyzing contextual themes. Even unpredictable intervention or events can be analysed based on its context characteristics as Johns (2001, p. 4) argued "the most compelling illustration of why to pay attention to context reside in its capacity to
explain anomalous organizational phenomena''. In addition, if organisations strive to
build their adaptability and capacity to embrace change, context can play a vital role –
if assessed properly – in achieving adaptability, flexibility and" absorptive capacity",

Advocates to this theory have divided context into internal and external
circumstances and conditions which influence organisational performance. According
to Armenkis and Bedein (1999, p. 295), the context dimension

“Focuses on forces or conditions existing in the organization's external and internal
environments. Two types of conditions form the context in which an organisation
function: external conditions which include such factors as governmental
regulations, technological advances, and forces that shape market place
competition; internal conditions, which include the degree of specialization or work
specificity required by exiting technology, level of organisational slack, and
experience with previous change”

Pettigrew et al (1987) conceptualized contextual forces to be national economic,
political context, social context, and the perception and interpretation of actions in
which the organisations operate in the national level (the outer context). By contrast,
organisational strategy, structure, culture and management processes represent the
internal context (the inner context). Not far from this perspective is the definition of
Dowson (1996) who argued that the external factors refer to the change in the
competition strategies and level of national competition, government legislation,
social expectations and technological innovations. On the other hand, he considered
as internal contextual factors the human resources, administrative structure,
technology, and products or services of an organisation

Contextual perspective recognises the importance of internal and external factors that
shape change, however, a critical review to this perspective has led to highlight its
weaknesses. Buchanan (1991) and Dowson (1994) found that this view did not offer
practical solutions to the management and the classification of context (inner and outer) did not offer a precise and adequate tool to understand context variables profoundly. Moreover, and irrespective of the broad conceptualisation from Pettigrew, his definition to the context “remains unsatisfactory if we want to explore a particular project” (Pichault 2007, p.267).

Caldwell (2006) criticized Pettigrew’s definition and configuration to the context, he argued that the meaning of ‘context’ offered in Pettigrew’s works overlaps with his definition to the ‘process’ as the third dimension of change, both are defined as a “realm of action and choice rather than macro-determinism or predictive causal analysis” (p. 72). Another criticism from Caldwell to the context’s dichotomy provided by Pettigrew stems from the ignorance to the interaction and interrelationships between the inner and outer context. In addition, the role of leadership is - according to Caldwell - undermined because of the overemphasis on contextual forces and overreliance on incrementalism of the process where change is shaped by its legacy and previous achievements, although process impacts are considered as a vital component and construct of change however, this should not undermine the role of leaders and management.
Ultimately, contextualism needs to be reconceptualised in many dimensions: firstly, the relationships between the outer and inner context with a clear definition to them is a priority in which the acknowledgment of case-based particularities and the broader scope and different actor’s roles are considered. This means that this view should be tailored to address simultaneously specifications, commonalities, idiosyncrasies and common denominators that are embedded in each case. Secondly, rebalancing and redefining the relationship between context and leadership are also required to overcome the overemphasis on the impact of the process at expense of the role of leadership and management.

Figure 1  Contextual Perspective Framework (CCP).
3 Research Problem
The novelty of this research stems from its primary intention to reproduce and shape contextual forces’ influences through organizing the relationship and the interaction between the internal context and the external context. The argument is about the possibility of reshaping contextual forces in order to handle its impact in content and process. Although, context variables have been analysed in the literature and addressed in many ways however most of such studies are in the private sector, and don't offer a practical guidelines to enable organisations to influence their outer context and reorganise the context with key actors and stakeholders. This research will investigate and identify mechanisms, possibilities and strategies to make the intersectional area between inner and outer context controllable and manageable.

4 Anticipated Contributions
Analyzing change components and providing simultaneously practical solutions are a trend towards moving from and developing the traditional contextual perspectives by concurrently providing practical advice to the key decision-makers. Context, content and process analysis gives an ample scope of the phenomena and "although organisational science researchers acknowledge the importance of all three variables, there is insufficient empirical evidence of these variables being systematically assessed simultaneously in organisational change efforts (Self at el ,2007, p. 212). Hence, the contribution of my project to the body of knowledge will be in investigating these variables in the context of a change management implementation in the public sector.

According to Coram and Burnes (2001,p.94) "whilst organisational change appears to be happening with increasing frequency and magnitude in the both the public and
private sectors, most of the major studies of and approaches to change focus in the private sector and tend to derive their approaches to change from that sector. Therefore, a gap stems from the differences between private and public sector with regard to challenges facing transition or introducing change. In the public sector, public accountability, political-driven agenda and justifying value for money are viewed as priorities whereas in the private sector the profit-driven agenda is the main determinant of change.

5 Methodology and Case study

An empirical investigation and qualitative data collection strategy will be used. The case is an analysis and an evaluative insight to the implementation of an EG project in the Sultanate of Oman (the Educational Portal). Both macro level (the national context) and the micro level (the organisational context) with regard managing change are presented. In this case, the Information and Technology Authority (ITA) represents the national strategy and the Educational Portal (EP) is the organisational level.

The priority in this analysis will be given to the social side of change. Organisational change theories and literature are used as a lens to identify managing change issues which have emerged from this implementation. The data and information about the case are collected from qualitative sources based on semi-structured interviews). In addition, interviews with parents and deputy manager of high secondary school and teachers. Moreover, reviewing the relevant documents, annual reports and relevant literature has backed up the analysis with documented and solid data, such data can help in minimising subjectivity of respondents and therefore increasing reliability of the results.
5.1 The national context

The Sultanate of Oman has introduced and conducted many reforms and initiatives in order to enhance its public service's efficiency and effectiveness. One of those large scale initiatives is the implementation of EG which takes a priority in the government reform agenda. According to the United Nations e-Government Survey (2008), which is a report developed by the United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Public Administration and Development Management, the readiness of the Omani government to the e-government jumped from the position of 112 in 2005 to be on 84 in 2008 ranking. Many initiatives have been introduced by the government bodies towards achieving this agenda.

There is a national strategy supervised by the Information Technology Authority (ITA), which is an independent body to supervise the digitalization movements in Oman and leading its e-government initiative. It works with public and private sector agencies in order to implement such initiatives successfully and provides supports to these agencies. In addition, it works as an organiser to achieve cooperation and coordination between different stakeholders and also reviewing with governmental bodies the human resources plans and training of employees in the field of information technology. In order to build human resources capacity, the ITA offers many services and programs such as the project of training civil service employee in IT which is training program on computer skills, moreover it offers a special training to all government employees in IT positions.

5.2 The Organisational Context

In order to change its traditional service's delivery to make them more effective and efficient, the Ministry of Education has established an Educational Portal (EP). The (EP) is designed to provide electronic services to the parents, students and
teachers and the educational management. A team was initiated within the Ministry of Education in order to manage and administrate the EP to achieve its main goals. There are also, regional teams in the local educational segments to work with local level and help the central team to implement and administrate the project.

The Ministry has launched a program to train its employee and the training program is based on achieving the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) and the aim is to enhance computing skills and ensure the ability to deal with the system.

The sample of this study consists of four main categories, the rationale behind choosing them is the nature of data which the research is looking for; different perspective from different actors; successful representation of both internal and external context; identify power level within this context, the four categories are:

1- Top level of managers who have the responsibility and authority to implement EG project.

2- Key Policy makers from the national (external) context.

3- Ministry of Education cadres who have the responsibility to implement EG project.

4- Customers of the ministry and its divisions who are utilized of the e-services.

6 Conclusion
To sum up, this research will investigate and analyse change context, content and process with paying more attention to the context, a conceptual framework based on contextual perspective is to be investigated empirically in Oman will be the core of the methodology to collect the required data. Managing and shaping the role of
external and internal forces are the main aim of this study, context proves to be an integral part of the organisational transition success however, rooms to ad an empirical studies remain and the neo –contextualism try to solve and tackle both the complexity of the traditional contextual perspective and its inadequacy in specifically, providing solutions and developing practical advices to implement change successfully.
7 References


