FORMAL ASSESSMENTS, TEAMS AND INFLUENCE OF A PROJECT CHAMPION IN THE SELECTION OF ICT PROJECTS: A CZECH REPUBLIC AND UK STUDY

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Abstract

We present and critically examine the links between the role of formal appraisal procedures, appraisal teams, and project champions and their influence in the selection of information communication technology projects in the Czech Republic and the UK. Our research is empirical and uses comparative analysis and exploratory descriptive analysis to interpret the findings. We draw on the economic, management and consensus-performance literature, and optimism bias theory to support our research. Our findings show significant differences in the practices between the Czech Republic and the UK, which we believe are the result of cultural and economic diversities. There is a high level of involvement of a project champion in the selection of projects with concern being expressed over their excessive/biased influence in the decision-making process. An important finding from our research reveals that adopting clearly defined appraisal/selection procedures may reduce this biased influence. As project failure can result from the influence of a project champion at the project selection stage, it is important to fill this perceived gap in the literature. The research is the only empirical study of its kind conducted simultaneously in the Czech Republic and the UK.

Keywords: investment appraisal, information communication technology, project champion, teams, decision-making, project evaluation, communication
JEL Classification: M 150

1. Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) has become an integral part, not only of industry, but also of our everyday life. The importance of ICT should not be underestimated (Oxford Economics, 2011), neither should be underestimated the problems associated with the appraisal of such investments (Doherty *et al.*, 2012). It is clear, however, that from an economic point of view, it is necessary to ensure the profitability of ICT investments, as these projects compete for scarce resources with a variety of other projects.

Lin *et al.* (2005) recapitulate several studies from around the world describing failures of companies when deriving benefits of their information technology projects. Furthermore, a report by Renkema (1998) revealed that around 70% of all IT investments give no adequate return on investment. From these findings we find out that the problem of ICT project appraisals is extremely important from both a theoretical as well as practical point of view.

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Much of the academic debate over the past two decades on IS/IT and ICT capital investments has been focussed on the development and critical examination of different appraisal/evaluation methods. Much lesser attention has been paid to multifarious circumstances under which these methods and tools have been used. In particular, we are interested in the influence of core individuals, such as project champions, on the ICT project selection process and their possibility to bias the relevant decision.

Research shows that project champions could have a significant influence at the appraisal phase of project selection, despite the fact that the project is not in the best interest of the company. Cross and Brodit (2001) argue that the decision makers' former experience can bias their perceptions when facing a new situation as with the new type of technology being assessed. The influence of a project champion could easily lead to a decision that is based on the sole convictions of that individual. Lefley (2006) provided the empirical evidence that a project champion may be in a position to influence the project selection decision, which could result in being detrimental to the organisation. Lefley (2008) argues that the utilisation of the financial appraisal profile (FAP) model could help organisations to identify this bias and thereby take steps to eliminate it. Jugdev *et al.* (2013) concludes that future research should be aimed at the paradigm of project managements' role as an "influencer" rather than as a "controller", a view that is supported by this research.

Much of the literature has focussed on the implementation stage of project management, especially in the success/failure paradigm, with the project champion seen as playing an important role in project success (Davis, 2014; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Pinto and Slevin, 1989). As project failure can result from the biased influence of a project champion at the project selection stage, it is important to fill what we perceive to be a gap in the literature. While the management literature distinguishes between a "project owner" and a "project manager" (see, for example, Andersen, 2012), a "project champion" can fit in to either of these roles. It is therefore important to identify a project champion and determine their influence at the project selection stage.

Farbey *et al.* (1993) argue that the process of appraising new capital investments is always a political process; in so far, as it touches on the diverse interests of many people and groups. While Remenyi *et al*. (2000) argue that, if there are any hidden agendas in the evaluation, then these will lead to questionable results, both from a practical point of view, as well as from an ethical viewpoint. Davis (2014) points out, that different stakeholders have distinct project perceptions and agendas, but that their perception of project success is unclear.

It is clear that these issues could be extremely important both from a practical as well as theoretical point of view. Our paper reports on research into current ICT appraisal practices of major organisations trading in the Czech Republic and the UK and aims to address some of the myths regarding such practices. We look specifically at the role of formal appraisals and teams in the process of ICT project appraisals, and the influence of project champions at the project selection stage. We believe that the results from our research could enrich the ongoing discussion focussed on ICT project appraisals and provide further evidence that management should pay attention to these important issues.

2. Research Methodology and Objectives

In order to obtain a wide range of data from a diversity of organisations, a postal questionnaire, designed around a factual and attitudinal survey, was selected as the appropriate research methodology (Ward *et al*., 1996). The survey was simultaneously conducted in the Czech

Republic and the UK and was addressed to the largest (by turnover) 650 (the net target sample was 625) Czech Republic organisations taken from the Albertina database and 500 (the net target sample was 470) UK trading organisations from a list prepared by County Data Publishing Ltd. The net target sample has been arrived at after taking into account, for example, returned uncompleted and spoilt/unusable questionnaires.

The respondents were asked to answer certain questions 'in relation to the most recent ICT project that their organisation had evaluated with which they were familiar'. Eighty-one (net response rate 13%) valid responses were received with regard to the Czech Republic and seventy-one (net response rate 15%) in respect of the UK. The response rates were deemed acceptable, considering the current economic global recession and the strategic nature of the questionnaire, and are in line with, for example, Cotton and Schinski (1999) who achieved a response rate of 16%. The number of usable responses was greater than the thirty-nine achieved by Berry (2013); the sixty-five achieved by Harris *et al.* (2009); and the fifty-six achieved by Ballantine and Stray (1999) in the second stage of their research.

Table 1 | Business Sector Analysis

	CZ (n=79)*	UK (n=71)
Non-food manufacturing and processing	23	15
Financial, banks, insurance, business services	8	12
Construction and materials	8	7
Food manufacturing and processing	4	7
Telecommunication, technology hardware and software	2	7
Transport, shipping	4	5
Chemicals, oil, gas producers, engineering	9	4
Retail and wholesale	4	4
Media, leisure, publications	0	4
Utilities, electricity, gas, water	7	3
Aerospace	0	1
Education	0	1
Pharmaceutical/Medical	3	1
Automotive industry	4	0
Foundry	2	0
Mining and quarrying	1	0

Note: Two Czech respondents did not answer this question

Source: Authors

The Czech Republic respondents comprised of forty-six chief financial officers, thirteen IT/administration managers, twelve chief executive officers, and eight other managers from a range of areas of responsibility (two respondents did not state their area of responsibility). The UK respondents comprised of forty-five financial directors/chief financial officers, nineteen IT/administration senior executives, and seven chief executive officers/managing directors. The business sector analysis of responding organisations is shown in Table 1.

A standard crosscheck analysis was undertaken to verify the compatibility of the data. The wide range of business activities in the responding organisations (Table 1) reflects the diversity of the initially selected target samples.

Our research is empirical and uses comparative analysis and exploratory descriptive analysis to interpret the findings and is believed to be the only study of its kind simultaneously conducted in the Czech Republic and the UK. We draw on the economic, management and consensus-performance literature, and optimism bias theory to support our research.

The main objective of our paper is to present and critically examine the selected results from our research linking the role and influence of project champions, in connection with the appraisal of ICT projects, with, (1) the use of formal appraisal guidelines, and (2) investment appraisal teams.

We were interested in learning if a project champion was perceived to have an adverse bias on project selection as the literature suggests. More specifically, the research questions this paper addresses are:

RQ1. *Do project champions have too much influence at the project selection stage of ICT projects*?

RQ2. *Does a project champion have a greater influence to bias project selection where their organisation did not have clearly defined procedures for assessing ICT projects*?

This led us to test the following null hypothesis:

H1. *There is no perceived difference in the excessive influence of a project champion between the existence or non-existence of clearly defined procedures for assessing ICT projects.*

RQ3. *Does a project champion have a greater influence to bias project selection as part of a team or were there was no team involvement*?

This led us to test the following null hypothesis:

H2. *There is no perceived difference in the excessive influence of a project champion between a team or non-team approach to the appraisal of ICT projects*.

3. Survey Results and Discussion

3.1 The use of formal procedures/guidelines

The lack of formal guidelines for appraising ICT projects has been highlighted, for example, by Heemstra and Kusters (2004). Furthermore, Remenyi *et al*. (2000) point out that many

organisations have special rules for IT investment decisions that differ from those adopted for core business investment decisions and that the signing limits are frequently different too. While some organisations in the past have relaxed rigorous appraisal processes due to the strategic nature of ICT investment, it is strongly recommended that an organisation should apply the same appraisal rules and criteria to decisions about ICT, as these projects should compete for all too scarce cash resources as any other non-ICT project.

Our research shows that forty-six (56.8%) of the Czech Republic and forty-seven (66.2%) of the UK responding organisations have clearly defined procedures (*e.g.* written guidelines) for appraising ICT capital projects (Table 2).

Table 2 | Organisations with Clearly Defined Procedures for Appraising ICT Projects

	CZ	UK	z-score	p-value	P < 0.05
Number of organisations with procedures	46	47	-1.1874	0.2937	Not significant
% [CZ: 46/81 (Total Organisations)] [(UK: 47/71 (Total Organisations)]	56.8%	66.2%			

Note: Number of organisations in sample CZ n = 81 UK n = 71

Source: Authors

These figures show no significant difference between the two countries. Although the use of formal guidelines is higher than previously indicated in the literature (Heemstra and Kusters, 2004), the number is still very disappointing. Lack of formal guidelines results in a lack of consistency in decision-making, leading to less transparency and greater opportunity for manipulating the decision-outcome.

We also inquired as to whether *all* ICT projects were formally evaluated (Table 3). With regard to the Czech Republic, forty-eight (60.8%) organisations formally appraised all ICT capital projects, which indicates that thirty-one (39.2%) did not. The figures for the UK were respectively, twenty-four (33.8%) and forty-seven (66.2%). The difference between the two countries was significant at the $p < 0.05$, with the UK showing a smaller number of organisations appraising *all* ICT projects.

Table 3 | Formal Appraisal of All ICT Projects

	CZ	UK	z-score	p-value	P < 0.05
Number of organisations that formally appraise all ICT projects	48	24	3.2994	0.00096	significant
% [CZ: 48/79 (Total Organisations*)] [(UK: 24/71 (Total Organisations)]	60.8%	33.8%			

Note: *Two CZ respondents did not answer this question. CZ n = 79 UK n = 71

Source: Authors

An interesting fact is that two Czech Republic respondents, who claimed that their organisations have no clearly defined procedures for evaluating ICT projects, still carry out a formal evaluation of all ICT projects. On the other hand, while forty-seven UK organisations had formal guidelines in place for appraising ICT projects, only twenty-four formally appraised *all* ICT projects. Although this may indicate that a formal capital investment appraisal may not be relevant for all ICT investments (Ballantine *et al.,* 1996), it is also of concern, especially in the UK, that some projects may, therefore, be accepted or rejected on an informal and less structured assessment.

3.2 Investment appraisal teams

As part of our research, we were interested in organisational setup of the appraisal procedure and whether individuals or management teams evaluate ICT projects. When adopting a team approach to the appraisal of capital assets, it is important that the procedure does not allow the process of "group think" (Janis, 1972) to develop. Janis (1972, p. 16) refers to group think as "a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgement that results from in-group pressures". This in-group pressure is one of conformity - where group members wish to remain amiable with each other, reassuring a sense of solidarity and concurrence on all matters. While conflict between the various managerial functions will exist in many organisations, it is important that it is maintained at a constructive "level of tension", in order to ensure group effectiveness and efficiency, with managers still strongly expressing their own points of view. Conflict should therefore be maintained at a controllable level. Controlled conflict is one way of avoiding "group think".

Our research shows that, with respect to the Czech Republic, fifty-three (72.6%) ICT projects were evaluated by an investment appraisal team, with forty (75.5%) of the respondents being part of those teams (Table 4). The figures for the UK were, respectively, sixty-four (90.1%) and fifty-nine (92.2%). This shows a significant difference (at $p < 0.05$ level) between the Czech Republic and the UK with respect to both the number of ICT projects assessed by a management team and the number of respondents who were part of those teams, with the UK indicating higher levels in both cases. With respect to the Czech Republic, eleven (20.8%) teams consisted of the same individuals and for the UK the figure was six (9.4%), indicating that a large number (Czech Republic = 79.2% and UK = 90.6%) of the teams consisted of different individuals. Although the difference between the Czech Republic and the UK was not significant at $p < 0.05$, it was significant at $p < 0.10$, indicating a greater number of the Czech Republic teams were made-up of different individuals. Of the forty Czech Republic respondents who were part of a team, twenty-three had responsibility for finance, six for general management and five for information technology. While, with respect to the UK, of the fifty-nine respondents, thirty-seven had responsibility for finance, eleven for information technology, and seven for general management.

Table 4 | Investment Teams

	CZ	UK	z-score	p-value	P < 0.05
Respondents answering this question	n = 73	n = 71			
Projects assessed by teams	53	64	-2.6958	0.00694	significant
% [CZ: 53/73 (Number of respondents)] [(UK: 64/71 (Number of respondents)]	72.6%	90.1%			
Projects not assessed by teams	20	7	2.6958	0.00694	significant
% [CZ: 20/73 (Respondents)] [UK:7:71 (Respondents)]	27.4%	9.9%			
Number of respondents who were part of a team	40	59	-2.4946	0.01278	significant
% [CZ: 40/53 (Projects assessed by teams)][UK: 59/64 (Projects assessed by teams)]	75.5%	92.2%			
Number of teams consisting of same individuals	11	6	1.7387	0.08186	Not significant
% [CZ: 11/53 (Projects assessed by teams)][UK: 6/64 (Projects assessed by teams)]	20.8%	9.4%			
Number of teams consisting of different individuals	42	58	-1.7387	0.08186	Not significant
% [CZ: 42/53 (Projects assessed by teams)] [UK: 58/64 (Projects assessed by teams)]	79.2%	90.6%			
Functional responsibilities of the respondents who were team members.					
	(n = 40)	(n = 59)			
Finance	23	37	Based on Pearson's $\chi 2$ Test and concentrating on the first three classifications, there is no significant difference at the 5% level between the CZ and UK.		
Information Technology	5	11			
General Management	6	7			
Purchasing	1	0			
Sales	1	0			
Economist	1	0			
Business Analyst	0	2			
Investment Specialist	1	0			
Services	0	1			
Technical	0	1			
Not classified (no details given)	2	0			

Note: Eight CZ respondents did not answer this question.

Source: Authors

The importance of a team approach to the appraisal of ICT capital projects has been highlighted in the literature (see, for example, Lefley, 2008). A team approach is well recognised for stimulating commitment and achieving optimal decisions than an individualistic managerial approach. Small groups are natural structures and superb agencies for solving problems (Hyde, 1986). While the composition of the investment appraisal team is important in respect to the members' varied managerial disciplines, it is also essential to appreciate that their other demographic characteristics (basic social attributes such as age, sex, educational standard, length of service, *etc*.) may be equally important and may well account for the fact that some teams will be more efficient than others (Hambrick, 1994). Cultural values are also seen as having a significant influence on project team performance (Jetu and Riedl, 2013). It is therefore encouraging to report that some organisations, especially in the UK, have adopted what academics prescribe in respect of the use of appraisal teams. Our research shows that these teams are not always made up of the same individuals, indicating that demographic characteristics may play an important role in team composition: finance professionals being included in the team because of their financial knowledge, IT specialists because of their expertise and knowledge of ICT, and general management because of their organisational skills.

3.3 Project champion

Having discussed the formal appraisal and team influence on ICT project selection, we now turn to "individual" influence in the person of a "project champion". A project champion is a person who is dedicated to seeing a project successfully completed. Farbey *et al*. (1992) argue that project champions have, "a major influence in getting the project accepted". The role of a project champion can have both a positive and negative influence on capital project appraisals (Lefley, 2006; Cross and Brodit, 2001). Kandemir *et al*. (2006) argue that a strong project champion can enhance internal and external team communication. They also conclude that a strong project champion is a key factor to project success. This view is also supported by Ruskin, (1995), who concludes that the key to project success "is almost entirely in the hands of the product champion".

The importance of the role of a project champion at the project implementation stage is not in question (Müller and Jugdev, 2012; Wickramasinghe and Gunawardena, 2010; Nah and Lau, 2001; and Rosario, 2000). However, Lefley (2006) concluded, "that a project champion may be in a position to influence the project selection decision, possibly to the detriment of their organisation". Lefley also argues that such a person can unduly bias project selection in a way that is epitomised by the optimism bias theory. Optimism bias theory asserts that there is a systemic tendency for managers to be over-optimistic about the outcome of planned events. This includes over-estimating the probability of positive events and under-estimating the probability of negative events. Andersen (2012) argues that a project champion "is a person who breaks down resistance to a project and uses all the weapons available to see a project succeed". Morton (1983) argues that a project champion, must be both the project's "staunchest advocate and its sternest critic", but warns that if a project is "built on a lie", then catastrophic failure may ensue.

We agree that a project champion has a vital role to play at the implementation stage in seeing the project through to successful completion (once it has been approved). We are also of the view that such a person may be over enthusiastic at the project selection stage, which can be detrimental to the organisation, in that the project may not be successful.

It seems from the literature that research into the role of the project champion has been focused on the implementation rather than the appraisal stage of project management. This clearly indicates a gap in the literature, which this paper sets out to address.

Table 5 | Project Champion

	CZ	UK	z-score	p-value	P < 0.05
Respondents answering this question	n = 74	n = 71			
Number of project champions involved in the appraisal process	68	55	2.4207	0.01552	significant
% (CZ: 68/74) (UK: 55/71)	91.9%	77.5%			
Number of respondents who were also the project champion	12	14	-1.0545	0.29372	Not significant
% [CZ: 12/68 (Number of project champions involved in appraisal process)] [UK: 14/55 (Number of project champions involved in appraisal process)]	17.6%	25.5%			
Opinion: Project champion had too much influence	20	17	0.1800	0.85716	Not significant
% [CZ: 20/68 (Number of project champions involved in appraisal process)] [UK: 17/55 (Number of project champions involved in appraisal process)]	29.4%	30.9%			
Number of respondents who were the project champion and also were of the opinion that the project champion had too much influence.	6	4	1.1196	0.26272	Not significant
% [CZ: 6/12 (Number of respondents who were the project champion)] [UK: 4/14 (Number of respondents who were the project champion)]	50%	28.6%			

Note: Seven CZ respondents did not answer this part of the questionnaire.

Source: Authors

With respect to the recently appraised ICT projects, sixty-eight (91.9%) of the Czech Republic respondents and fifty-five (77.5%) of the UK respondents stated that a project champion was involved at the project appraisal stage (Table 5). This shows a significant difference between the Czech Republic and the UK at $p < 0.05$ level, with the Czech Republic indicating the involvement of a greater number of project champions. Of the Czech Republic respondents, twelve acknowledged that they were the project champion,

while for the UK the figure was fourteen. Twenty Czech Republic and seventeen UK respondents were of the opinion that the project champion had too much influence on the project selection, suggesting that an undue influence may have occurred. A further interesting observation is that six (50%) Czech Republic and four (28.6%) UK respondents, who identified themselves as the project champion, actually stated that they had too much influence at the project selection stage.

We argue that the above figures clearly indicate that a project champion may have too much influence at the project selection stage as, based on consolidated figures, 38.5% of those respondents who acknowledged that they were the project champion were of the opinion that they had too much influence. Also, 30.1% [37 (number of respondents who expressed the opinion that a project champion had too much influence) / 123 (number of project champions involved in the appraisal process)] of respondents, again based on consolidated figures, were of the general opinion that a project champion had too much influence. On the basis of the above evidence, it is our view that a project champion is perceived to have too much influence at the project selection stage and is therefore in a position to bias the investment decision.

Farbey *et al.* (1992) found that the appraisal of IT projects relied heavily on a project champion to the extent that a large number of projects would not have gone ahead without their support. They also found that, "it was up to the champion to do whatever he or she thought necessary to gain approval". We do not advocate that a project champion is excluded from the appraisal team; but we do suggest that any over-enthusiasm on their part for the project should be monitored and taken into account. It is important to include the project champion, who in many cases may be the project's proposer, in the team in order to elicit factual data and loyal commitment at the implementation stage.

3.4 Project champion and the link to formal appraisal procedures

We investigated if a project champion had a greater influence to bias project selection where their organisation did not have clearly defined procedures for assessing ICT projects.

Eight (19.0%) Czech Republic project champions [UK: ten (21.3%)], who were judged to have too much influence, operated in an environment where their organisation had clearly defined procedures, while twelve Czech Republic (37.5%) and seven [UK (29.2%)] operated in an environment where their organisation did not have clearly defined procedures (Table 6). We can report that there was no significant difference between the Czech Republic and the UK or between those project champions who operated in either an environment where their organisation had clearly defined procedures or not, at $p < 0.05$ level. We are therefore unable to reject H1 null hypotheses, "*There is no perceived difference in the excessive influence of a project champion between the existence or non-existence of clearly defined procedures for assessing ICT project*", at this level. This indicates that having or not having formal procedures to appraise ICT capital projects does not affect a project champion's undue influence. However, increasing the significance level to $p < 0.10$, we find that there is a difference with respect to the Czech Republic, in that it is perceived that a project champion has too much influence when their organisation does not have clearly defined procedures for assessing ICT projects. This is also supported by taking a more European view, by consolidating the CZ and UK data (Table 6) This leads us to reject the null hypotheses

at $p < 0.10$ level, indicating that a project champions' excessive influence is greater when their organisation does not have clearly defined procedures for assessing ICT projects. This finding is important and should be the subject of future research. It may indicate that adopting clearly defined procedures in the appraisal of capital assets may reduce any biased influence of a project champion at the project selection stage.

Table 6 | Project Champion/Formal Investment Appraisal

	CZ	UK	z-score	p-value	P < 0.05
Number of project champions who were deemed to have too much influence when their organisation had clearly defined formal appraisal procedures.	8	10	-0.2613	0.79486	Not significant
% [CZ: 8/42 (Number of clearly defined procedures*)] [UK: 10/47 (Number of clearly defined procedures)]	19.0%	21.3%			
Number of project champions who were deemed to have too much influence when their organisation did not have clearly defined formal appraisal procedures.	12	7	0.6518	0.5157	Not significant
% [CZ: 12/32 (Number of organisations that did not have clearly defined formal appraisal procedures*)] (UK: 7/24 (Number of organisations that did not have clearly defined formal appraisal procedures)]	37.5%	29.2%			
Null hypothesis H1. There is no difference in the excessive influence of a project champion between the existence or non-existence of clearly defined procedures for assessing ICT projects.					
Based on the CZ data [8/42: 12/32]			-1.7707	0.07672	Reject at $p < 0.10$
Based on the UK data [10/47: 7/24]			-0.7370	0.4593	Unable to reject at $p < 0.05$
Based on consolidating the data from the CZ and UK. [18/89: 19/56]			-1.8429	0.06576	Reject at $p < 0.10$

Note: *Seven CZ respondents did not answer the questions on project champions so we have adjusted the CZ 'n' figures proportionately. (a) CZ (46 – 4 = 42), (b) (35 – 3 = 32) CZ n = 74

Source: Authors

3.5 Project champions and the link with appraisal teams

A further examination of our data encouraged us to explore deeper into the role of a project champion and to find some patterns of behaviour that would help us understand better their role at the project selection stage. We were therefore interested in any link between the investment appraisal team and the involvement of a project champion. Were all the project champions part of a team? With respect to the Czech Republic, we have seen from Table 4 that teams assessed fifty-three projects, and in respect of the UK, the number was sixty-four. In Table 7, we show that fifty (94.3%) of the Czech Republic teams and 50 (78.1%) of the UK teams included a project champion. The difference was significant at $p < 0.05$, showing a greater number of Czech Republic projects that were assessed by teams included a project champion.

Eighteen (26.5%) Czech Republic projects and 5 (9.1%) UK projects, which were *not* assessed by a team, involved a project champion. The difference was again significant at $p < 0.05$, showing that the number of project champions who were not part of a team was greater in the Czech Republic. Three (5.7%) Czech Republic teams and 14 (21.9%) UK teams did not include a project champion.

As we clearly defined for our respondents that a project champion is a person who has a major influence in getting the project accepted, it is clear from our research that the influence of such a person could be very strong. It is also an interesting observation that out of the 53 Czech Republic cases, when the particular project was evaluated by an investment appraisal team, there were only three (5.7%) instances when a project champion was not included. With respect to the UK, 64 teams were involved and of these 14 (21.9%) did not consist of a project champion. This shows a significant difference between the Czech Republic and UK at $p < 0.05$ level, with the UK indicating a greater number of teams without a project champion than the Czech Republic. Altogether, these results clearly demonstrate that the role of project champion in the appraisal/selection process of ICT projects is very important.

Having reported that twenty Czech Republic and seventeen UK respondents had expressed their belief that a project champion had too much influence on project appraisal/selection, we were interested as to whether the level of this influence is somehow related to the existence or non-existence of an investment appraisal team. Of the above respondents, six Czech Republic and four UK were of the opinion that they, as project champions, had too much influence (Table 5). As we have already reported, there were fifty-three Czech Republic and sixty-four UK projects that were assessed by an investment appraisal team and of those teams; fifty Czech Republic and fifty UK included a project champion. This shows that a high number of teams included a project champion, leading us to believe that the project champion had an important role to play. As to whether his/her influence was excessive is highlighted by the fact that fourteen Czech Republic and fourteen UK believed that a project champion, who was part of a team, had too much influence. In the case of both countries, therefore, 28% of project champions, who were part of a team, are believed to have too much influence, leading us to conclude that a project champion, who is part of a team, may bias the acceptance of a project. This leads us to believe that a project champion may have had excessive influence in 26.4% (14/53) of Czech Republic projects and 21.9% (14/64) of UK projects.

Table 7 | Project Champion/Teams

	CZ	UK	z-score	p-value	P < 0.05
Number of respondents who believed that a project champion, who was part of a team, had too much influence.	14	14	-0.8728	0.3843	Not significant
% [CZ: 14/20 (Total Number of project champions with too much influence)] [UK: 14/17 (Total number of project champions with too much influence)]	70%	82.4%			
Number of respondents who believed that a project champion, who was not part of a team, had too much influence.	6	3	0.8728	0.3843	Not significant
% [CZ: 6/20 (Total Number of project champions with too much influence)] [UK: 3/17 (Total number of project champions with too much influence)]	30%	17.6%			
% [CZ: 6/20 (Number projects not assessed by teams)] [UK: 3/7 (Number projects not assessed by teams)]	30%	42.9%	-0.6211.	0.5353	Not significant
Number of projects that were assessed by a team, which included a project champion.	50	50	2.4774	0.0131	significant
% [CZ: 50/53 (Number of teams)] [UK: 50/64 (Number of teams)]	94.3%	78.1%			
Number of teams that did not include a project champion.	3	14	-2.4774	0.0131	significant
% [CZ: 3/53 (Number of teams)] [UK: 14/64 (Number of teams)]	5.7%	21.9%			
Number of project champions who were not part of a team.	18	5	2.4579	0.0139	significant
% [CZ: 18/68 (Total number of project champions)] [UK: 5/55 (Total number of project champions)]	26.5%	9.1%			
Null hypothesis: H2. There is no perceived difference in the excessive influence of a project champion between a team or non-team approach to the appraisal of ICT projects.]					
Based on the CZ data [14/50: 6/18]			-1.4763	0.1389	Unable to reject at p < 0.05
Based on the UK data [14/50: 3/5]			-0.4258	0.6672	Unable to reject at p < 0.05
Based on consolidating the data from the CZ and UK. [28/100: 9/23]			-1.0495	0.2937	Unable to reject at p < 0.05

It seems reasonable to assume that the non-existence of an investment appraisal team may create a more favourable condition and give space for a project champion to exercise their dominancy. We therefore decided to test this view. Of the twenty Czech Republic and seven UK cases (Table 4) where projects were *not* assessed by a team, six Czech Republic (30%) and three UK (42.9%) respondents (Table 7) were of the opinion that the project champion had too much influence. This led us to conclude that a project champion may also bias the acceptance of a project when the appraisal process does not involve a team approach.

Based on this evidence, we set out to investigate if a project champion had a greater influence to bias project selection as part of a team or were there was no team involvement, leading us to test the following null hypotheses: H2, "*There is no difference in the excessive influence of a project champion between a team or non-team approach to the appraisal of ICT projects*" (Table 7). We are unable to reject this null hypothesis (at $p < 0.05$ level) based on the Czech Republic, the UK or consolidated data and therefore conclude that any excessive influence of a project champion is not influenced by the adoption of a team or non-team approach to the appraisal/selection of ICT capital projects.

4. Conclusion

This paper sets out to present and critically examine the links between the formal appraisal, the role of investment appraisal teams, and the role of a project champion and their influence at the ICT project appraisal/selection stage. We believe that this research will enrich the ongoing discussion focussed on ICT project appraisals and fill, what we perceive to be, a gap in the literature. Our findings show some significant differences in the practices between the Czech Republic and the UK, which we believe are the result of cultural and economic diversities.

Although we report an increase in the use of formal guidelines in the appraisal of ICT projects, the number is still disappointing. We believe that this paucity of formal guidelines results in a lack of consistency in decision-making, leading to less transparency and greater opportunity for manipulating the decision-outcome. In addition, the fact that not *all* ICT projects are formally evaluated may lead to an accept/reject decision being made on an informal and less structured assessment or no assessment at all. We found a significant difference (at $p < 0.05$ level) between the Czech Republic and the UK in that a greater number of Czech Republic organisations formally appraising *all* ICT projects.

Although the literature suggests that formal appraisals may not be relevant for all ICT projects, this is not a view that we fully support. We found a significant difference (at $p < 0.05$ level) between the Czech Republic and the UK in that the UK shows a greater number of ICT projects being assessed by investment appraisal/selection teams and a greater number of respondents being part of an investment team.

A team approach to decision-making is well recognised for stimulating commitment and achieving optimal decisions than an individualistic managerial approach. This is especially applicable to the appraisal of ICT and other capital investments. It is therefore encouraging to report a high level of team involvement, thus supporting the views of academics. The importance of the demographic characteristics of team members is also evident, with teams not always being constituted of the same individuals. Finance professionals being included in the team because of their financial knowledge,

IT specialists because of their expertise and knowledge of ICT, and general management because of their organisational skills.

While we do not dispute the importance of a project champion in seeing a project to successful completion, we are concerned that such a person may bias and overly influence the project selection stage. Our research shows that there is a high involvement of project champions in the appraisal/selection of ICT capital projects. Their influence, however, is a cause for concern, in that a large number of respondents to our research believed that the project champion had too much of an influence. It is even more alarming when we find that some of those who expressed this concern were actually project champions themselves. We found a significant difference (at $p < 0.05$ level) between the Czech Republic and the UK in that the Czech Republic shows a greater number of project champions being involved at the appraisal/selection stage of ICT capital projects.

Our focus now turns to the generic relationships between, formal appraisal, teams, and project champions.

A more detailed examination of the data from our research revealed that a project champion was perceived to have the same excessive influence as part of a team or acting independently where a team does not assess the project. We were, however, unable to prove that the non-existence of an investment appraisal team constitutes more or less favourable conditions for a project champion's dominancy.

Of some importance, however, we did find support for the notion that a project champion's influence is greater when their organisation did not have clearly defined procedures for assessing ICT projects. This indicates that adopting clearly defined procedures for the appraisal of capital assets may reduce any biased influence of a project champion, leading to better decision-making. This important finding should be the subject of future research.

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