



Chapter XVII

National Culture and the Meaning of Information Systems Success: A Framework for Research and its Implications for IS Standardization in Multinational Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Information system (IS) success is still one of the most researched topics in the IS discipline, but most research on defining and measuring IS success was conducted in North America. As the world globalizes, multinational organizations consider information technology and IS as crucial and necessary tools to glue together all of their units. Moreover, IS standardization (i.e., the same IS implemented in all the units), particularly

through enterprise systems (ERPs), has attracted these organizations because of the economic benefits standard applications can eventually yield to. However, researchers in the international management discipline have assessed that culture may be a major factor that influences organizational structure and management practices. Some researchers in the field of IS have also confirmed that national cultures do, indeed, have an impact on IS design and acceptance. As culture is defined as “a shared system of meaning,” the success of IS should hold different meanings in different cultures. We found only sparse research work on how people from different national cultures perceive, define and operationalize IS success. The objective of this chapter is twofold: first, discuss why organizations that intend to standardize IS in different cultures should consider culture as an important factor in the achievement of success and second, propose a comprehensive framework for future cross-national research on IS success in multinational organizations. After the introductory section, the four main components of the proposed framework and their interrelations are presented: IS success, culture, IS standardization, and IS built-in success assumptions. The chapter concludes with the presentation of the new framework.

INTRODUCTION

From the most recent list of IS research mainstream, Markus et al. (2000) argues that one of the most enduring research topics in the field of information systems is information systems success. The urge to define, the dependent variable (IS success) was first called by Keen (1980) when he presented a list of five issues that IS researchers need to resolve (DeLone and McLean, 1992). DeLone and McLean (1992) argue that if information systems research is to make a contribution to the world of practice, a well-defined outcome measure is essential.

Today, managers are still frustrated because the question of IS success definition and measurement has no definite and clear answer (Myers et al., 1998). This problem of IS definition and measurement has largely been documented in North America, where most IS research has been conducted. The IS success problem becomes more complex for large multinational organizations, which conduct business activities in different parts of the globe, that is, in different contexts or cultures. This complexity is largely caused by the impact that different cultures may have on behavior, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals, which in turn influence the current managerial practices and the characteristics and type of use of the systems in place in a particular subsidiary. The complexity grows even more if a multinational organization seeks to standardize the IS in its foreign subsidiaries. A multinational organization that decides to standardize an

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