ABSTRACT

Surveys of IS management issues play a valuable role in identifying important topics for IS research and in identifying important areas for IS management attention. However, researchers and practitioners should be careful how they report and interpret the results of IS issues surveys. Survey studies’ reporting the rankings of individual IS issues for specific geographical regions can be misleading. This study interviewed 62 IS managers from Kuwait regarding the relative importance of 25 IS management issues. Results confirm the presence of seven underlying IS management issue dimensions. The top two ranked factor dimensions are 1) the effective management of IS resources (e.g., data, networks and applications) and 2) managers’ knowledge of IS. This study’s issue factors differ from those found in earlier studies in the Gulf region and Taiwan. These results indicate that senior IS managers in different countries focus on different management areas based on local conditions and practices.

Keywords: IS management issues, information technology, dimensions, factor analysis, Kuwait, GCC

INTRODUCTION

Identification of the top management issues in information systems has been a popular research topic in MIS. Several research teams have surveyed chief information officers regarding the top IS management issues that they face. The results have been used by IS researchers to guide the selection of relevant research topics and by IS managers to focus their decision-making. In spite of this, Palvia & Basu (1999) have shown that reporting the underlying constructs associated with the IS management issues is more meaningful than listing the individual issues and their ranks.

Businesses in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)1 countries are fully embracing information technology (Watson et
Additionally, governments across the region are planning to launch large projects to develop and implement e-government operations across their critical governmental agencies. Yet, a large percentage of organizations in this region lack knowledge about the functionality of information systems, and therefore, IT is generally underutilized (Al-Abdul-Gader, 1999). Moreover, Badri (1992) argues that using IS issue factor dimensions is more effective than using single-issue variables as a means of educating corporations located in the Gulf countries about IT utilization. Thus, there is a continuous need to better understand the basic variables underlying IT executives’ perceptions of what is important concerning IS management practices in this region.

This study extends the analysis using data of a recent field study of IS management issues in Kuwait (Alshawaf, 2001). Given the significance assigned to the results of the study, it is important to establish the meaning and relevance associated with these results. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the important IS management issue dimensions and to determine the theoretical and practical implications of such dimensions in Kuwait in particular and the GCC couriers in general.

The results of this study should provide useful information about IS management practice for Kuwaiti organizations, policy makers and researchers. The results will provide management in organizations with a comprehensible framework for evaluating their use of IT. Such information will also educate Kuwaiti policy makers regarding major investment decisions in IT infrastructure and regarding the formulation of national policies to help private and public organizations to more rapidly take advantage of IT. The findings will assist researchers in identifying key research areas in Kuwait and other Arab Middle East countries. Finally, the results of the study will be useful for global companies and “dot-coms” operating or contemplating operations in the Middle East.

This paper is organized into five sections. The first section provides literature review of the prior research. The second section discusses the research methodology. In the third section, the results of the study are presented. Then, the implications are discussed in the fourth section. Last, the paper ends with a brief summary and concluding remarks.

**RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Yang (1996) surveyed IS managers in Taiwanese companies to identify their most important IS management issues. Questionnaires were mailed to a sample of 748 CEOs, CIOs and other professionals. The response rate was 44%. Factor analysis was performed on 38 key issues, and seven underlying factors were found and explained 96.8% of the issues variance. Badri (1992) surveyed IS managers from organizations in the GCC region regarding their top IS management issues. Self-administered questionnaires were handed directly to 120 CIOs and 80% completed the surveys. Factor analysis was performed on 20 key management issues, and eight underlying factors were found and explained 96.8% of the issues variance. Badri (1992) surveyed IS managers from organizations in the GCC region regarding their top IS management issues. Self-administered questionnaires were handed directly to 120 CIOs and 80% completed the surveys. Factor analysis was performed on 20 key management issues, and eight underlying factors were identified explaining 75.9% of the variance in the issue responses. These two studies have four management issues dimensions in common: namely, strategic alignment of IT, IT integration, IS productivity, and IT application management. Importance rankings of three out of the four common factor dimensions were also similar (see Table 3).