Chapter 6
Revisiting Issues, Limitations, and Opportunities in Cross-Cultural Research on Collaborative Software in Information Systems: A Critical Literature Update

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ABSTRACT

Previously, Zhang and Lowry (2008) analyzed the issues, limitations, and opportunities in cross-cultural research on collaborative software in information systems. This chapter revisits the issues discussed in that paper and adds to them an analysis of the research done since their analysis, which covered the years leading up to 2005. Five additional articles, published between 2005 and the end of 2008 have been added to their original analysis. Since the beginning of 2005, research has extended to new countries and cultures, and has covered a previously unexplored task type. New insights and opportunities are discussed. Previously, Zhang and Lowry (2008) found seven common failures in CSW-supported cultural research. This update analyzes five new papers against these seven failures and finds their recent research encouraging. The main contribution of this chapter is filling in the gap between the current state of this particular area of research and the previous state at the beginning of 2005 when the analysis of Zhang and Lowry was completed.

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Cross-Cultural Research on Collaborative Software in Information Systems

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has affected business by increasing marketplace competitiveness, restructuring organizational boundaries, and creating new challenges for managers who deal with multinational companies or international alliances. Businesses often use multicultural collaborative groups working in distributed environments to cope with uncertainty, change, ambiguous problem definitions, and rapidly changing information (e.g., Vick, 1998). A critical need exists for managers “to develop a new repertoire of skills and abilities to manage and/or work with people whose cultures and value systems can be significantly different from those at home” (Tung, 1995, p. 485). Thus, “understanding the potential advantages and disadvantages of this diversity is important for organizations” (Staples & Zhao, 2006, p. 403).

Improving group processes and outcomes has been one of the most highly investigated research issues of the past two decades. The advance of information technologies makes it possible for distributed teams to be supported through collaborative technologies such as group support systems (GSS) and computer-mediated communication (CMC), which are collectively known as collaborative software (CSW). CSW refers to computer systems that combine communication and decision-support technologies to facilitate the formulation and execution of various group activities. These distributed, computer-supported groups are often referred to as virtual teams.

In general, CSW has been proven useful in alleviating problems associated with intercultural communication primarily by reducing many behaviors that might offend members of other cultures (Aiken, Martin, Shirani, & Singleton, 1994; Gray & Olfman, 1989). Few studies both advance theories involving culture and employ empirical data to test assumptions and hypotheses. In an earlier review of 230 CSW studies (Fjermestad & Hiltz, 1999), only nine were found that included culture as either an independent variable (IV) or a moderator. The benefits of CSW identified mostly from research on Western cultures may not be manifest in different cultures under the same circumstances. For example, Kim et al. (1990) report that some incentives used to motivate North American workers can be counterproductive in collectivistic cultures.

CULTURE AND COLLABORATIVE SOFTWARE

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