Exploring Importance of Environmental Factors for Adoption of Knowledge Management Systems in Saudi Arabian Public Sector Organisations

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to examine importance and influence of environmental factors (mainly from institutional theory perspective) on adoption of KMS in the context of Saudi Arabian public sector. Data collected from a survey of 352 employees from various public sector organisations, was utilised to perform a number of analyses which led to illustrate that the coercive pressure not just directly affects behavioural intention but also exert indirect effect on it via mimetic pressure construct. Coercive pressure along with normative pressure and external IS support determines the strength of mimetic pressure. Findings also indicate that mimetic pressure along with coercive pressure significantly influences behavioural intention to adopt KMS in Saudi Arabian public sector organisations. The paper also outlines contribution, limitations and future research directions emerging from this research.

Keywords: Coercive Pressure, Environmental Factors, External IS Support, Mimetic Pressure, Normative Pressure, Public Sector Organizations, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management (KM) has received an extensive awareness, from both academics and practitioners and is addressed by a diverse range of academic literature in last two decades (Kakabadse et al., 2003). KM is defined as “collection of processes that govern the creation, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge to fulfil organizational objectives” (Murray & Myers, 1997, p. 29). For the purpose of this research, the term public sector refers to the

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functioning body at the federal, country, state, municipal, and local level of governments (Arora, 2011).

While literature on KM has been addressing the issues, challenges, and opportunities for the private sector, a little has been talked about for the public sector (Cong & Pandya, 2003). Regardless of the substance apparently linked to it, public sector organizations have less likely inclined to completely explore the benefits of KM than the private sector. However, many organizations in the public sector have started to recognize the significance of KM in restructuring their operations (Arora, 2011). An literature exploration and analysis suggest that a very few literature and/or information on knowledge management have been found in the public sector in general (Al-Zoabi & Al-Noukari, 2008, Cong & Pandya, 2003; Lenk, 2002; Steyn & Kahn, 2008; Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland, 2004a; Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland, 2004b; Taylor & Wright, 2004), and even less so in the context of developing countries (Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland, 2004a, Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland, 2004b).

A knowledge management system (KMS) is a type of information system that maintains and develops KM processes related to the formation, storage, recovery, dissemination, and application of knowledge within and outside an organization (Alavi & Leidner, 2001, Quaddus & Xu, 2005). Analysis of the available literature on the adoption of KMS indicates that although it involves the application of IT systems and other organizational resources to handle knowledge tactically, in a more efficient and methodical way, as broadly employed in organizations, the topic of KM systems has not been fully investigated empirically by researchers and scholars (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Cortada & Woods, 1999, 2000; Gray, 2000; Moody & Shank, 1999; Xu & Quaddus 2005, 2007).

The studies on KM systems are mainly focused on issues of knowledge processing (Chalmeta & Grangel, 2008; Gray, 2000; Hahn & Wang, 2009), KMS design principles (Hall & Paradice, 2005; Hicks et al., 2002; Markus et al., 2002; Richardson et al., 2006), KMS architecture (Butler et al., 2008; Chua, 2004, Gottschalk, 2006; Kwan & Balasubramanian, 2003; Pirro et al., 2010), IS success model (Hwang et al., 2008; Kulkarni et al., 2006; Wu & Wang, 2006), KMS performance evaluation (Brown et al., 2005; Liu & Tsai, 2007; Mccall et al., 2008; Poston & Speier, 2005), IT applications (Bolisani & Scarso, 1999; Hjelmervik & Wang, 2007; Medermott, 1999; Sher & Lee, 2004), and critical success factors (CSFs) in KMS implementation (Al-Busaidi & Olfman, 2005; Damodaran & Olphert, 2000; Hung et al., 2005).

Only a handful of studies (e.g., Al-Ghaith et al., 2010; Hester, 2008, 2010; Huang & Quaddus, 2007; Huang et al., 2009, 2011; Kuo & Lee, 2011; Peng, 2008; Rizzi et al., 2009; Xu & Quaddus, 2011) used the well-known models of IT adoption to represent the case of KM systems adoption at the organizational level. However, none of them have empirically examined importance and influence of environmental factors particularly in the context of public sector organizations. Since existing studies have illustrated role of environmental factors (see section 2.2 for further details) for successful adoption and diffusion of other information systems, it was deemed appropriate to examine importance and influence of such factors for understanding adoption and diffusion of KMS systems. Hence, the aim of this research is to examine importance and influence of environmental factors (mainly from institutional theory) on adoption of KMS in the context of Saudi Arabian public sector. The findings from this research would have implications for the public sector organisations and governments particularly in the Middle East context.

The remaining sections of this paper are structured as follows: the second section briefly discusses the relevant literature on KM/KMS in the context of Middle East countries with particular attention to Saudi Arabia. This section also discusses theoretical basis for the factors utilised in this research and illustrate a conceptual model for guiding empirical research. The third section then provides the description of the research methodology utilised in this research.
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