Defining Information System Success in France

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to explore how IS success is defined and perceived by a group of people in France. The results show that culture does influence IS success perception. The study has many implications for both academic and practice communities. The results are especially important to multinational organizations that standardize IS in different cultures, including France. The research case is a multibillion dollar Canadian multinational organization which decided to standardize an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system in all its worldwide subsidiaries.

Keywords: defining IS success; globalization of IS; measuring IS success; IS success; IS success model

INTRODUCTION

One of the most enduring research topics in the field of information systems is that of information systems success (Markus, Axline, Petrie, & Tanis, 2000). DeLone and McLean (1992) argued that if information systems research is to make a contribution to the world of practice, a well-defined outcome measure is essential. On the other hand, cross-cultural researchers have largely suggested that it is not possible to take existing models and theories and apply them to different contexts or cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Laurent, 1983; Maurice, 1979; Tayeb, 1994; Trompenaars, 1993, Pauleen et al., 2006). This problem becomes apparent in large organizations or multinational organizations which conduct business activities in different cultures because “the meaning of information and effectiveness of an information system can vary substantially in different cultures” (Jordan, 1996, p. 2). This problem becomes even more complex in cases where a multinational organization seeks to standardize IS in its subsidiaries that are located in different cultures. The multinational organization would face two challenges. First, the system needs to be implemented successfully. Second, the multinational organization in due time, needs to measure the success of the system, that is, the outcome from implementing the new system.
In reviewing the literature, we couldn’t find specific studies that deal with how people in different cultures define and operationalize IS success. The intent of this research is to focus on this issue by developing culturally sensitive models of IS success in France.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**IS success**

The DeLone and McLean (1992, 2003) model is probably one of the most cited models in the IS community. Their 1992 model was successfully tested in many empirical studies (Rai, Lang, & Welker, 2002; Ivari, 2005). IS success definition and measurement is still problematic for many factors (Seddon, Staples, Patnayakuni, & Bowetell, 1999). The first factor is the mixture of the technical and social aspects of an IS (Kanellis, Lycett, & Paul, 1998). Second, Alter (2000) argues that information technology and work practices are now so intertwined that it is difficult to identify their respective contributions to success. Other researchers link the difficulty of defining IS success to the methodological aspects involved in measuring it: “Specifying a dependent variable is difficult because of the many theoretical and methodological issues involved in measuring IS success” (Garrity & Sanders, 1998, p. 14). Seddon et al. (1999) argue that IS success is still a fuzzy concept contingent upon different stakeholders and different types of IT. In the practice community, Markus and Tanis (2000) claimed that there is a fundamental gap in both practical and academic thinking between the lack of consensus and the clarity about the meaning of success where information systems are concerned.

**IS Success in the International Context**

The problem of IS definition and measurement becomes more difficult and more complicated if we add the international dimension (Ishman, 1998; Garrity & Sanders, 1998). The international dimension includes cultural terms, such as values and assumptions, which may be at the heart of the differing perceptions and interpretations. Shing-Kao (1997) argues that “Research has shown that people notice, interpret and retain information based on their values, assumptions and expectations. Different assumptions and values lead to different ways of looking at the same thing” (p. 13).

This international differing in perception of the meaning of a phenomenon is an important topic in international management or cross-cultural management disciplines. Do theories and concepts born in a specific culture apply or have the same meaning in other cultures? Hofstede (1993), for example, after a large survey on work-related values in sixty countries, concluded that management theories and findings are not automatically transferable from one context to another. Shing-Kao (1997), Kedia and Bhagat (1988), and Robichaux and Cooper (1998) add that the majority of theories of management have a Western and, therefore, generally, an American perspective which is based on the embedded values that influence the ways in which Americans perceive and think about the world.

Rosenzweig (1994) argues that a central concern in scientific research is external validity. That is, the extent to which a theorized or observed relationship among variables can be generalized to other settings. Rosenzweig (1994) claims that the main question should not be, “Are scientific management theories that interest us valid elsewhere? But how can we best understand management, as it exists around the world?” (p.37); this is exactly the main goal of this research project, where we seek to understand the meaning of IS success in France.

**Culture**

Culture is a term that was originally developed in the field of anthropology and has recently become a prevalent research area in organizational studies. Unfortunately, a consistent definition of this ambiguous concept is extremely difficult to isolate (Lammers & Hickson, 1979). The complexity of the concept of culture derives, then, from the multiplicity of the perspectives
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