Chapter I

Creating and Developing a Program of Global Research*

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Abstract

This is the first part of a two-part chapter that describes and analyzes a program of research (PR) in international IT studies begun in the fall of 1992 and continuing through 2004. The chapter presents the first two stages which span the years of 1992 through 2000, focusing on the creation and development process for a PR, examining the concept of a PR, the inception of our PR and its maturation both in terms of theory and methodology, research team dynamics, and program implementation. We offer guidelines for initiating and maintaining programs of research, highlighting the inevitable trade-offs that occur when high administrative work loads and intensive data gathering in the global setting, often involving long periods of time abroad, have to be balanced against the ability to carry out the research at all and the rarity of the data.

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Introduction

This is the first part of a two-part presentation that traces the evolution of a program of research (PR) on Arab culture and national IT policy and how these variables affect various ICT (information and communications technologies) outcomes. This paper focuses on the creation and development of the PR. The second part is presented in Straub and Loch (2006). The program began in 1992 with a team of four faculty members at Georgia State University, three of whom were IS faculty and one of whom was a cultural anthropologist. Since the research domain set in the Arab world was familiar to only one of the faculty members, sharing of knowledge between the team members was critical, even as the team grew somewhat larger over data-gathering exercises in Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, and Egypt. By the late 1990s, the research had reached a point where major U.S.-government National Science Foundation (NSF) funding was sought and acquired. Team membership had changed, as well, and the program shifted to an examination of other variables and explored new ways of measuring the established constructs. Over time, we adopted the acronym ACIT-APIT (Arab Culture and IT Transfer; Arab Policy and IT Transfer) as representative of the work; the URL for detailed information about the program is www.acit-apit.com.

As the team wrapped up its grant activity in 2004, our thinking was moving to new applications of models and methods. We are considering comparative studies in developing and lesser-developed countries across continents and will seek funding to support these endeavors. For example, IT policy and culture in other developing countries like South Africa and Brazil could offer fascinating contrasts to each other and to the experiences of lesser-developed countries such as Tanzania and Bolivia, where national IT policy is in its infancy and IT infrastructure is nascent.

The evolution of this program of research is idiosyncratic in that the program has changed considerably over the years due to personal and individual factors as much as by environmental factors. Nevertheless, there are some causal agents that seem to be generalizable, and the telling of the story could be of use to researchers pursuing global studies in determining how and if a program of research will allow them to reach their goals more efficaciously.

The PR story is divided into four stages. The first two stages are told in Part I. The second two are told in Part II. Guidelines and lessons learned are offered in each case as the nature of the research, including evolution of the model, methodology, and team composition developed during the 10-plus-year horizon.
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