Global Programs of Research: Maintenance and Extensibility

Detmar W. Straub, Georgia State University, USA
Karen D. Loch, Georgia State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This is the second part of a two-part article that describes and analyzes a program of research (PR) in international IT studies that began in the fall of 1992. The first part spans the years 1992 through 2000 and discusses the concept of a PR, the inception of our PR, and its maturation in terms of theory and methodology, research team dynamics, and program implementation. Part II focuses on the time frame of 2000 to 2004. The work undertaken during this second period is distinctive in two areas: the examination in detail of the full range of all constructs in the final research model; and grantsmanship, which was essential to the life of the PR. Specifically, a multi-year NSF grant funded the core of in-depth work undertaken between 2000 and 2003. A second NSF grant permitted us to work with domain experts from around the world to push the stream of research forward. In Part II, we also offer a retrospective analysis, based on our experience, on the PR effort. Pros and cons are articulated and then extrapolated into practical lessons learned that will be useful to others in similar undertakings. 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 with the ability to carry out the research at all and the rarity of the data. Finally, we look forward to what we term Stage 4 — the period of redirection — which is the bridge to the next program of research.

Keywords: Arab culture; culture-specific modeling; developing countries; global or international IT studies; ICT and systems outcomes; national IT policy studies; programs of research; social norms; socioeconomic development; technological culturation

INTRODUCTION

This is the second 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. In Part I, Creating and Developing a Program of Global Research (Straub & Loch, 2006), we described the background lead-
ing up to this period. Each team member brings different and complementary assets to the project. Loch had long-term established relationships with a key individual in Egypt, Sherif Kamel, without whom we would not have been able to do this work. Kamel was instrumental in opening the doors for interviews at all levels. Straub and Sevcik both taught in the Robinson Joint MBA program with Cairo University, which permitted the team to leverage its funds and gave it considerable on-the-ground experience and contact with its partners. Kamel had been involved in the development of the ICT sector in Egypt. He was exceptionally knowledgeable of the players and had access to them. It was 1999. At this point, we knew two things. First, we were committed to continuing the line of inquiry. Second, we knew we must seek major third-party funding to sustain the work.


We published a series of articles reporting our initial findings in the first two stages, Inception and Theory Confirmation. We felt that the next natural step in the development of what we now knew to be a program of research was a large-scale grant, especially from a prestigious source like the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the U.S. Competitive grants, such as NSF grants, convey many benefits to awardees. The competitive nature of the grant means that awards presumably go to ideas that are acceptable science and will lead to high impacts, both in scholarly and social terms. In addition to the funding, which is necessary to carry out the research, the winning of an NSF grant can lead to participation in NSF panels and reviewing, which extends the knowledge base and social network of team members. The impact on the research is indirect but decidedly valuable.

While not the place for a detailed discussion on grant programs and their respective funding agencies, it merits mentioning that many developed countries have governmental funding and even private funding available. The Canadian government, for example, provides reasonably good levels of funding for researchers at Canadian institutions. This is equally true of Asian schools, such as those in Singapore and Hong Kong, as well as for countries belonging to the European Union.

The output from this stage is shown in Table 1.

Typical Activities in this Stage

The following activities characterized this stage. Each will be discussed next in greater detail.

1. Acquisition of external grants
2. Changes in team membership
3. Continuing literature review
4. New instrumentation and retesting of refined and expanded research model
5. Numerous trips abroad
6. Team processes

Acquisition of External Grants

The application for the main NSF grant in February 1999 was the largest funding we had attempted to date. The proposal, which can be viewed at http://ACIT-APIT.com, was ranked among the highly competitive proposals, but funding ran out before it could be financed. Therefore, we were in the position of reapplying with a different set of reviewers for the following year’s competition.

The reviews of the proposal were extremely valuable, and we gained addi-
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