Chapter 12
Some Cultural Issues in the Adoption of E–Learning: A Structuration Theory Approach

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) varies from one cultural context to another. This phenomenon of technology acceptance is not new anymore. While it is increasingly common due to globalization in some cultures, its use tends to be rejected by other cultures. Cultural factors are often identified as a crucial influence on the success or failure of Information Systems in general and ICT use in particular. This chapter is a theoretical foundation on which one can base the mutual influence of culture on the use of e-learning technologies. It highlights the cultural factors in macro and micro level that have been investigated in the literature of management. A theoretical basis for analysis in this area is developed using concepts drawn from the Structuration Theory of Giddens (1979). For this purpose, a qualitative exploratory approach has been adopted to address the research question.

INTRODUCTION

ICTs use has increased tremendously. There has been much debate over the last decade about the major social transformations due to ICTs which are taking place in the world such as the increasing interconnectedness of different societies, the compression of time and space, and an intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole (Lucio-Nieto et al, 2012, Robertson 1992). Such changes are often labeled with the term globalization, although the precise nature of this phenomenon is highly complex on closer examination. Despite the complexity of the globalization phenomena, and the unresolved debate concerning its value, all parties would agree that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are deeply implicated in the changes that are taking place, through their ability to enable new modes of work, communication and organization across time and space. However, does globalization enabled by ICTs imply that the world is becoming a homogeneous arena for global business and global attitudes, with differences between organizations and societies disappearing, there are many thoughtful commentators who take exception to this conclusion. For example, Robertson (1992) discussed the way in which imported themes are
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‘indigenized’ in particular societies with local culture constraining receptivity to some ideas rather than others, and adapting them in specific ways. Similarly, Appadurai (1996), coming from a non-Western background, argued against the global homogenization thesis on the grounds that different societies will appropriate the “materials of modernity” differently depending on their specific geographies, histories and languages. If these latter arguments are broadly correct, then the adoption of ICTs should prove to be problematic. The adoption of technology transferred from one society to another involves the importing of that technology into an ‘alien’ cultural context where its value may not be similarly perceived to that in its original host culture. Indeed, the variance of the acceptance of the technology from culture to another is not new anymore. Such differences in views can be noticed even in various areas within the same country. This research is situated in the field of e-learning and innovation management and examines the impacts of cultural factors on the adoption of e-learning technologies through a qualitative study.

Indeed, most studies on information systems have for long limited themselves to study how and why individuals adopt new technologies basing themselves on the assumption that technology should be accepted, adopted and used by organizations. Most of these studies, reporting to behavioural sciences, adopt models and theories which mainly aim at understanding and explaining individuals’ reaction and behaviour towards information system implementation and new information technology. Technology acceptance model (TAM) and planned behaviour model (PBM) are the two models most cited within information system literature (Abderrazek et al., 2010). Nevertheless, these acceptance models seem to consider technology tools as univocal. They are unable to consider unexpected consequences of technology and are focused only on one side of analysis level regardless of the influence the organisation imposes on its adoption by groups or analysis contexts. In this sense, the implementation of a technology is regarded as statics. However, implementing is above all a social and human change process which needs accommodating technology by the individual and organization. Understanding acceptance decisions requires a break up with these classic analytical models at the micro and/or macro levels and to combine the two levels of analysis in order to unveil the social and human experience. Under its use as a meta-theory, the Structuration Theory (ST) is attempted to recast macro and micro analysis and as a mutually dependent duality. Much of previous thinking about ICTs field in structurational terms has revolved around Giddens dimensions of the model of “duality of structure”, which fleshes out the concepts of structure and interaction (agency) (Markus et Robey, 1988). This paper proposes to finish some with objectivism domination (macro level of analysis), and that of the subjectivism domination’s (micro level of analysis), in helping to understand the interaction between the societal, organizational and personal contexts; which without it, the technology becomes absolute. So, we try to introduce the use of a structurational analysis to derive the cultural dimensions which may influence technologies of the e-learning. A new framework of analysis of the interaction between human agency, culture and structure (as ICTs) is proposed. The e-learning is mostly conceptualized as innovation situated in the interplay between structure and individual and how this leads to adoption.

A primary goal is to develop a theoretical basis for analysis of this area by investigating the use of specific concepts from the Structuration Theory. Next, we try to indentify the cultural issues which may influence the adoption of the E-learning project. The structure of this paper follows a logical sequence. The following sections expand upon a theoretical background. The first section includes the previous literature about cultural issues. In section two, we propose to highlight Structuration Theory as a framework to evaluate social and cultural phenomena in IS discipline before describing our methodology.