

Editorial Preface The World IT Project: A Program on International Research and Call for Participation

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Abstract:

Much of the research in information systems and information technology (IS/IT) has been dominated by a U.S-centric or a Western-centric view. Research paradigms and models developed for the U.S. and Western Europe are just that; they are applicable primarily to the western context. Unsuspecting researchers have taken the same models and applied them to other nations, e.g., underdeveloped countries, emerging economies, transitional economies, and middle-eastern countries. The results have been misguided and spurious in many cases.

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Article:

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This is not to suggest that serious efforts have not been made by selected investigators to address unique issues in various regions of the world using paradigms applicable to the context. In fact, some have risen to the challenge in limited domains. But these efforts have been limited at best. What is sorely lacking is a world view that tries to understand the major IS issues in the world in the context of their unique cultural, economic, political, religious and societal environments. If

we are able to accomplish this rather expansive goal, it will not be purely an academic exercise; although the contributions to academic research will be enormous.

A good understanding of the critical IT issues facing firms and their employees and their surrounding context will be important from the firm, national, and international points of view. At the firm level, it would help management and staff in formulating business and IT policies and strategies. At the national level, it would allow stakeholders, such as policymakers, government and vendors in addressing the pressing issues of the times. In international business, it would help firms and governments in responding to the needs of partners and stakeholders in other countries. A comparative examination across countries and world regions would help facilitate global understanding, cooperation, and knowledge transfer among many nationalities. At the academic level, it will provide researchers with a grounded understanding of the international IT environment, and provide a validated framework to launch many international IT studies.

I made the call to undertake this research several years ago, but it remained unfulfilled to date due to many reasons: lack of resources, need for an international collaboration among willing investigators, cross-border coordination and project management, the sheer amount of effort and time required to accomplish the goals, the lack of incentives and rewards, and most importantly a well-articulated vision and plan. Fortunately, this changes as of now. At the time of writing this editorial, we are well into the development of a major research program, called the "World IT Project". While the plan is in formative stages, I will try to describe its major elements. The purpose is to describe it briefly, seek your input, and invite those interested in contributing to the project.

The World IT Project is designed to examine important issues confronting IT employees, both staff and management, in many countries of the world. The proposed project requires survey data collection from different countries, representing different cultures, levels of economic growth, societal and religious beliefs, and political systems. More than forty countries from all parts of the globe will be targeted for this research. In terms of scope, the project is akin to Hofstede's research on culture and the GLOBE project.

The project will examine various IT employee issues, such as organizational IT issues, technology issues, and individual issues. Among organizational IT issues are IT strategic planning, IT-business alignment, business process reengineering, security and privacy, and IT reliability and efficiency, to name a few. Technology issues include cloud computing, social media, ERP systems, business intelligence, and big data, again to name just a few. Few of the individual issues include job satisfaction, efficacy, and role ambiguity. For a deeper understanding of these issues, the context is important. These contextual variables include such factors as the organizational variables (to include structure and strategy), organizational culture, IT occupational culture, and national culture. At this time, we have explicated each one of these factors into its constituent parts. A broad framework appears below in Figure 1. More information on each factor is available directly from me.

Specific instantiations of the framework will result in a large number of analyses and studies from the massive dataset. As examples of descriptive studies, a group of researchers could compare the IT occupational culture among countries, another could compare organizational IT

issues, another could compare individual issues, and yet another could compare technology issues. In order to get insights into the nature of the issues and develop the ability to proactively influence them, researchers could develop theory-based or grounded models to evaluate the effects of various contextual factors on the world IT issues. The possibilities are almost limitless, once the project is underway. To be certain, some evolution is expected in research goals as the research team develops more knowledge and first-hand experience.

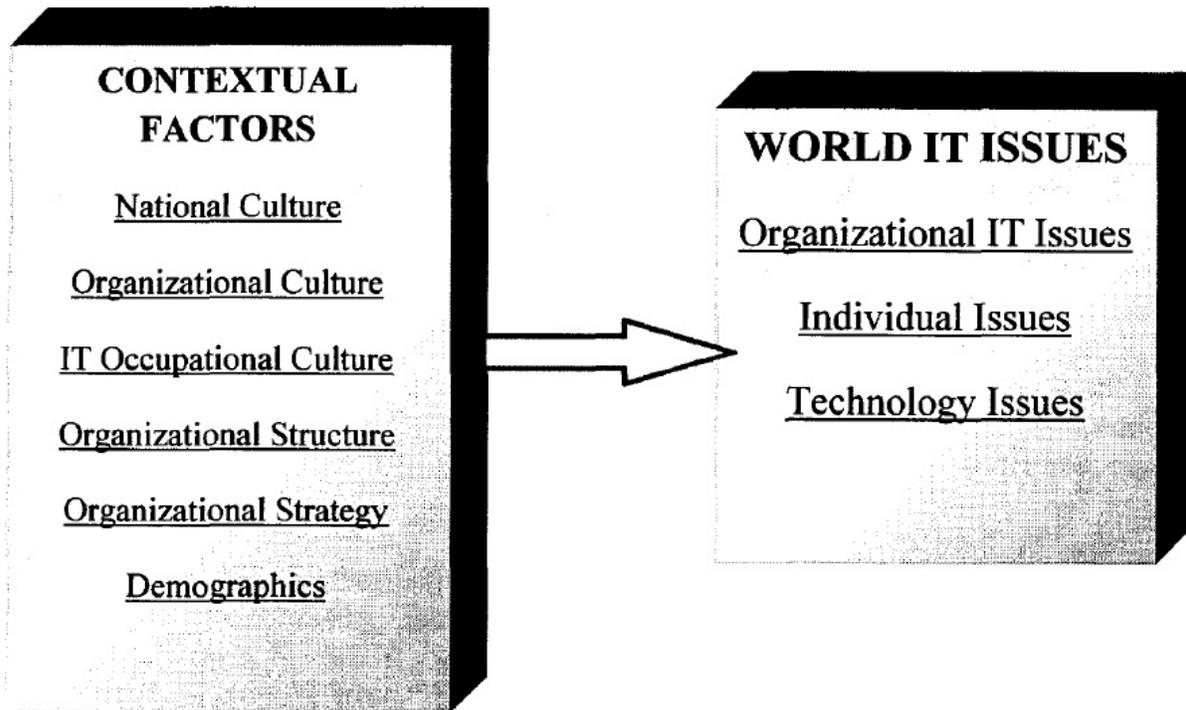


Figure 1. A Framework for the World IT Project

So how do we go about launching such an ambitious project? I will briefly outline the plan that has been set in motion. An international Core Research Team has been formed comprised of seven individuals. The team members are:

- Naveed Baqir, University of Delaware, USA
- Jaideep Ghosh, CSIR - NISTADS and Dept. of Science & Technology, Govt. of India, India
- Tim Jacks, Southern Illinois State University Edwardsville, USA
- Paul Licker, Oakland University, USA
- Celia Romm Livermore, Wayne State University, USA
- Prashant Palvia, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA (Project Leader)
- Aykut Turan, Narruk Kemal University, Turkey

At the time of this writing, the core team has developed a broad research framework as shown above. The remaining steps include the following:

I. Develop instruments. This step is currently under way. Previous studies are characterized by great variation in the underlying instruments making comparisons across time and countries difficult. There is definitely a need to achieve some level of uniformity in instruments used across studies. Once the instruments are developed, they will go through pre-testing and pilot testing for validation.

2. Identify countries/regions and country investigators. Our goal is to get data representing major regions of the world. The proposed project requires data collection from different countries, representing different cultures, levels of economic growth, religious beliefs and political systems. As an estimate, more than 40 countries from all parts of the globe are targeted for this research. It is anticipated that we will be able to include participants who can collect data from Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the BRIC countries), and USA, Ghana, Israel, Kuwait, and South Africa. This list is by no means complete. Country investigators will be identified for the data collection effort after a careful screening process.

3. Identify grant sources. International, national, state, and regional agencies as well as foundations will be researched for funding possibilities for the different projects and phases of the projects. In this regard, *JGITM* readers are encouraged to identify these resources, get involved and bring these opportunities to our attention.

4. Data Collection. Given the scale of the project, data will be collected in stages. We expect all data collection to be completed by the year 2015. It is expected to collect data from 10 countries in the year 2013.

5. Analysis and Reporting. The data from each country study will be stored in a single repository. Analysis will include single country findings, cross-country comparisons, and industry-specific analyses. We will disseminate our findings in a number of ways, such as conference presentations, journal publications, and books. The project will conclude in 2017 when all writing is expected to be completed. While difficult to predict, depending on the results, it is possible to continue the project further into the future with renewed goals.

At this stage of the project, we are in the process of identifying countries and country investigators from all over the world. As the audience of this journal is truly worldwide, we encourage our readers and their colleagues to consider the opportunity to become country investigators. Typically one or two investigators will be assigned to each country. The data collection effort would require collecting data from 10-15 IT employees from 25 organizations, yielding a country sample size of about 300 responses. The direct benefits to you from joining the World IT Project are the following:

- You get readymade instrument and procedures. Your main effort is in data collection.
- You have access to the best expertise.
- You will have co-authorship in several publications. This will include co-authorship using data from your country and co-authorship in comparative studies that include your country.
- You will have international colleagues to collaborate with.
- There will be tremendous opportunities for growth

Your roles and responsibilities will include the following:

- Commit to the project and collect quality data in a timely manner.
- Assist in writing.
- Be responsive to project requests and deadlines.
- Attend an annual meeting of the group to discuss project progress and results.

In summary, the World IT Project will have several deliverables which will significantly enhance our understanding of the global IT environment. It will have direct benefits for private and public organizations at the national and international level by providing them a systematic assessment of the needs and issues of IT employees in organizations across the globe; thus enabling them to carefully address the problems and opportunities associated with such needs. As for research, it will encourage diversity in research and the use of multiple paradigms beyond the current U.S. centric and western views. It will promote research in regions of the world under-represented in the IT literature. Most of all, it would encourage research collaboration among researchers across the world leading to higher synergy, relevance, and quality; and greatly enhance research efficiency through the provision of a central repository of reliable worldwide data.

Prashant Palvia is *Joe Rosenthal Excellence Professor in the Bryan School of Business & Economics at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA. He received his Ph.D., MBA and MS from the University of Minnesota and BS from the University of Delhi, India. He has worked extensively in the field of Global Information Technology Management (GITM) and chairs the annual GITMA world conference, the next one being in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in June 2013 (<http://www.gitma.org>). Professor Palvia is the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Global Information Technology Management, and is on the editorial board of several journals including the role of associate editor for Information & Management. His research interests include global information technology management, healthcare IT, virtual teams, electronic commerce, media choice theory, and trust in exchange relationships. He has published 97 journal articles in such outlets as the MIS Quarterly, Decision Sciences, Communications of the ACM, Communications of the AIS, Information & Management, Decision Support Systems, and ACM Transactions on Database Systems, and 183 conference articles. He has co-edited four books on Global Information Technology Management.*