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Cultural Impact on e-Performance in Government Organizations in the United Arab Emirates.

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Abstract

This paper examines the influence of cultural forces in accepting the implementation of technology systems that deal with assessment and evaluation of government employees to facilitate the transitional process from manual to e-performance assessment in governmental organizations in the United Arab Emirates. The research methodology followed is descriptive and semi-structured interviews with government employees and line managers involved in e-performance and assessment. This study finds that scholars have long argued that cultural characteristics influence behavior directly. This phenomenon, however, varies from one culture to the other depending on numerous factors that shape work ethics and norms in the workplace. This study suggests that the United Arab Emirates enjoys highly structured governmental organizations. This primarily results from the naturally inherited characteristics of being a high-context society.

Key words: Cultural forces, e-performance management system, UAE

Introduction

The rapid technological changes, human capital assessment and evaluation, and available financial resources are shaping organizational development worldwide. Armstrong (2006) concur that maintaining highly skilled, well-performing workforces in a troubled global economy is a daunting task. Increased competition, new regulatory bodies, changing technology, and process management engineering could disrupt traditional employee practices and capability. The

challenge for most organizations is that the use of technology to drive human performance is relatively new and not well understood (Cooper and Schindler, 2005). To meet such demands, organizations and businesses are relying on communications technology to monitor and improve employee performance and productivity (Frayne and Geringer, 2005).

Jarrar and Schiuma (2007) agree that e-performance helps to better manage organizational performance drift through efficient and cost-effective performance measurement techniques. Performance however is largely shaped by cultural characteristics, personality, values and norms (Hall, E.T. 1976, 1982). However, the core elements of performance management systems remains confined to a process that consists of managers and the people who manage the process. There are number of elements ranging from cultural to managerial that directly influence workers' performance in the twenty-first century. Incentives and rewards, for instance, must be aligned with business units and organizational objectives to achieve successful performance management systems. Since performance management is the primary method for evaluating workers, gaining first-hand understanding of the challenges facing the contemporary workforce is a primary concern for both managers and organizations.

Moreover, Various sectors of the UAE government found themselves in the position of mass hiring of fresh graduates to absorb them into the public sector (Randeree and Ninan, 2011). This, however, left the private sector in the UAE heavily dependent on expatriates, and kept UAE nationals distant from the efficiency and effectiveness of the private sector. This study sheds light on whether UAE nationals and non-UAE nationals are skilled enough to perform their duties effectively. Moreover, this study investigates the optimal utilization of e-performance management systems in governmental settings in the UAE, and how to apply such systems for adequate decision-making. It is important to mention, however, that optimal, not adequate, performance is one of the primary objectives of intergovernmental agencies in the UAE. This also puts more pressure on management and employees to improve performance and results.

Presently, the issue of employee effectiveness is a grey area within UAE-based governmental organizations. One of the primary objectives of higher management within the public sector is to intensify training for employees to improve effectiveness. Post-training performance, however, is difficult to measure without effective performance management systems. It is unclear whether managerial assessment is fair and accurate in measuring employees' performance. It is also unclear whether the training provided was utilized properly by government employees to improve their performance and adequately measured. Cultural elements play a significant role in determining the relationship between number of variables such as effectiveness of training programs, employees' commitment to improve their level of effectiveness, competency of management in the public sector to utilize employees' full capacity, and effectiveness of current e-performance management systems in gauging employees' performance. Performance however, is still for the most part influenced by cultural characteristics. This is especially true in the case of high-context society such as the UAE.

Literature Review

Little literature is available that examines cultural forces and government employee performance in the UAE. However, an extensive research has been conducted internationally on the interacting forces between culture and performance amongst government employees. Most

notably Sharma (2005), Heery (1996), Chen, X., Tsui, A. (2006) and others in examining the relationship between performance, culture, and the causes and effects of performance in government sectors.

The closest literature available that examines e-performance assessment and culture is Norhayati and Siti-Nabiha (2009) work on government employees in Malaysia. Norhayati and Siti-Nabiha concur that government employees performance is highly shaped by cultural attributes within the Malaysia context.

Research of relevance to this paper is Panina and Aiello's (2005) study, which acknowledges that national culture is a defining factor in the success of e-performance systems, and that this factor should be fully considered when designing and implementing any such performance management and assessment systems. Ramlall (2003) studied the effect of culture, e-performance management systems on governmental staff members in Greece, and found that while it did indeed improve employee performance, it also simultaneously caused negative behavior such as deception, as employees felt very exposed and under pressure to perform due to the e-performance system which they seemed to be threatened by. This behavior according to Ramlall is purely cultural in nature and highly based on cultural norms and morays.

Omar (1992) compared people's attitude towards computers in two different countries, the USA and Kuwait. While discovering that people's attitude towards computers is positive in the USA, he suggested that people's attitude in Kuwait and especially amongst women was a negative one. While no such study has been done on the UAE before, Kuwaiti culture is closest to the UAE in terms of population, structure, history, and social norms.

Lytras and Carroll (2008), Koumpis (2009), and Leidner and Kayworth (2008) further suggest that language is a key cultural characteristic that greatly shapes human attitudes towards interaction between performance and people. Choe (2007) and Myers and Tan (2005) emphasize in their research the relationship between national culture or users' cultural characteristics, system's ease of use, and performance.

Del Galdo (1996) suggested that the cultural environment shapes people's attitudes and behavior. Such human behavioral differences are largely shaped by cultural attributes (Hofstede, 1980). A better understanding of these cultural elements that contributes to the acceptance and successful implementation of new technological systems will reduce resistance and ease the process of implementation.

Many researchers have argued that culture and cultural norms are the key factors in determining human interaction with one another and with technology (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Luna et al., 2002; Trompenaars, 1993; Tsikriktsis, 2002; Singh et al., 2005). Hall (1976) further suggests that family, school, and religious institutions are the primary determinates in shaping behavioral patterns. Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1991) concur that determinates shaping cultural norms are set at early stages of human development and are difficult if not impossible to change.

Number of studies conducted by Straub et al. (2001), Loch et al. (2003), El Said and Hone (2005), and Nantel and Glaser (2006) also concur with Hofstede's argument that cultural barriers prevent acceptance of new systems introduced to the workplace. Additionally, Trompenaars' (1993) subjective examination of differences in solving problems amongst people of different cultures provides another platform for understanding culture as classified by Hall (1976) on the

bases of universalistic vs. particularistic, neutral vs. emotional, individualism vs. collectivism, specific vs. diffused, and achievement vs. ascription as the foundation of significance. Trompenaars shares common ground with Hall's (1976) and Hofstede's (1980) description of culture dimensions, all of which emphasize the influence of culture and cultural characteristics in determining not only people's actions but also their acceptance of new processes that might be considered as threat or an opportunity to the group.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research can be described as follows: first a qualitative approach that included open-ended interviews, and second; quantitative analysis that included questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted prior to data collection. The purpose of the pilot study was to reduce uncertainty in survey questions, increase clarity, enhance questionnaire validity, expand on factors that might affect data analysis, improve research design, and confirm the feasibility of this research study. The quantitative research strategy adopted in this investigation arose from the nature of the study. This involves obtaining the views and opinions of the participants involved in UAE governmental organizations. Following the pilot study, interviews were conducted with 22 managers and front-line employees involving open-ended questions. All open-ended answers were examined thoroughly to become more familiar with the nature of the data. Then the data were categorized and classified according to themes. Each theme represented a major point of findings as a result of the interviews conducted with both employees and managers. Questionnaire was then distributed to managers and employees at various governmental departments.

The study is of empirical and field nature conducted on a chosen sample of UAE public sector governmental organizations. Among the various reasons behind this selection that:

- Accessibility to key personnel in all governmental organizations in the UAE
- These governmental organizations using e-government services representing an important sector to the present and future development of Dubai Emirate. The UAE Government is seeking to build one of most advanced and prosperous economic centre in the region. Recognizing this ambition, it can only be realized by grounding every effort on a solid scientific bases, the government encourages e-performance efforts that meet the prerequisites of such objective by adopting the latest technological standards. The geographic proximity of public organizations within Dubai is an important factor in conducting this study within the time constraint, and other requirements that facilitate the process of study's survey questionnaire, interviews, and relevant data collection.

The post-pilot study data collection involved an entirely different set of participants from those who participated in the pilot study.

Validity

The type of questionnaire used in this study could only be considered valid if it contains questions and possible responses that accurately represents the topic of study and is worded in clear, unambiguous language. This was validated through the pilot study stage.

Review of the literature, in particular Brudney and Brown (1990) helped to determine possible need areas. The pilot study further determined the validity of the instrument.

Analysis and Results

Data analysis was performed with both descriptive and inferential techniques. On the descriptive, summary tables, averages and average percentage were used. In order to establish casual relationships between variables, regression analysis was used. Though the level of measurement is not ratio (which is the basic requirement for the use of regression analysis) the Numerical scale was used as an approximate interval scale. Before starting data analysis, the replied questionnaires were edited to exclude extremely inconsistent and extremely incomplete ones. Each completed questionnaire was read through as it was received. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was the main tool used for analyzing the collected data for the study. Survey responses were tabulated regression analyses were deployed.

The reliability of the measurement instrument was assessed using Alpha Chronbach (α) for each of the six sections in the questionnaire. The split half technique was conducted using the Spearman-Brown formula, which yielded satisfactory results supporting the reliability of the different scales. All the reliability values obtained for the scales are compatible with those reported by Davis (1989) and Adams et al. (1992) study. The alpha coefficients range from 0.450 to 0.527. These coefficients provide evidence for reliability and internal consistency of the scales. The Guttman Coefficient ranges from 0.406 to 0.617.

Section I contained the general information of variables like age, gender, number of years of experience. Section I variables have Alpha (α) of 0.527, Guttman coefficient of 0.617 and the Spearman's Brown coefficient of 0.618. The Section II has the Performance measurement variables like Electronic Performance result is used to improve employee skills, mentoring is used to improve employee skills, Each key position in the organization has electronic performance formats and Continuous personal development. Section II variables have Alpha (α) of 0.493, Guttman coefficient of 0.528 and the Spearman's Brown coefficient of 0.429.

Section III has the performance assessment variables like performance appraisal is linked to overall goals and strategies, performance appraisal is used to identify the skill gaps, organization should rely only on external electronic PA centers and linking electronic performance to strategy. Section III variables have Alpha (α) of 0.481, Guttman coefficient of 0.406 and the Spearman's Brown coefficient of 0.407.

It can be seen if the elements in the monotrait triangles within the MTMM matrices contain the highest correlation coefficients in their perspective columns, where a monotrait triangle is a sub matrix of intercorrelations between items intended to measure the same construct (Davis 1989).

Overall, the monotrait triangles in the MTMM Matrix show good convergent and discriminate properties. Items of the same scale are all highly and significantly ($p < 0.01$) correlated. The inter-item correlation coefficients ranged from 0.921 to 0.361. Items of the same scale are also correlated higher among each other than other items measuring different constructs. Only some

variables like "Mentoring to improve employee skills" and "Electronic Performance results is used to empower employee" shows weaker inter-item correlations.

In the analysis of respondents' answers data and testing study's hypotheses the following statistical techniques like Standard Deviation, Cronbach's Alpha, variances are used. One of important measurements is to decide on the data homogeneity. This factor is mean of the mean. The standard deviation is a statistic that tells how tightly all the various examples are clustered around the mean in a set of data. When the examples are pretty tightly bunched together and the bell-shaped curve is steep, the standard deviation is small. When the values are spread apart and the bell curve is relatively flat, the standard deviation is relatively large.

The response frequencies of the items used in the questionnaire are listed in Table 1. Overall, respondents rated their support agreeing to the variables that voice the acceptance of e-performance solutions in UAE.

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median Response
Section I - Performance Measurement (PM) Variables			
Performance result is used to improve employee Skills	3.48	1.06	Completely Agree
Mentoring is used to improve employee skills and development and correction.	2.68	0.73	Disagree
Each key position in the organisation has electronic performance formats on their system	4.25	1.12	Neutral
Continuous Personal Development of Employees	3.73	0.69	Agree
Providing performance feedback to employee	4.28	1.63	Agree
Employee performance and improvement	3.64	1.45	Slightly Agree
In the Performance Measurement Section, having electronic performance formats and providing the performance feedback to the employees were given more importance by the responders. The maximum response from the employees is for providing performance feedback to employee, which has a mean of 4.28 and standard deviation of 1.63. Continuous Personal Development of Employees and Employee performance and improvement have also high response rates and support from the employees and employers in the UAE organisations. The main area of improvement in the manual performance measurement section is in the use of "Mentoring to improve employee skills and development and correction."			

> The mean of the variable is only 2.68 and the standard deviation is 0.73. This response indicates that the UAE organisations do not use Mentoring technique to improve employee skills.

Table 1. Distribution frequency of E-performance study variable

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure produces a one-way analysis of variance for a quantitative dependant variable by a single factor (independent) variable. Analysis of variance is used to test the hypothesis that several means are equal. This technique is an extension of the two-sample t-test. In addition, trends can be used across categories (SPSS for windows, 1998)

One way ANOVA tests were conducted on the sample demographics, Section I of the questionnaire is to test for any mean variances caused by a non-hypothesized variable such as age, gender, education, level and so on. The results of the one-way ANOVA analyses, conducted with excluding cases list wise for missing values, is summarized in Table 5.6 below. The subjects' characteristics variables including gender, age, UAE nationality, and job experience were all entered into the ANOVA analyses.

Using the aggregate mean in the analysis of variance is more accurate than using the total score, because the number of items used to measure each variable is different. Therefore a subject's total score on a variable that has more items in its scale may be higher than another variable's total score with fewer items in its scale. This might give the wrong impression that the subject's self-reported evaluation of the first variable is higher than the second.

Variables		PM	PA	EPS	EPM	EPA
Gender	F	0.687	0.278	0.026	0.162	0.278
	Sig.	0.800	0.570	0.267	0.592	0.479
Age	F	1.761	-0.640	1.678	1.402	1.397
	Sig.	0.077	0.08**	0.278	0.185	0.381
UAE National	F	0.825	0.705	0.008	0.679	0.372
	Sig.	0.273	0.254	0.185	0.140	0.192
Experience	F	3.856	2.484	3.027	2.531	1.742
	Sig.	0.000***	0.000***	0.008***	0.000***	0.000***

Table 2. Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) between subject characteristics and study variables

*** Strong significance $(p < 0.001)$

** Moderate significance $(p < 0.01)$

* Weak significance   (p<0.5)

The results of the ANOVA analyses summarized in Table 2 above indicate that experience and age has measurable variation of means between categories. Subjects high years of experience tend to bestow similar evaluation for e-performance variables of Performance Measurement (PM), Performance Assessment (PA), Electronic Performance Standards (EPS), Electronic Performance Measurement (EPM) and Electronic Performance Assessment (EPA).

Overall, the results of the ANOVA tests identify three no-hypothesized independent variables (factors) that affect the e-performance variables. The different categories for level of education, field of study and experience all caused significant variance of the mean of the dependent behavior intention variable. Because of the nature of the ANOVA analysis, these results cannot confirm predictor-predicted relationships between the exogenous variables and the study variables. Consequently, the researcher decided to include the exogenous subject characteristic variables in the regression model to test their significance as predictors of performance assessment, performance measurement, e-performance standards and e-performance measurement variables and e-performance assessment variables. The results of the different regression analyses are presented in the following sections.

Regression Results

The steps in performing a regression analysis are:

- Formulate the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis (H0) is therefore that "Y is independent of X, therefore the slope of the regression line is 0".
- Calculate the test statistics. A regression line is actually a running series of means of the expected value of Y for each value of X.

The P value is calculated from an F test. It is the probability that a statistical result as the one observed would occur if the null hypothesis were true. The F statistic is the ratio of the two mean squares. When the F value is larger and the significance level is smaller (smaller than 0.05 or 0.01), the null hypothesis can be rejected. That is to say, a small significance level indicates that the results probably are not due to random chance.

For the regression analyses to be accepted, we assumed that for each value of the independent variables, the distribution of the dependent variable is normal. The variance of the distribution of the dependent variable is constant for all values of the independent variables. The relationship between the dependent variable and each independent variable is linear and all observations are independent.

R^2 is the change in the R^2 statistics when the independent variable is entered into the model (stepwise)

Dep. Vari.	R	R²	F	Sig. (p)	Ind. Vari.	ΔR²	Beta [a]	T	Sig. (p)
EPA	0.380	0.552	85.20	0.345	PM	0.283	0.302	2.10	0.04***
	0.521	0.439	93.50	0.006**	PA	0.328	0.485	1.73	0.00***
	0.493	0.372	73.87	0.00***	EPS	0.465	0.290	3.40	0.025**
	0.405	0.641	67.21	0.00***	EPM	0.380	0.537	2.69	0.00***

Table 7.7 Summary results of the Regression Tests using Electronic Performance Assessment (EPA) as Independent / predicted Variable

[a]   βeta reported is the standardized regression coefficient

***   Strong significance   (p< 0.001)

**   Moderate significance (p< 0.01)

*   Weak significance   (p<0.5)

As shown above, Electronic Performance Assessment (EPA) has a strong significance with Electronic Performance Standards (EPS) having F=73.87 with p=0.00 and βeta =0.290 and Electronic Performance Measurement (EPM) having F=67.21 with p=0.00 and βeta =0.537. As evident from the analysis, the Electronic Performance Assessment is more related to Electronic Performance Standards and Electronic Performance Measurement.

Conclusion

The results of this research achieved by the data collected from the UAE governmental organizations. Results shows that there are number of elements ranges from cultural to managerial, directly influence workers performance depending on their organizational, cultural, and inter-personal behavioral characteristics. Incentives and rewards for instance must be aligned with business units and organizational objectives to achieve successful performance management systems. Since performance management is the primary method for evaluating workers, and gaining first hand understanding of challenges facing contemporary workforce is a primary concern for both managers and organizations.

Results of this study also shows that implication of performance management practices on employees are complex, largely because of the changing organizational cultures, structures, advancements in technological network systems that connects people in more ways than ever before, and because of the changing nature of skills required from modern employees. Furthermore, modern organizations are required to become far more agile than ever before. This adds to the complexity of modern workplace and capacity needed in modern employee. Managing expectation of both, the organization and the employee is a difficult task for modern

managers. Performance management systems, particularly e-performance management systems are expected to close the gap in expectation between both, the organization and the worker. For instance, modern workers expected to be highly trained in whatever task they are expected to perform, possess highly specialized skills, and to perform multi-tasks as required by their employers with minimal retraining.

Furthermore, physically and developmentally Arab organizations are at a different stage of development to western counterparts and thus this slower adaption by Arab firms is likely to be the reason for the below target results. Thus, when considering the cultural and historical differences of the two regions, in fact despite being below average, the UAE organizations are in fact doing fairly well in relation to e-pms so far seeing as it is relatively new. However, as an alternative explanation for these results, there is no doubt that Arab culture it may also play a crucial role in the large-scale below target results. As according to Hoftstede (1994) the Arab culture can be categorized as having a high dislike to risk, so they hate anything that puts them at risk. It may be the case that Arabs in general view the e-pms as risky, with the potential to create job insecurity, as it will reveal their real performance, and thus from the outset, Arab users may not be as enthusiastic about e-pms as western counterparts. This could also be likely as e-pms ultimate purpose is to monitor performance.

It is also interesting to note the disparity of satisfaction ratings for e-pms between private and public sector organizations, as it appears that public sector organizations are far more like to have above target satisfaction levels, while private sector had strong below target levels. This trend is best supported and explained by Al-Ali (2008), who states that in general UAE workers dislike the private sector and are dissatisfied with it as it is very money driven and is very ruthless in many aspects, while they prefer and are more satisfied with working in the public sector.

This represents a strong cultural belief of UAE governmental workers and is a belief that is well engrained. This study concurs to Rapaille (2007) argument that culture as the manifestations of human intellectual capacity, which reflects in human activities. This study further concurs to Kotter's (2011) argument that all human activities are governed by set of values, which in turn forms human culture, as shown in the examination of cultural impact on performance in governmental organizations in the United Arab Emirates, and how cultural norms have an impact on performance.

This study further confirms findings of the literature review presented by Hofstede (1980Lytras and Carroll (2008); Leidner and Kayworth (2008); Omar (1992); Koumpis (2009) that issues of technology adoption and use are sensitive to cultural characteristics. This study also confirms that cultural forces are highly relevant to the acceptance of electronic appraisal system at workplace. Finally, these factors are also influenced by the external environmental forces such as; regulatory, cultural, business and economics.

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