Convergence or Divergence? Web Usage in the Workplace in Nigeria, Malaysia, and the United States

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out to examine whether employee web usage patterns, attitudes toward web usage in the workplace, and organizational policies are more similar (convergence thesis) or less similar (divergence thesis) in three countries: Nigeria (n = 224), Malaysia (n = 107), and the United States (n = 334). Our results show general support for the divergence
thesis. We found strong differences in employee usage patterns by country, even after controlling for differences in several demographic variables. However, there is less support for the divergence thesis in attitudes and organizational policies. In half of the eight indicators of employee attitudes, there were no differences among the three countries. Agreement that personal web usage at work is acceptable behavior is widespread. Other common perceptions are that companies tolerate personal web searches and that Internet usage policies are not enforced.

**INTRODUCTION**

Cross-cultural researchers and practitioners concur that there is a need to better understand and manage the tension between the durability of national cultures (divergence) and the closer, more frequent interactions among nations (convergence) (Adler, 1997; Brodbeck et al., 2000). National boundaries are increasingly permeable; the number of multinational corporations is increasing, many people are employed transnationally (Hodgetts et al., 1999) and participation in cross-cultural teams is commonplace. There is an increasingly complex matrix of global interaction points in the workplace made possible by communication innovations, particularly in information technology and the widespread usage of the World Wide Web. At the same time, there is attention to national pride, thus the tension between convergence and divergence heightens. Few would argue that in the last decade of the 20th century, the World Wide Web revolutionized the way we work. The business world has been “blown to bits” (Evans & Wurster, 2000), digitized (Cronin, 2000), globalized (Ohmae, 2000) and uniquely challenged (Drucker, 1999). Consideration of the issues raised by these unprecedented changes invites the exploration of an important question, specifically, the relationship between national cultural diversity and managing human resources in a digital economy. For instance, given the escalating importance of the web in the workplace, the more we know about workplace information technology (IT) behaviors and attitudes, particularly workplace usage of the World Wide Web, the more effectively and efficiently we can manage. Empirical data on cultural variation in web usage and attitudes can be helpful for those who deal with employees in the Internet-anchored workplace, particularly those in human resources and information technology.
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