

# The Role of Culture in Business Process Management Adoption

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## 1 Research Problem and Relation to BPM Research

BPM adoption is defined as “the use and deployment of BPM concepts in organizations” [1]. However, many organizations struggle when adopting BPM because it requires extensive effort, time, resources and discipline [2-4]. Several studies have attempted to identify the factors that influence BPM adoption [3]. While many of these studies have culture among the key factors that influence BPM adoption, Syed, Bandara, French and Stewart [5] note that culture is not discussed extensively in the body of BPM literature and few studies have explored in depth or empirically the influence of culture on BPM adoption.

### 1.1 Research Problem

Although, the importance of organizational and national cultures have been extensively recognized in the information systems (IS) field [6-8], it is not clear which critical factors in organizational and national cultures influence BPM adoption [2, 3, 9, 10]. Indeed, almost all studies investigating the factors that influence BPM adoption are undertaken in the context of developed countries (i.e. USA, UK, and Europe), with few studies undertaken in developing countries [5, 9]. However, there is doubt as to whether the factors that support or hinder information systems in organizations in general apply to those working in other countries due to differing national cultures [5, 11]. It is noted that most international organizations that apply the BPM concept operate across national borders and BPM initiatives within these organizations involve different locations worldwide [10]. Thus, there is a need to study organizational and national cultures to overcome the challenges faced when adopting BPM by organizations in different geographical locations [10]. Indeed, it is deemed important to identify the critical factors of organizational and national cultures that affect BPM adoption in different geographical locations [2, 3, 5, 9, 10]. There is apparently a heavy slant towards the developed context in many studies giving rise to doubts on the validity and suitability of applying the findings to the context of a developing country which suggests a need for further analysis and investigation to provide contextually rich solutions for developing countries [5]. Syed, Bandara, French and Stewart [5] emphasize the importance of investigating how organizational culture and its characteristics in developing countries uniquely affect BPM initiatives in public sector organizations.

Syed, Bandara, French and Stewart [5] observe that the cultural factors of an organization represent the interaction of its core value system, shared beliefs and norms resulting in the shaping of other organizational factors. Ahmad, Francis and Zairi [12] reinforce this view in their observation that strong organizational culture is founded through innovative incorporation of core values while Tan, Cater-Steel and Toleman [13] strongly support the view that public sector

organizations should transform their culture from technology driven to service orientation. Weerakkody, El-Haddadeh and Al-Shafi [14] acknowledge that culture is an important factor in the implementation and dissemination of e-Government.

In studies in developed, as well as, developing contexts, there is scant reference to the identified sub-elements of organizational culture. Chen, Chen, Huang and Ching [15] have suggested that the culture of public service organizations merits a standalone research topic given the unique socio-economic, ethnic and political dynamics in developed and developing countries. Such research may serve to elicit responses to ways in which robust and innovative process centric cultures may be implemented in the public sector. In parallel to Hofstede's (1994) distinction of differences between western and eastern cultures in their perception about organizational planning and management. Chen, Chen, Huang and Ching [15] and Weerakkody, El-Haddadeh and Al-Shafi [14] believe that in developing countries, organizational cultures are characterized by complex layers and thus raises the need for examination of how BPM initiatives in public sector organizations in developing countries are impacted upon by organizational culture and its characteristics. One of the few studies investigating national cultural issues in BPM has concluded that bridging the cultural gap in communication between BPM vendors and clients from different cultures is crucial for BPM success [16]. Other studies have suggested that a formal BPM strategy and BPM governance practices are essential to alleviate negative impacts of the national culture on business [17, 18]. In conclusion, this study aims to explore the effect of organizational and national culture on BPM adoption in the Saudi Arabian context.

## 1.2 Research Context (Saudi Arabia)

Saudi Arabia which is considered a developing country [19] could benefit from adopting BPM [20] as a holistic management approach [21] for increasing the overall effectiveness and efficiency of its organizations [22, 23]. Nowadays, Saudi Arabia is transforming its economy to a knowledge-based economy [24]. It has embarked on the adoption of an efficient and effective approach to work to reduce expenses while continuing to introduce excellent products and services to citizens and foreign investors [24]. This effort has been established because the Saudi Arabian government relies on oil revenue as its main source of income but this revenue has decreased significantly since 2016 due to declining oil prices [24]. A new vision, 'Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030', identifying the general directions, policies, goals, and objectives as a roadmap for economic transformation in Saudi Arabia [24] was recently announced to promote a culture of continuous improvement (CI) and to improve operational excellence in all Saudi Arabian organizations [24]. This vision may be achieved through the adoption of BPM as a holistic approach and the development of those aspects of the Saudi human capital environment such as information and communications technology (ICT), education, innovation and employment that are essential in the development of a knowledge-based economy. Notably, the current support fund provided to the private sector by the Saudi Arabian government is gradually diminishing [24], signaling to the private sector the need to become more effective and efficient in order to remain competitive.

Given the increasing requirements of Saudi Arabian organizations for effectiveness, efficiency [25] and continuous improvement [24], BPM offers a potentially valuable solution [1, 22, 23]. BPM is a customer-focused approach [26] that requires organizations to "live and breathe a customer-centric process design and management" [27]. It emphasizes "continuous

improvement, customer satisfaction, and employee involvement” [1]. Indeed, it has been shown that BPM increases the overall effectiveness and efficiency of organizations [28-32]. According to Rice [25], gulf businesses, including Saudi Arabian of businesses, are aiming to expand the liberalization and privatization of their economies, which require these organizations to develop new ways of management to remain competitive [25]. According to AlShathry [20], while there is a positive attitude toward adopting BPM practices by Saudi Arabian organizations, the process of BPM adoption is still in its early stages. Thus, Saudi Arabian organizations need more awareness of the adoption of BPM as a holistic management approach [20] that addresses their needs for effectiveness, efficiency [25] and continuous improvement [24].

As postulated by Hribar and Mendling [2], Trkman [3], Ohtonen [9], vom Brocke and Sinnl [10] a study of national culture, in this instance the national culture of Saudi Arabia, may raise the awareness of its effects on the adoption of BPM. Hribar and Mendling [2], Trkman [3], Ohtonen [9], vom Brocke and Sinnl [10] believe that BPM initiatives are more likely to succeed if the specific organizational culture incorporates elements of the BPM culture. Given Saudi Arabia’s ambitions to attract more foreign investors and companies from different lines of businesses [24], it is essential to understand its national culture [33] because national culture affects organizations in different ways [34] and organizational success or failures have been influenced by national culture [35]. Thus, understanding organizational and national cultures are essential for improving effectiveness and efficiency for both local and international firms to succeed in the adoption of BPM.

### 1.3 Theoretical Background and Conceptual Model

In the qualitative phase, the semi-structure interviews with participants include questions about the key factors of organizational and national cultures that they consider important for BPM and their effects on BPM adoption in their organizations.

In the quantitative phase, this study utilizes the concept of BPO-MM by McCormack and Johnson [36] to conceptualized and operationalized BPM adoption in line with [2, 31, 37, 38]. The conceptualization and operationalization of organizational culture is based on values as there is a need to identify how specific cultural values that are related to BPM influence BPM adoption [39]. This study utilizes the CERT framework of BPM culture as postulated by Schmiedel, vom Brocke and Recker [39] and its instrument [40] to measure CERT cultural values. The conceptualization and operationalization of national culture is based on the Hofstede’s model of national culture and its instrument ‘VALUES SURVEY MODULE 2013’ [41, 42]. This study includes only five dimensions of Hofstede’s model, namely power distance (PDI), individualism versus collectivism (IDV), masculinity versus femininity (MAS), uncertainty avoidance (UAI) and long term versus short term orientation (LOT) [41, 42]. According to Leidner and Kayworth [35] these five dimensions of Hofstede’s national culture model are the most frequent dimensions to appear in IS research.

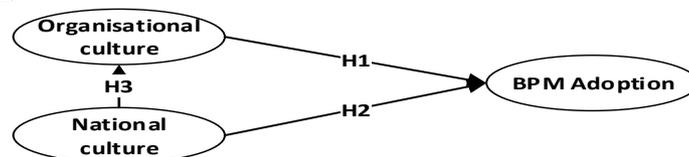


Fig. 1. Proposed conceptual model for culture and BPM adoption.

## 2 Research Aim and Objectives

This study aims to explore the influence of organizational and national cultures on BPM adoption in the Saudi Arabian context with the aim of generalizing the findings for application to similar contexts such as developing or Gulf countries. The overarching objectives of this research are to:

- Develop and ‘empirically’ validate a conceptual model to investigate the roles of organizational and national cultures in BPM adoption in Saudi Arabia.
- Encourage practitioners to consider the organizational and national cultures in BPM adoption.

### 2.1 Research Questions

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of this research, the primary research question is:

*How do organizational culture and national culture influence BPM adoption in Saudi Arabia?*

In order to answer the primary research question, the following sub questions are formulated:

*What are the key factors of organizational culture that influence BPM adoption?*

*What are the key factors of national culture that influence BPM adoption?*

### 2.2 Research Methodology and Techniques

This study employs a sequential mixed methods approach through a collection of in-depth interviews with and survey questionnaires from participants working in Saudi Arabian organizations of different sizes, sectors and industries where BPM has been adopted. Invitations were sent by the Association of BPM Professional - Saudi chapter to all members and subscribers to participate in the interviews and online survey. Participants are consultants who have had experience in managing BPM adoption in different organizations and employees responsible for implementing or are involved in the BPM adoption effort in their organizations. This study employs deductive thematic analysis for qualitative data whereby the literature and proposed conceptual model guide the process as thematic analysis is appropriate for exploratory and mixed methods research [43]. The quantitative data is analyzed with descriptive, confirmatory and structural statistical analyses. These analysis techniques are essential to ensure precision, consistency, accuracy and validity of the survey questionnaire data. They are also essential to test the research hypotheses in order to validate the proposed theoretical model.

### 2.3 Expected Research Contribution

Theoretical and practical contributions which emanate from this study will include:

- Identification of the roles of organizational and national cultures in BPM adoption.
- Development and ‘empirical’ validation of a theoretical framework that explains the role of organizational and national cultures in BPM adoption.
- Awareness of the importance of organizational and national cultures in BPM adoption raised among practitioners.
- Support local and foreign entities to collaborate more effectively by aligning their organizational cultural values and considering differences in national cultures when adopting BPM.

**Keywords:** Business Process Management Adoption, BPM Adoption, Culture, Organizational Culture, National Culture.

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