E-learning in India: The Role of National Culture and Practical Implications

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Presentation Outline

• Definition of e-learning
• Advantages/disadvantages of e-learning
• Challenges in adopting e-learning
• Theoretical framework
• E-learning in India
• Methodology
• Results and hypothesis proposed
• Implications for practice
Definition of e-learning

- E-learning can be defined as providing training and development to employees via any electronic medium.

- Jay Cross, founder of Internet Time Group, and global consultant, introduced the term e-learning in 1998.

- The definition of e-learning can further be divided into synchronous and asynchronous.
Facts on e-learning

- The global e-learning market is predicted to surpass $52.6 billion by 2010.

- As of today, about 60% of US organizations actively promote e-learning to train their employees.

- In 2007, IBM spent $700 million on e-learning with each employee spending at least 55.5 hours annually on online learning skills (Pollitt, 2008).
Advantages of e-learning

- Cost-effective to organizations
- Learning flexibility
- Repetitive learning
- Standardized material
- International learning platform

Cost-effectiveness
- IBM, the training leader reports savings $50,000 for every 1000 classroom training days that are replaced by e-learning programs

(Allison, 2007)
Disadvantages of e-learning

- Learners cannot clarify their concerns immediately
- Requires self-direction and discipline
- Collaborative spirit of classroom learning may not be replicated
- Start-up costs can be prohibitive for small and medium-sized companies
Challenges in adopting e-learning

- National cultural dimensions
- Learning styles of deductive and inductive
- Thinking styles of inventive, evaluative and implementing
- Age of the learning audience
- Concepts of time
- Technical infrastructures
- Translation issues
Theoretical framework

- Learning theories help understand how individuals process, store, and recall information that is being learnt.

- Behaviorist theory
- Cognitive learning theory
- Constructivist learning theory
- Social learning theory
- Social constructivist theory
Social constructivist theory

- This conceptual study will adopt the social constructivist theory (SCT)

- SCT suggests that individual learning is a result of the socio-cultural environment

- Individuals develop and construct their learning styles based on how they have been socialized in their cultures
E-Learning in India

Sanjay Sharma, CEO of Tata Interactive systems, championed the e-learning efforts in the early 90s. (Bhattacharya, & Sharma, 2007).

E-learning programs receive support from the Indian federal government.
Social and historical context

- Portuguese invaders introduced the term *castas* in the 16th century
- The Indian caste system is divided into four categories based on a social and economic hierarchy
- India’s was colonized by the British for almost a century
- The British introduced a work culture along the same lines of inequality established by the Indian caste system
Facts for e-learning professionals

- India’s population of one billion has only 5.4% internet penetration with approximately about sixty million internet users.

- The US has about 69.3% internet penetration with about 207 million internet users.

- Pearson Educational Technologies, educational leader, has moved its entire e-learning development to India.
Reasons multinationals choose India

- Labor costs for entry-level knowledge professionals in India is around $25-$50/hour in comparison to those of $75/hour in the US
- English-speaking work force that can communicate with other English-speaking cultures
- The difference in time zones between US and India makes it a very attractive customer service strategy
- Today 125 Fortune 500 US companies have their R &D centers in India
Methodology

- This study uses the national cultural scores from the GLOBE study.
- The GLOBE study was conducted from 1994-1997.
- Involved 170 researchers from 61 countries.
- Introduced cultural dimensions both at the organizational and societal level.
- Identified nine cultural dimensions.
Research Question and National Cultural Dimensions

Main Research Question

- What is the role of national cultural dimensions on e-learning practices (synchronous and asynchronous)?

- This study will examine the role of four dimensions on e-learning practices
  - Power Distance
  - Uncertainty-Avoidance
  - In-Group Collectivism
  - Future Orientation
Power Distance

- Indian society is distinguished by social hierarchy and power
- In training and development, such national cultural values dictate the type of learning and training methods employees would prefer
- High power distance cultures favor a learning environment that differentiates and identifies the source of expertise

H1: Employers from high power distance cultures are more likely to use synchronous e-learning methods than employers in low-power distance cultures
H2: Employers from Indian organizations are more likely to use synchronous e-learning methods than employers in US multinationals.
Uncertainty-Avoidance

- Indian culture is very ritualistic and ceremonial - therefore the society adopts elaborate procedures to reduce anxiety
- In training and development, such national cultural dimensions demonstrate a strong need to reduce uncertainty in the learning process
- High uncertainty-avoidance cultures prefer a learning environment that clearly provides structure and rules

H2a: Employers from high uncertainty-avoidance cultures are more likely to use synchronous e-learning methods than employers from low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures.

H2b: Employers in Indian organizations are more likely to use synchronous e-learning than employers in US multinationals
In-group Collectivism

- The Indian culture that is very tightly knit to both immediate and extended family
- In training and development, high collectivist scores depict a strong need for an interactive group learning process
- Collectivist cultures focus on the process of learning rather than learning outcomes

H3a: Employers from high in-group collectivist cultures are more likely to use synchronous e-learning methods than employers from low in-group collectivist cultures.

H3b: Employers in Indian organizations are more likely to use synchronous e-learning than employers in US multinationals.
Future-Orientation

- The society that always plan for the future - most Indians having personal savings bank accounts
- In training and development, high scores in this national cultural dimension reflect a work culture that is always planning for their future
- Studies have demonstrated that synchronous e-learning methods allows individuals to plan and organize their learning outcomes

H4a: Employers from high future-orientation cultures are more likely to use synchronous e-learning than employers in low future-orientation cultures.

H4b: Employers in Indian organizations are more likely to use synchronous e-learning methods of training than employers in US multinationals
Discussion

Gladwell (2008): Demonstrated the role of power-distance on pilot behavior evidenced from recorded conversations between co-pilots and pilots of Korean Airlines

Leidner & Kayworth (2006): Identified in their meta-analysis of 82 articles the significant role of culture on IT adoption

Biech (2008); Rodrigues (2005); Suggested that learning theories imply learning is largely a result of how individuals are socially and culturally trained

Edmunson (2009): Identified learning discrepancies due to cultural preferences in different countries
Strategic Implications for Multinationals
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- Employees from different cultures would prefer different methods of e-learning based on their cultural and social experiences.

- National cultural dimensions help understand what learning theorists suggest as to how individuals have been cultured to learn.
Strategic Implications for Multinationals

- These cultures would prefer synchronous e-learning:
  - High power Distance
  - High uncertainty avoidance
  - High collectivist cultures
  - High future orientation

- Identifies an expert
- Reduces anxiety in the learning
- Provides for collaborative learning
- Helps plan ahead
Strategic Implications for multinationals

These cultures would prefer asynchronous e-learning
✓ Low power Distance
✓ Low uncertainty avoidance
✓ Low collectivism
✓ Low future orientation

☐ Prefer self-directed learning
☐ Open to novel learning approaches
☐ Prefer individual learning
☐ Do not plan for future learning outcomes
Conclusions & Contributions

- Provides a theoretical model that can be tested
- Suggests strategic implications for multinationals
- Enhances research by integrating learning theories with national culture theories
- Focuses on a strong emerging economy
Questions?

✓ I would be very happy to answer any questions or address any comments