Challenges & Strategies for Conducting International Public Management Research

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Digital Government: An International Phenomenon

- Necessity to share experiences across countries
- Requires increasing international public management research
Cross-Cultural Public Management Research

• A complex & error prone endeavor that poses particular methodological challenges

• Our experience: the New Models Project
  – A multi-national study of new models of collaboration for delivering electronic government services
  – Case studies in the United States, Canada, and Europe
The New Models Project

• A comparative study
• Using consistent methods of data collection & description across countries
• Attempting to understand the fundamental elements that transcend national boundaries
• Enabling a sharing of models and experiences in delivering electronic public services
Complexity of the New Models Project

- 2 continents, 4 countries, 3 different languages
- 11 research institutions involved
- 3 different funding agencies
- 15 case studies
Simplified Conceptual Model

Macro-level dimensions:
- Political, social, economic & cultural environment
- Institutional, business & technical environment

Meso-level dimensions:
- Partners' characteristics and objectives
- Collaboration process over time

Micro-level dimensions:
- Modes of collaboration
- Collaboration and program performance
Data Collection & Analysis

- Interviews + document analysis
- Coding scheme keyed to the specific variables of each dimension of the conceptual model
- Data analysis using a qualitative data analysis software
Main Challenges Encountered
Accounting for Cultural Factors

- Conceptual model dealing with culture only at the macro level (dimension 1)
- Attempt to capture culture from secondary sources rather than from the open-ended interviews
- Assumption that culture is contextual, negligence of its behavioral aspects
Conceptual Equivalence of Key Management Terms

• Key management terms have different meanings in different cultures
• Example 1: leadership
• Example 2: stakeholder
Translation

• A matter of epistemological consequence

• Difficulty in finding a translator with language skills, cultural understanding, and disciplinary knowledge
Issues to Consider When Designing & Conducting Cross-cultural Management Research
Research Design

• Type of cross-cultural research

• Selection of countries
  – Rationale for selection

• Languages involved
  – Official languages & regional dialects

• Culture
  – Definition of culture for the purposes of the study
Execution

• Composition of the research team
  – Unicultural or multicultural research team?

• Conceptual equivalence
  – Definition of the core concepts of the study

• Selection of translators
  – Knowledge of both languages & cultures?
  – Specialization in the field of study?
  – Native speaker of the target language?
Analysis

• Culturally-specific vs. universal findings
  – Error 1: Cultural stereotype
  – Error 2: Universality assumption

• Cross-national analysis
  – Juxtaposition of national results or cross-country analysis?
  – Divergent research agendas of the teams?
To Conclude...

Validity & reliability of international e-gov research can be increased...

...and enable us to determine the extent to which models & experiences around the world can be shared