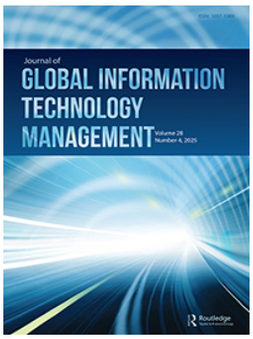

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Journal of Global Information Technology Management

ISSN: 1097-198X (Print) 2333-6846 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ugit20

The World IT Project: From cradle to culmination

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To cite this article: Prashant Palvia, Jaideep Ghosh, Tim Jacks, Alexander Serenko & Aykut Hamit Turan (2025) The World IT Project: From cradle to culmination, Journal of Global Information Technology Management, 28:4, 273-280, DOI: 10.1080/1097198X.2025.2578158

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1097198X.2025.2578158

JOURNAL OF GLOBAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT
2025, VOL. 28, NO. 4, 273–280
https://doi.org/10.1080/1097198X.2025.2578158

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EDITORIAL

The World IT Project: From cradle to culmination

Introduction

Twelve years later . . . In 2013, we wrote an editorial in this journal titled "The World IT Project: A Program on International Research and Call for Participation" (Palvia, 2013). In it, we described the vision of this expansive and ambitious global project, its goals, and the research framework, and called for participation from researchers all over the world. We were a little tentative about the project and its success at the time, yet we marched on, undaunted, over the last twelve years. The original plan was to complete the data collection by 2016 and the writing by 2019. Due to numerous challenges (Palvia et al., 2017), the data collection was completed at the end of 2017, and due to inherent publication delays accompanying the review process of journals, we are now nearing the publication of all of our major findings. In the end, perseverance prevailed. We are happy to report that the World IT Project has been one of the longest and largest (if not the largest) academic projects in the IS field – resulting in the publication of one book, eighteen journal articles, with three more articles under revision and forthcoming, and fourteen peer-reviewed conference proceedings papers. The success is largely due to the commitment and hard work of the core team members of the project, the coauthors of this article.

The methodological details and challenges encountered during the project's execution are described elsewhere in detail (Palvia et al., 2017). A brief description of the project's motivation and key milestones are provided below to set the proper context for the reader. Thereafter, as the body of findings from the project is too large to fit into one article or even several articles, we provide an overview of the major themes and topics addressed by the project. The interested reader is encouraged to review the various publications cited in the article.

Background and milestones

It is generally known that IS/IT research is largely dominated by U.S.-centric and Western-centric views. Thus, research paradigms and findings emanating from published reports are applicable primarily in the Western context. Their use in other contexts, such as developing and poor countries or emerging and transitional economies, may at times lead to misguided and incorrect inferences and consequent actions (Apicella et al., 2020; Henrich et al., 2010). Given this history, the World IT Project was launched in 2013 to address this persistent anomaly in the IS literature and provide a balanced view of IS/IT issues in various countries and regions of the world. In terms of scope and scale, the project was inspired by the works of Hofstede (1980) on national culture and the GLOBE project on culture and leadership (House et al., 2004). Briefly, it examines various IT employee issues, such as organizational IT issues, technology issues, and individual issues, in the context of several factors such as national culture, organizational structure and strategy, and several individual variables. The schematic in Figure 1 provides an overarching framework for the project.

A core team was formed and began its work in 2013. Its current members are the authors of this article. A common survey instrument was prepared, which was administered in 37 countries by specially formed local country teams who employed various means to collect responses from IT employees in their own countries. The core team members served as liaisons to country teams and provided necessary guidance and support. The instrument was translated into several languages, including Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, and Turkish. We strove to obtain data from countries representing every major region of the world as well as different cultures, levels of economic growth, religious beliefs, and political systems. Table 1 lists the 37 countries participating in the project. A good representation of IT employees was achieved by instructing the country teams to

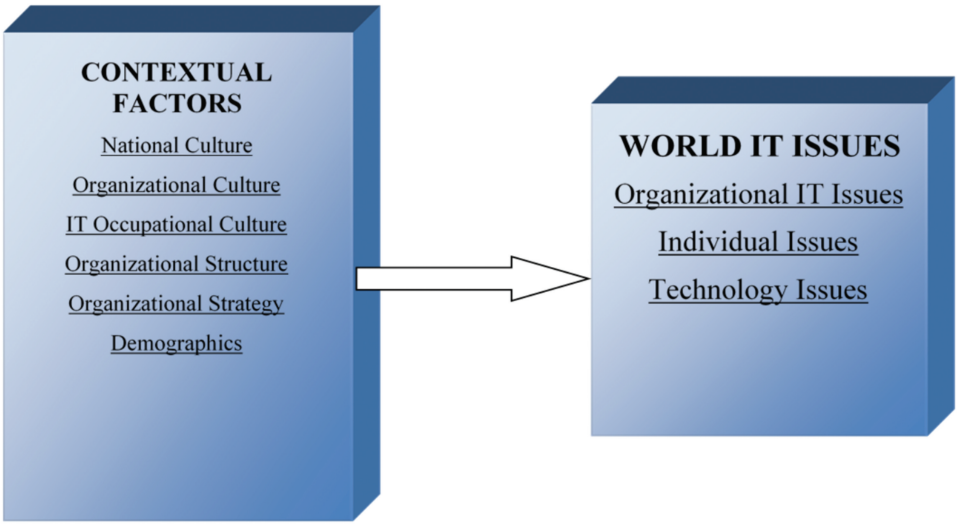

Figure 1. An overarching framework for the World IT Project.

Table 1. Participating countries in the World IT Project.

Argentina	Greece	Mexico	South Korea
Bangladesh	Hungary	New Zealand	Taiwan
Brazil	India	Nigeria	Thailand
Canada	Iran	Pakistan	Turkey
China	Italy	Peru	U.K.
Egypt	Japan	Poland	U.S.
Finland	Jordan	Portugal	Vietnam
France	Lithuania	Romania	
Germany	Macedonia	Russia	
Ghana	Malaysia	South Africa	

collect at least 300 data points from small, medium, and large organizations in a variety of industries. Most countries fulfilled this directive. While the data collection was challenging and came with its own trials and tribulations, ultimately, we were successful in collecting data from more than 10,000 IT employees by the end of 2017. It took us another 9 months to cleanse the data and validate it using a number of rigorous statistical procedures. Since then, our efforts have been focused on writing and disseminating the results by publishing a book (Palvia, et al. 2020) and 18 journal articles[1] to date. The following sections provide an overview of our major findings.

Overview of results

Table 2 provides the various book and journal publications resulting from the World IT Project to date (also see: https://aserenko.com/witp). Fourteen conference papers were also prepared, which appeared later as conference proceedings. The conference papers as well as several keynote speeches and panels/workshops are not included in the following tabulation. For ease of presentation, the various topics are divided into seven categories. Each category is described below briefly along with some key results.

Global organizational IS Issues

Several articles were written in the World IT Project to explore the important organizational IS issues relevant on a global scale. Traditionally, these key issues are reported annually in the journal *MIS*

Table 2. Publications to date from the World IT Project.

PUBLICATION	TOPIC CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION
Book		
Palvia, P., Ghosh, J., Jacks, T., Serenko, A., and Turan, A.H. (Eds.) Foreword by G. J. Hofstede. (2020). The World IT Project: Global issues in information technology. Boston-Delft: World Scientific - Now Publishers.	Organizational, Technology, and Individual Issues	Describes organizational, technological, and individual issues in 37 countries.
Journal Articles		
1. Serenko, A., Palvia, P., Ghosh, J., and Jacks, T. (2025). Why do women professionals leave the IT field? Ten insights and recommendations from the World IT Project. *IEEE Engineering Management Review*, in-press.	Women Gender Issues	Explicates the reasons why women IT professionals leave the IT field, which lead to ten insights and practical recommendations for IT managers and policymakers.
2. Serenko, A., Ghosh, J., Palvia, P., and Jacks, T. (2025). Organizational strategy and IT workforce during times of environmental turbulence. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 72: 925–936.	Organizational Issues	Investigates how organizations can improve agility in order to respond to environmental turbulence by developing an appropriate organizational strategy and adapting their IT function.
3. Palvia, P., Ghosh, J., Jacks, T., and Serenko, A. (2024). Global perspectives on organizational information systems issues: An enigma in search of a theoretical framework. *Information & Management*, 61(8): Article 104,034.	Organizational Issues	Develops a multitiered framework consisting of factors affecting organizational information system issues.
4. Yeo, B., Serenko, A., and Palvia, P. (2024). One size does not fit all: Global perspectives on IT worker turnover. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 71: 2843–2852.	Individual Issues	Demonstrates that the U.S. model of IT job turnover is less applicable in countries with different cultural, political, and labor market conditions than the U.S.
5. Palvia, P., Ghosh, J., Jacks, T., Serenko, A., and Turan, A. (2023). Are IT workers from Mars? An examination of their national culture dimensions. *The DATA BASE for Advances in Information Systems*, 54(4): 31–52.	National Culture	Investigates and finds significant differences between the national culture scores of IT employees and those of the general population.
6. Jacks, T., Palvia, P., Serenko, A., and Ghosh, J. (2022). Global perspectives on IT occupational culture: A three-way cultural analysis. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 51 (Article 27).	IT Occupational Culture	Examines occupational values of IT professionals across the world using the three-way perspective of cultural theory as integrated, differentiated, and fragmented.
7. Ghosh, J., Palvia, P., Serenko, A., and Jacks, T. (2022). Individuality matters: A world view of individual issues of IT professionals. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 51(Article 8).	Individual Issues, Social Capital	Examines fundamental issues of IT workers from a global perspective. While there are differences, nine individual issues are important across many countries, and they are interrelated.
8. Serenko, A., Sasaki, H., Palvia, P., and Sato, O. (2022). Turnover in Japanese IT professionals: Antecedents and nuances. *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, 26: 1–31.	Individual Issues	Examines distinctive factors influencing employee turnover intention in Japan.
9. Bui, S., Le-Nguyen, K., Bui, Q., Jacks, T., and Palvia, P. (2022). IT workplace preferences, job demands, and work exhaustion. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 62(6): 1199–1201.	Individual Issues	Explores work exhaustion in a developing country to examine its antecedents and mitigating factors.
10. Palvia, P., Serenko, A., Ghosh, J., and Jacks, T. (2022). Sorry, the world is not flat: A global view of organizational information systems issues. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 70(2): 777–783.	Organizational Issues	Underscores the importance of visioning beyond ethnocentric views and provides a global view of organizational IS issues.

(*Continued*)

Table 2. (Continued).

PUBLICATION	TOPIC CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION
11. Cranefield, J., Gordon, M. E., Palvia, P., Serenko, A., and Jacks, T. (2022). From fun-lovers to institutionalists: Uncovering pluralism in IT occupational culture. *Information Technology & People*, 35 (3): 925–955.	IT Occupational Culture	Explores whether there is diversity of occupational culture among IT workers and relates them to individual factors.
12. Palvia, P., Ghosh, J., Jacks, and Serenko, A. (2021). Information technology issues and challenges of the globe: The World IT Project. *Information & Management*, 58(8): Article 103,545.	Technology Issues	Reports information technologies rated as important in thirty-seven countries and finds both similarities and differences among countries.
13. Palvia, P., Ghosh, J., Jacks, T., Serenko, A., and Turan, A. (2021). Insights from the World IT Project survey on IS organizational trends. *MIS Quarterly Executive*, 20(1): 61–68.	Organizational Issues	Discusses the top 18 organizational trends globally and how the importance of trends differs between two country clusters.
14. Yeo, B., Serenko, A., Palvia, P., Sato, O., Sasaki, H., Yu, J., and Guo, Y. (2021). Job satisfaction of IT workers in East Asia: The role of employee demographics, job demographics, and uncertainty avoidance. *The DATA BASE for Advances in Information Systems*, 52(2): 94–126.	Individual Issues	Explores the drivers of job satisfaction of IT workers in the East Asian context, particularly in Taiwan, Japan, and China.
15. Scholtz, B., Van Belle, J.P., Njenga, K., Serenko, A., and Palvia, P. (2019). The role of job satisfaction in turnover and turn-away intention of IT staff in South Africa. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management*, 14: 77–97.	Individual Issues	Investigates factors, in particular, the role that job satisfaction has in turnover intention and turnaway intention in South Africa.
16. Bellini, C.G.P., Palvia, P., Moreno, V., Jacks, T., and Graeml, A. (2019). Should I stay or should I go? A study of IT professionals during a national crisis. *Information Technology & People*, 32(6): 1472–1495.	Individual Issues	Discusses two important behaviors: changing jobs to move to another organization and changing the profession entirely during a national crisis in Brazil.
17. Palvia, P., Ghosh, J., Jacks, T., Serenko, A., and Turan, A. (2018). Trekking the globe with the World IT Project. *Journal of Information Technology Case and Application Research*, 20(1): 3–8.	Organizational, Technology, Individual, National Culture, IT Occupational Culture, Social Capital	Describes the key deliverables, objectives, and nine research questions of the World IT Project.
18. Palvia, P., Jacks, T., Ghosh, J., Licker, P., Romm-Livermore, C., Serenko, A., and Turan, A. H. (2017). The World IT Project: History, trials, tribulations, lessons, and recommendations. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 41 (Article 18): 389–413.	Organizational, Technology, Individual, National Culture, IT Occupational Culture, Social Capital	Provides the project's objectives and history, its general framework, governance, important decision points, lessons learned, and recommendations for future researchers.

Quarterly Executive, but only in the context of the U.S. In the U.S., the top-rated organizational IS issues for many years have included: alignment of IT with business, cybersecurity, and data analytics. In our global study, the top issues were: IT reliability and efficiency, cybersecurity, and alignment of IT with business. The inclusion of reliability and efficiency suggests that many countries in the global sample are still wrestling with operational issues in IT management. Another finding showed that IT strategic planning and project management were ranked high in the global study compared to the U.S. A plausible explanation is that planning and management issues have long been adequately addressed in the U.S. and other developed countries.

Another article in this category developed a multitiered theoretical framework to unravel the factors that impact organizational IS issues. This framework comprises three layers: an outer layer with three national-level factors, a middle layer with two macro-IT factors, and an inner layer with

three organizational-level factors. The national factors include: economic level, political system, and national culture. Seventeen propositions were developed based on the examination of the global dataset.

Global technology issues

Globally, four core technologies were ranked high for most of the countries in the World IT Project: networks/telecommunications, business intelligence/analytics, enterprise application integration, and mobile & wireless applications. Note that AI and LLM models have become popular only in the last three years, with ChatGPT itself being released in November 2022. We also found differences among the countries. Statistical analyses were conducted to analyze the differences based on the economic level of the country and its IT-infrastructure capability. Further insights were generated by performing cluster analysis; grouping the countries into three clusters (optimizers, pragmatists, and progressives), and examining their characteristics and technology priorities.

A wide divergence was noted between the global ranks and the U.S. ranks. While there was agreement on business intelligence/analytics as one of the top issues in both sets of ranks, the biggest difference in the global ranks was the high importance attributed to networks/telecommunications, enterprise application integration, and mobile & wireless applications. Technologies ranked higher in the U.S. compared to the global findings were: artificial intelligence, cloud computing, disruptive technologies, and cybersecurity.

Individual issues and outcomes

Individual issues of IT employees were the subject of several articles produced from the project and were well received by multiple journals and their readers. Two dependent variables stood out: employee turnover (the decision to change jobs within the IT field) and employee turnaway (the decision to leave the IT profession entirely). A research model showed that the direct antecedents of turnover and turnaway included job satisfaction, job insecurity, work exhaustion, and work-home conflict, with two moderators: self-efficacy and friendship circles. Differences were also found in these variables based on the economic classification of the 37 countries, with job satisfaction deemed most important in lower-middle income countries and turnover intention highest among high-income countries.

Several studies examined individual issues in specific countries. One study focused on Japan. The Japanese IT industry is unique in many respects: it is highly knowledge-intensive, and employees' skills and expertise represent the most important component of the intellectual capital of Japanese organizations. Generally, the longer IT workers stay in their organizations, the more knowledgeable and productive they become, which increases their value to their employers. Another study explored the drivers of job satisfaction of IT workers in the East Asian context, particularly in Taiwan, Japan, and China. The decision tree induction method was used for analysis. Similarities and differences were found; they were explained by variables in three categories: employee demographics, job demographics, and the culture variable of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980). Yet another study examined the role of job satisfaction in turnover and turnaway intention in the context of South Africa. Several correlates to all three antecedents were found to be significant, and a research model was developed based on the findings.

Information technology occupational culture (ITOC)

The studies in this area examined the occupational values of IT professionals (ITOC) across the world. The findings provide global-based support for the ITOC ideology of values: Autonomy in Decision-Making, Structure in the Workplace, Precision in Communication, Innovation in Technology, Reverence for Knowledge, and Enjoyment in the Workplace (abbreviated as ASPIRE). A three-way

perspective of cultural theory as integrated, differentiated, and fragmented allowed for a more comprehensive view of ITOC than previously known. Results show that while there are surprising global similarities in ITOC around the world, there are also important differences, which may be due to national culture.

Another study used the ASPIRE values and identified four ITOC segments in the IT workforce: fun-lovers, innovators, independents, and institutionalists. These differ in the relative emphasis ascribed to the ITOC values with each segment being distinguished by one or two dominant values. Segment membership varies according to level of responsibility and birth country. The study challenges the concept of a unified ITOC often assumed in the literature and suggests that ITOC is pluralistic. A forthcoming publication will address this notion in more depth based on a variety of demographic factors including IT role.

Information technology and national culture

IS researchers have primarily utilized the published scores of national culture dimensions as provided by the preeminent social psychologist and culture scholar Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 1980) and have applied them to various IT populations within a country. Given that the IT profession is unique in many respects, and there is cultural heterogeneity within a country, the World IT Project went ahead to test the implicit assumption that the cultural values of IT workers were the same as of the general population. By using the original Hofstede scales, scores were obtained on five national culture dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, and long-term orientation for the IT employees in the 37 countries. Surprisingly, significant differences were observed between the national culture scores of IT employees and those available in the literature for the general population. These findings are novel and revealing, and as such may seriously impact past, present, and future practices in research, thus having profound implications.

Social capital and friendship circles

Social exchange theory posits that social relationships among human individuals frequently transcend commonplace exchanges of goods and services and are more deeply embedded in affect-based, emotional bonds between them. For IT workers, these exchanges constitute the primary stock of their social capital, on which they depend during difficult times or periods of personal trials and professional tribulations. In particular, in situations where IT workers suffer from excessive work overload and exhaustion, they tend to rely more on psychological support from social relationships with their colleagues, friends, and professional acquaintances to cope with this stress. In support, our study found that, in a number of countries where employees maintain active friendship circles, there is a high level of job satisfaction and professional self-efficacy. Although these social relationships are culturally embedded in the very fabric of the societies in different countries, we found revealing evidence of a near universality of this reliance of IT employees on their social capital and the support they derive through these circles.

Women gender issues

A dramatic underrepresentation of women in the IT profession is an ongoing concern for managers, educators, and policymakers with implications at the individual, organizational, and national levels. Among the more than 10,000 responses in the World IT Project, only 27% of employees in the sample were women, although the ratio is similar to previous surveys of the IT workforce. From the responses of the women participants, ten important insights were gleaned regarding their departure from the workforce. Three of these insights are: the gender imbalance existing within the IT job roles enables women's exodus from the IT profession, younger women IT workers are more likely to leave IT, and women in managerial roles are more likely to leave.

Another study examined the factors that influence women's intention to leave the IT profession by adopting the job demands-resources model and the individual differences theory of gender and IT to compare their experiences. It identified factors that affect women's experience in the profession based on environmental, identity, and individual differences. Several insights are offered based on our analysis of the data and the literature. For example, one insight illuminates the impact of gender inequality on women's turnaway in a rather nuanced way. Another insight underscores the impact of digital divide on women's turnaway from the IT profession. Yet another insight offers a temporal understanding of the issues women face during their careers.,

The above is only a small, yet representative, sample of the important and sometimes surprising findings that we uncovered during this project. We urge future researchers to build on the framework we have started. By citing these published World IT articles, researchers will be carrying forward our important mission. There is still a strong need to represent different parts of the world outside the U.S. in IS research in order to enhance our knowledge. And *JGITM* will be ready to serve as an outlet to support those endeavors long after this particular project ends.

Concluding remarks

The World IT Project has been a rather long but inspiring journey. Besides our own learning, both in knowledge and in managing a large project, hopefully our readers have learned a lot about the world of global IT through various World IT Project publications as described earlier. Understandably, this editorial presents just the tip of the iceberg; we encourage our readers (faculty, students, and practitioners/policy-makers) to read the many articles listed above, critically examine them, critique them, and carry on this work further. Each article from the World IT Project offers numerous insights and suggestions for future work, which are too many to list here. We hope that our colleagues worldwide will be able to build on our work to develop a better understanding of the world of global IT, which will be useful for both researchers and practitioners for generations to come.

An overarching conclusion from our experience is that Friedman was not exactly right when he said in 2005 that the world is flat (Friedman, 2005). Country differences in different facets of IT and its management are still relevant and worth careful examination. Even after 20 years, the world is not flat and is probably not going to be any time soon!

Note

1. There is an inherent delay in the publication of journal articles due to the long review process. A few more journal articles are under review and expected to be published in the next few months.

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