

Bring Your Own Device: Status Quo and Cultural Differences

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vorgelegt von

Name: Uphoff

■■■■■■ ■■■■■■

Vorname: Nils

■ ■■■■■■■■■■■■

Name: Hönig

■■■■■■ ■■■■■■

Vorname: Martin

■ ■■■■■■■■■■

Prüfer: Prof. Dr. Michael H. Breitner

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1. Introduction

Globalization is one of the biggest challenges companies facing today. The contenders in the market are very close to each other and the differences are very small. Those who want to stay in the market will need more quality, the smallest price or better innovations than others. The basic for this is knowledge and knowledge is based on information. That is why companies will need more information about the preferences of their costumers, the contenders in the market and their own business environment. Therefore companies are looking for the best way to provide information to their employees. One of the most discussed ways is a program which is called “Bring your own device” (BYOD).

Many employees already own mobile devices like Notebooks, Tablets or Smartphones for private use. Thus, they are already familiar with the Software of their devices and consume the offered IS almost daily. Therefore, it would obviously be beneficial if employees use their private mobile devices also in business, which is described by the trend BYOD. Employees can access their networks, applications and data at any time and any place from their mobile devices. With respect to this, BYOD increase the productivity of the employees and simultaneously be cost cutting for organizations.¹

“Consumer adoption of mobile devices has become mainstream worldwide. In developed markets, over half of the eligible workforce and two-thirds of households already have a smartphone that can run apps and has a capable browser. Many employees are already way ahead of their employers, so to some extent, policies are simply catching up to reality. Already, over 60% of workers report using a personal device at least once a day in their work; 44% use a personal smartphone in their job”.²

CIO’s want to make their companies more efficient and successful by improving processes throughout the company. BYOD is one way how companies may save money and become more successful by saving time.

¹ PWC (2012)

² Gartner (2013), p.5

It will be shown that increasing efficiency differ a lot regarding countries and cultures. This thesis will give an overview about cultural differences facing BYOD regarding the actual situation and what kind of impact the cultural differences may have on the development and acceptance of employees and the IT governance using BYOD.

Since BYOD is used by companies and giving response using BYOD this scripture will give a status of BYOD today in the second part. There are already a lot of companies who provide their employees the chance to bring their own device to their job. But companies do not only provide this service because their colleagues want to use their own device. This thesis will give an overview about reasons and advantages given by BYOD for example rising efficiency and mobility caused by mobile devices. Though BYOD is not the only way for employees using mobile devices to get information. There will be more alternatives described and discussed.

The third part is all about the cultural differences of four countries. In many countries companies are providing BYOD programs with different levels of success. Depending on the country people react different on those possibilities to use their own devices for business issues. They accept or do not accept these services. The companies are also facing different challenges depending on their goals and their weaknesses. With these countries it will be illustrated which cultural differences can make it easier to implement a BYOD strategy or which factors challenge the companies more than others to implement a BYOD program because of given regional differences.

The study of the cultural differences in this thesis in terms of BYOD refer to a study that Geert Hofstede conducted mid-20th century, with the support of IBM. The index values for each of its dimensions do not reflect exact scores, which apply to all individuals of the respective society, but give only relative values, which probably represents the possible behavior of the majority of the members of those societies.³ Decisive results can just be generated by comparing the relative values between different societies.

Further, the part about cultural differences research is limited to four countries, which were examined for their cultural values and finally compared. This selection was made on the basis of economic size and geographic distance from each other. All four nations are among the most important economies in the world.

³ Hofstede

Furthermore, each country belongs to a different continent, even if their values are not representative of the other countries in the respective continents. Therefore, the findings can not relate to neighboring countries and can not be generalized.

The fourth part of this paper will be a discussion of different characteristics of cultural differences regarding the six dimensions of Hofstede in the four countries observed and how they may impact the acceptance of employees and the IT governance regarding the implementation of BYOD.

Without a defined limitation, an investigation based on various cultural influences on implementations or possible handling of BYOD programs would be too much effort and would potentially distort the essence of the results. This research is based on some priorities which are set at the beginning of the investigation.

2. Background

2.1 Literature review

In recent years, several research papers have been published on the topic of BYOD on which this research is based on. Due to the rapid technological development of more and more advanced information and communication technologies (ICT) and mobile devices, also the subject of BYOD receive increased attention in research and practice.

Employees participation on this program usually is voluntary, so Lebek, Degirmenci and Breitner describe that organizations are dependent on employees' acceptance on BYOD. It reveals employees' indecision towards their intention to use their private mobile devices for working purposes.⁴

It can not be said that an innovation brings only benefits with it, therefore, it is difficult to create acceptance among users of a BYOD program once. Several threats may arise due to an implementation of BYOD in a company. On the one hand regarding to private life existing blurred boundaries between private and business data and on the other hand on the business side, there are factors such as a loss of business data.⁵

⁴ Lebek, Degirmenci, and Breitner (2013)

⁵ Niehaves, Köffer, Ortbach, and Katschewitz (2012)

It would be interesting to know why BYOD strategies create different levels of benefits regarding cost and time savings depending on the country. This would be very helpful for companies which are about to decide to implement a BYOD strategy or not.

Referring to Hensema who said that there is “still a large gap between what is written in the literature about BYOD and the current position of BYOD at various organizations”¹⁹² it is important for organizations to decide about the implementation of BYOD independently.

The discussed cultural characteristics of a society as well as their potential impact on the acceptability of BYOD may help organizations to get an overview if BYOD might be a solution for the company but can not be generalized for the whole country/ society. In addition to this it is important for companies to consider their IT infrastructure. Companies which already provide a device strategy for e.g. GYOD may not be able to receive benefits like small companies which were just found.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

5.1 Conclusion

Bring your own device is a challenge for every company in every culture as we have shown. With actual numbers and developments of different nations it has been shown that mobile devices can be used for business purposes and can increase employees' productivity and job satisfaction. On the other hand BYOD is also challenging companies dealing with security and privacy rights to make private devices in the company having an impact on cost savings and productivity gains. A key challenge dealing with BYOD might be to make employees and the companies' governance feel satisfied with the way BYOD is implemented and managed. Some points which can have either a positive or negative effect on the acceptance on both sides has been shown in the second part.

To find out whether the acceptance of employees for BYOD programs is also influenced by cultural attitudes, Hofstede's cultural dimensions were investigated for four various countries. For each of the dimensions there are two different hypotheses developed regarding the employees' and the company governance' acceptance which can be rejected or confirmed in further researches.

¹⁹² Hensema, p.7

In section 4 it is shown that especially different characteristics of Power Distance, Long Term Orientation vs. Short Term Orientation, Individualism vs. Collectivism and Uncertainty Avoidance may have different effects on the acceptance of employees and superiors what can be one reason why BYOD is rated by companies differently along different cultures and countries. Without further research in the countries observed it is not possible to determine precise cultural impact on different handling in relation to BYOD but with the developed hypotheses and the findings in the discussion possible trends of employees' acceptance for BYOD in different cultures can be a guideline for further research.

5.2 Limitations

The results of this research are based on the one hand to an investigation of studies and research paper on the topic BYOD and on the other hand to an analysis and discussion of cultural differences in the behavior of corporate members and the potential impact on the acceptance of BYOD programs. In addition, one must also represent that some ambiguities remain after the investigation, which requires further research.

First, it should be noted that there are barely findings to what extent the cultural characteristics affect the respective behaviors. The respective weightings of the six dimensions are not known. Thus, one can not say whether all dimensions have roughly equal effects on the behavior of the members of a society, or some dimensions have a more dominant influence than others.

Moreover, without further investigation, it can not be said how much the decisions of employers and employees of companies with respect to BYOD programs in the observed countries are actually influenced by the behavior patterns according to Hofstede. The dimensions of Hofstede, the developed hypotheses and the discussed potential influences on the acceptance of the members of the observed societies regarding BYOD only represent approaches for possible ways of thinking, which can probably be related to the majority of individuals in the respective societies. However, more statistical analyzes in the observed countries about the behavior of employer and employees in dealing with BYOD programs are needed, to be able to say to what extent (positive/ negative effects) the hypotheses are confirmed.

In addition, a possible cultural change in recent and in the next few years has not been

taken into account. According to this, Hofstede believes that cultures only change together under influences of the same global forces. Thus, the collected scores of the Nations will retain their validity. Finally, the scores are only a measure of the differences between national cultures and should not be misinterpreted as absolute numbers.¹⁹³

In this thesis, the cultural characteristics of four various countries were analyzed and compared. The countries observed are not representative of their surrounding geographic region and its continents. In order to derive possible influences of cultural characteristics on the acceptability of BYOD programs more accurately, it would be advantageous to involve other countries in the comparison.

Similarly, for the investigation of the status quo of BYOD limitations must be shown. Firstly, many sources related to the topic have to be paid, but it lacks the necessary resources to use them. By using additional statistics the results of this research could possibly be supported. Each country and each company has its own laws and regulations which employees have to respect. To investigate these guidelines in detail it requires a lot of effort and is beyond the scope of this research.

6. Outlook

The estimations for devices being part of BYOD strategies are good like it is shown in section 2. Referring to Gartner only 15 percent “of companies will never provide any BYOD option”¹⁹⁴ illustrated by figure 36:

¹⁹³ Hofstede et al. (2010), p.62

¹⁹⁴ Gartner (2013), p.2