

# Factors related to IT outsourcing result

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## Abstract

As IT outsourcing increases, this study is timely to revisit the key variables anticipated to influence IT outsourcing result. Prior to this study, very few studies have focused specifically on this aspect and by addressing this shortfall; it is the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge. The results of this quantitative study showed that vendor capability, the internal readiness of the customer organization, the cultural similarity of vendor with the customer and the engagement of the internal IT team all had a significant relationship with IT outsourcing result. These results support the prior, mostly qualitative work of other scholars. The implications of these findings and recommendations for future research are discussed in the post-analysis section.

**Keywords** Information technology outsourcing, ICT management, information systems issues.

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## 1. Introduction

The information technology (IT) outsourcing market is growing rapidly [5]. With many organizations engaged in highly competitive markets in an increasingly challenging economic climate, the information technology departments, like many other business departments, have been increasingly pressured to deliver greater results while maintaining or lowering costs. To achieve this goal, heads of corporate information technology departments have looked to IT outsourcing as a strategic approach that enables organizations to address their information technology needs [10].

Although there have been studies conducted to highlight the benefits of IT outsourcing and the risks involved in IT outsourcing, there are not many specific studies that have focused on the factors influencing outsourcing result and even less based on the feedback of information technology professionals [29]. This quantitative study addresses this gap by focusing on the key factors influencing outsourcing result from the viewpoint of IT professionals. Information technology professionals play a very important role in the overall outsourcing process since they are typically the people most involved in the IT outsourcing process [26]. The perceptions from this group of people are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge by filling out a more complete picture.

## *Why this study is important*

Information technology outsourcing is one of the fastest growing areas in IT services. According to Gartner, the IT outsourcing market is still expected to grow in 2009 despite the current financial crisis [5]. This trend is all the more interesting given the known inherent risks of IT outsourcing. Some of these risks include failing to meet cost targets, vendors failing to deliver products or services to satisfaction, loss of competencies and vendor lock-in [7]. In his study, Elmuti [4] noted that only 58% of the respondents described their initiative as being successful. In another study focused on software development outsourcing, a typical outsourced function, the results indicate that only about half of such projects are deemed successful [21].

This study is thus deemed timely and relevant since it revisits the factors influencing IT outsourcing result from the perspectives of the very people working closest with the IT vendor. The study elicits responses from IT professionals – the very people on the frontlines of engagement with the IT vendors providing the outsourcing service. In addition, the choice of variables chosen for this study have been specifically selected on the basis of practicality and tangibility – the outcome of the study is intended to be highly applicable under real-world settings. With organizations continuing to increase their outsourcing activities, a study of this topic will be of benefit to IT managers, consultants, academics and all interested parties interested and related to information technology outsourcing.

## 2. Literature Review

### *A brief description of IT outsourcing*

Lacity and Hirschheim [14] defines outsourcing as a "purchase of a good or service that was previously provided internally". Essentially, a company transfers an internally performed task to an appointed external partner and pays for the service provided. IT outsourcing typically falls into one of the three categories: total outsourcing, selective outsourcing and insourcing.

Total outsourcing refers to the outsourcing of IT functions, staff, assets and IT management responsibility to external vendors [16]. Companies are deemed to engage in total outsourcing when approximately 80% or more of their IT budget represents payments to external vendors. Conversely, total insourcing indicates that approximately 80% or more of the IT budget is spent internally [16]; IT functions are managed and run internally and most IT staff and assets belong to the company. Selective outsourcing selects certain IT functions to be outsourced based on the company's discretion. The vendors assume responsibility for the areas outsourced while the internal team assumes responsibility for the non-outsourced areas.

### *Reasons why company outsource*

There are various reasons why corporations outsource information technology functions. The common cited reasons include: cost savings, access to expertise, increased reliability, better performance and reduction of risk.

*Cost Savings.* Some corporations perceive that IT vendors possess the necessary economies of scale to deliver cost savings compared to an organization's internal information technology department [22]. A vendor's experience and expertise may enable it to perform certain functions with greater efficiency and effectiveness, hence reducing the cost needed to perform the function.

*Access to expertise.* Some corporations outsource in order to leverage a vendor's specialized expertise in a specific area [27]. Vendors may have specialized knowledge in a particular system, technology or process and corporations seeking to gain access to these may find outsourcing as the fastest and most efficient path.

*Increased reliability.* Some corporations outsource in the hope that the vendor can deliver greater reliability than the internal information technology department. This belief stems from the assumption that vendors have access to better resources, facilities and expertise that enable them to deliver reliabilities

exceeding the corporation's in-house capabilities [22].

*Better performance.* The combination of expertise, reliability, experience as well as economies of scale allows for the possibility of overall better performance for IT functions that are outsourced [27].

*Scalability.* By virtue of their domain knowledge and focus, vendors can and do attract relevant human resources and are often better able to retain them. This then allows vendors to provide clients the flexibility to scale up resources quickly. For many organizations, this is an attractive option since they can also scale down any unnecessary resources when required [7].

*Reduction of risk.* Corporations may also outsource if they perceive that by doing so, risk can be diffused. By outsourcing, corporations hope to leverage the vendor's resources and diversify the any risks of non-performance of the IT function to the vendor. Some organizations even engage in multi-vendor outsourcing arrangements to further mitigate any remaining risks [16].

### *Risks related to IT outsourcing*

Nevertheless, despite the above potential benefits of outsourcing, there remain significant risks to the customer organization in any outsourcing venture. These risks to the organization may be classified as cost-related risks, function-related risks, supplier-related risks and organizational risks [1].

*Cost-related risks.* Cost-related risks associated with outsourcing include risks such as unforeseen escalation of costs or hidden costs [1]. These may arise as a result of insufficient planning or an unexpected turn of events. Customers may also have to deal with transition costs and increased management overhead when outsourcing. On some occasions, there are high switching costs involved once a function is fully outsourced and some customers find themselves in a situation of vendor lock-in as a result of outsourcing [1].

*Function-related risks.* The risks associated with outsourcing also include function-related risks. These risks include the failure of the vendor to provide service equivalent to the expectation of the customer [14]. This situation can arise since the vendor's objectives are usually quite different from the customer's objectives. While both parties usually do want the outsourcing arrangement to work out, their business objectives can sometimes lead to a situation of conflicting interests [14]. Another risk associated with outsourcing is that a company may eventually lose the capability that has been outsourced altogether [14]. Through lack of practice and development, it is possible for

the company to lose human resources skilled in a particular area and consequently to eventually lose organizational competency in a particular area.

*Supplier-related risks.* Supplier risks refer to the risks faced by vendors. These risks include vendor financial capability, vendor integrity and vendor human resources. A vendor may be reliable and capable to deliver good service, but circumstances may affect its ability to continue operating [3]. If this is true, then its customers face financial and operational challenges should it be forced to wind down. Vendors are also not immune to human resource movements. A vendor providing the outsourced service may itself be faced with problems to deliver the service if they lose staff that have the necessary skillsets related to provision of a particular service. Customers with sensitive information or intellectual property must also be wary of vendors who may lack business ethics or integrity. The staff of a vendor that is privy to advances or confidential information may misuse that information for personal gain, often without the knowledge of the employer, but this poses a significant risk to the client of the vendor.

*Organizational risks.* On occasion, conflict between internal teams and vendors have also led to a less than optimal result of outsourcing. Poor communication and unclear measurements can contribute to poor outsourcing results. The cultural fit between the vendor and client company is essential for outsourcing success. The very act of outsourcing may cause the loss of morale among internal staff, leading to resentment and possible counterproductive actions [9].

#### *Factors related to IT outsourcing result*

The purpose of the paper is to examine the relationship among vendor capability, internal readiness, similarity of culture and involvement of internal IT team with IT outsourcing result. The selection of these variables were based on previous qualitative studies and expert opinion. A brief discussion of these variables and their relevance is presented below.

*Vendor capability.* The strength of the vendor may be described from several perspectives. The technical ability of the vendor is an important part of outsourcing success. For obvious reasons, partners with the depth of skill and significant experience can really make a difference in ensuring the success of an outsourced function [16]. Vendors are expected not only to be able to perform a specific task, but also draw on their domain expertise to achieve the desired result within reasonable time and resource limits. Another aspect of vendor

capability is the familiarity and experience of the vendor with the customer's industry and business processes. The familiarity of the outsourcing partner with the client organization's business also plays a great role in the success of the outsourcing arrangement [6, 16]. When vendors are familiar with the customer's business industry, they are better able to leverage their knowledge of industry best practices in performing the outsourced function. In addition, the vendor will be more sensitive to any idiosyncratic requirements of the industry and propose viable solutions to issues that arise [28]. Last but not least, capable vendors are also able to integrate new technologies and solutions into their client organizations, enabling their customers to derive new capabilities [15, 23]. Vendors that are able to contribute in this manner to client organizations often stand a better chance of securing the project.

*Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between vendor capability and outsourcing result*

*Internal readiness of customer organization.* Organizations wishing to achieve success in outsourcing must first embark on a comprehensive and detailed preparation process to ensure their readiness in adopting outsourcing [25]. These initiatives include, but are not limited to ensuring clear and detailed policies and guidelines on the cooperation mechanism between vendors and internal staff coupled with a clear description of the objectives of the arrangement and the measures used to determine success [6]. In addition, having well-defined guidelines to manage the outsourcing arrangement enables both internal and external teams to concentrate on their respective areas of focus. Young [30] discussed the importance of clear contract specifications and formal measures to measure outsourcing performance while Lin, Pervand and McDermid [19] extend a similar assertion and also included staff transition management in their list of recommended action. In some cases, customer organizations have created new processes and protocols to better manage their outsourcing arrangement [15].

*Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between the internal readiness of the customer organization and the outsourcing result*

*Cultural similarity of vendor and customer organization.* In their paper, [2] Chakrabarty, Whitten and Green discuss the impact of relationship quality on client satisfaction with the outsourcing experience. The quality of a relationship between vendor and customer is an important contributor to a successful outsourcing arrangement for both parties. The elements of a good relationship include, but are not limited to trust, commitment, good communication and

cultural fit. When organizations are culturally similar, they share similar value systems and work ethics [12]. This similarity enhances inter-organizational collaboration to some degree and it is anticipated that enhanced collaboration will influence outsourcing result. In her 2008 paper, Young [30] noted that a cultural clash between vendor and customer organization is a significant factor that can jeopardize the outcome of the outsourcing initiative.

*Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between cultural similarity and the outsourcing result*

*Involvement of internal IT team.* Getting internal teams engaged in the overall IT outsourcing process is expected to lead to better outsourcing success. When internal teams feel that they are a part of the initiative, they will feel compelled to contribute to the success of the venture [12]. In this study, the relationship between the involvement and engagement of the internal IT team and the perceived outsourcing result is explored. In his work on change management, Kotter described the involvement of employees in the change process as critical to successful change [11]. When organizations outsource their IT systems, changes can and do occur in the roles and job scopes of the internal IT teams. It is anticipated that greater participation of the internal IT team in the outsourcing arrangement will result in improved outsourcing result.

*Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between involvement of internal IT team and outsourcing result*

### 3. Methodology

#### *Participants*

The target participants of this survey are information technology professionals working in American companies. In collaboration with Markettools, participants were selected from a random sample of the MarketTool's TrueSample™ database. TrueSample™ is a quality-assured database that provides researchers with survey participants that are real, unique and engaged [20]. The TrueSample™ database reflects national demographics, with participants from all industries across the United States of America. A total of 310 complete responses were received with a total of 298 valid responses.

#### *Operational Definition of Variables*

*Vendor capability.* This construct is defined as the perceived vendor capability of the IT vendor from the viewpoint of the IT professional. The construct is a composite of three Likert-scale questions and the results of

exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood analysis as well as internal reliability analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Vendor Capability construct

Question Number	Question Text	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha
51	IT outsourcing provides companies with access to new skills and/or technologies	0.793	0.8022
52	The skills of the staff in the outsource service provider are usually better than those of in-house staff	0.772	
62	My company's IT outsourcing vendor understands my company's processes and business operations well	0.709	

Given the construct's Cronbach's alpha score of 0.8022 is higher than Nunnally's proposed minimum of 0.7 [24], and further supported by the factor loadings as shown in Table 1, the construct is deemed valid.

*Internal readiness.* This construct is defined as the perceived internal readiness of the customer organization from the viewpoint of the IT professional. Tangible evidence of internal readiness can be seen by the presence of policies, organizational guidelines and reorganization of work to manage and optimize the outsourcing arrangement. The construct is a composite of three Likert-scale questions and the results of exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood analysis as well as internal reliability analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Internal readiness construct

Question Number	Question Text	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha
56	IT outsourcing allows in-house teams to focus more on their core job while leaving non-core functions to external service providers	0.7058	0.8033
59	My company has well established policies and guidelines to enable smooth working relationships with IT outsourcing vendors	0.8016	
60	My job role and the job role of the IT outsourcing vendor is clearly defined	0.7838	

Given the construct's Cronbach's alpha score of 0.8033 is higher than Nunnally's proposed minimum of 0.7 [24], and further supported by the factor loadings as shown in Table 2, the construct is deemed valid.

*Cultural Similarity.* This variable is defined as the perceived cultural similarity between the vendor and the customer organization from the viewpoint of the IT professional. This variable is captured in the survey question "The corporate culture of the IT outsourcing vendor that I work with is quite similar to my company's corporate culture". Responses are captured from responses to a 6-choice Likert scale ranging from 'Disagree very much' to 'Agree very much'.

*Involvement of internal IT team.* This construct is defined as the perceived involvement of the internal IT team concerning the outsourcing arrangement. The construct is a composite of four likert-scale questions and the results of exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood analyses as well as internal reliability analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Engagement of internal IT team construct

Question Number	Question Text	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
64	Prior to engaging any IT outsourcing vendor, my superior usually seeks my input	0.8128	0.91
65	I am involved in the price negotiation process with my company's IT outsourcing vendors	0.8422	
66	I am involved in the regular review of my company's IT outsourcing vendors' performance	0.8536	
67	My superior usually seeks my input when it comes to the renewal or dismissal of IT outsourcing vendors	0.8879	

Given the construct's Cronbach's alpha score of 0.91 is higher than Nunnally's proposed minimum of 0.7 [24], and further supported by the factor loadings as shown in Table 1, the construct is deemed valid.

*Outsourcing result.* This construct is defined as the perceived outcome or results of outsourcing activities from the viewpoint of the IT professional. The construct is a composite of four Likert-scale questions and the results of exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood analysis as well as internal reliability analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Outsourcing result construct

Question Number	Question Text	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha
48	Outsourced projects or work are usually delivered with satisfactory quality	0.8841	0.91
49	Outsourced projects or work are usually delivered on time	0.8602	
50	IT outsourcing is cost effective and can help companies get more while spending less	0.8759	
53	Information systems that are outsourced perform better than those maintained by in-house teams	0.7830	

Given the construct's Cronbach's alpha score of 0.91 is higher than Nunnally's proposed minimum of 0.7 [24], and further supported by the factor loadings as shown in Table 1, the construct is deemed valid.

**4. Results**

*Demographics*

From the responses received, 58.39% (174) of the respondents were male while the remaining 41.61% (124) were female. The largest age group was the age group between 26 years of age to 35 years of age. 45.64% of the total number of participants fell into this age group. The respondent age groups are detailed in Table 5.

Table 5: Respondent age group

Age group	Count	Percent
Below 26	15	5.03%
Between 26 and 35 years of age	136	45.64%
Between 36 and 45 years of age	68	22.82%
Greater than 45 years of age	79	26.51%

Within the sub-specializations of the IT profession, the two largest groups remained software development (28.52%) and system administration/support (28.19%). The combined total of these two groups exceed more than half of the total number of participants. About 15.10% of the respondents listed their job role as being in management and 8.72% of the respondents listed their job role as being in project management. Table 6 presents the data in tabular format.

Table 6: Respondent job profile

Job description	Count	Percent
Management	45	15.10%
System Admin/Support	84	28.19%
Networking	18	6.04%
Software development/programming	85	28.52%
Business analysis	23	7.72%
Project management	26	8.72%
Information security	17	5.70%

The respondents came from diverse company sizes, enriching the population sample. The largest group of respondents worked in companies with more than 1500 persons. This group constituted 40.27% of the total number of respondents. In terms of working experience, 49.66% of the respondents had more than 10 years working experience while 27.52% had between six to 10 years working experience. Table 7 presents the data in tabular format.

Table 7: Respondent company sizes

Company size	Count	Percent
Below 100 persons	58	19.46%
Between 100 to 499 persons	63	21.14%
Between 500 to 1500 persons	57	19.13%
Above 1500 persons	120	40.27%

According to responses from survey participants, the most frequently IT function outsourced was software development. IT outsourcing of software development accounted for the most frequently outsourced IT function, constituting 31.62% of the total frequency count for IT outsourced functions. The frequency distribution of IT outsourced functions is shown in Table 8.

Table 8: In what areas does your company presently outsource IT? (Check all that apply)

IT Function	Frequency Count	Percent
System Admin/Support	80	21.62%
Software development/programming	117	31.62%
Business analysis	39	10.54%
Project management	45	12.16%
Information security	44	11.89%
Vendor management	45	12.16%

*Correlation analysis of independent variables*  
The bivariate correlation coefficients between the dependent variables are shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Correlation analysis of independent variables

	Vendor Capability	Internal Readiness	Cultural Similarity	Involvement of IT team
Vendor capability	1			
Internal readiness	0.75616	1		
Cultural similarity	0.68717	0.546814	1	
Involvement of IT team	0.54009	0.583025	0.50768	1

*Summary results of hypotheses testing*  
The summary results from the hypotheses testing are shown in Table 10 below. Correlational and univariate regression analysis was performed for the hypotheses below. Interested readers can find the detailed results of the ANOVA tables and regression statistics in the Appendix.

### 5. Discussion

#### Summary

In this study, American IT professionals were surveyed for their opinions on the key factors influencing IT outsourcing result. The factors that were studied include vendor capability, internal readiness of the client organization, cultural similarity between the vendor and client organization and the involvement of the internal IT team in the outsourcing arrangement. Using univariate regression, the results of the study indicate that all the variables examined were significantly related to outsourcing result. This result is consistent with pre-study expectations.

Table 10: Summary results of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Correlation with outsourcing result*	p-value
Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between vendor capability and outsourcing result	0.83	0.00000
Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between the internal readiness of the customer organization and the outsourcing result.	0.66	0.00000
Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between cultural similarity and the outsourcing result	0.61	0.00000
Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between involvement of internal IT team and outsourcing result	0.53	0.00000

\*Correlation coefficient between dependent and independent variable

Prior studies by Lacity and Hirschheim [14] have indicated that vendor capability and the internal readiness of the customer organization influences the outsourcing result. Young [30] and Lin, Pervand and McDermid [19] have expressed the need for explicit internal measures and staff transition management in improving outsourcing success. In their paper, Feeny, Lacity, Willcocks [17] discuss the importance of vendor capability and identify core capabilities that vendors should possess to ensure outsourcing success. Chakrabarty, Whitten and Green [2] have found that cultural similarity influences relationship quality which in turn is affects the outsourcing result. Kotter [11] and Kreitner and Kinicki [12] have described how the involvement of internal

staff leads to greater opportunities for success within the organization.

The objectives of the study was met as the study was able to confirm quantitatively that the variables under study are significantly related to outsourcing result since prior studies were mostly qualitative.

#### *Managerial implications*

IT outsourcing success is often the result of the congruence of various factors. Although this is generally understood by decision-making individuals, more often than not, many past IT outsourcing arrangements have been made almost on the sole basis of cost [4]. In recent years however, outsourcing has shifted from the classical paradigm of cost savings to improved competitiveness [9]. Organizations are therefore not considering whether to outsource or not, but rather what to outsource. By outsourcing non-core organizational functions, internal resources can be diverted to high value-added areas within the organization. There is also a noticeable trend for multi-vendor outsourcing strategies, where corporations engage an array of vendors to provide services relevant to their area of expertise. In this case, managers have to be increasingly adept at managing not only several, but an entire portfolio of vendors [16].

Thus, in order to ensure the success of future outsourcing initiatives, elements beyond cost need to be considered from day one. These include, but are not limited to, factors such as sustainable vendor capability, the familiarity of the vendor with the customer's business [9], presence of internal measures and controls, [19] the corporate culture of the vendor [30] and the involvement of the internal IT team [12]. Managers also have to consider how to clearly delineate the role of the outsourced party with that of the internal staff. Clearly defined expectations, procedures and gamerules on managing the outsourcing initiative are strongly recommended. These include, but are not limited, to program charters, communication guidelines, measurement metrics and service level agreements [9]. Managers may also want to place additional weight on vendors that share similar values and organization cultures since this aspect can contribute to the outsourcing result. Last but not least, involving the organization's internal teams early on in the process creates heightened awareness of the initiative and also develops a sense of ownership among the internal staff. In this study, the involvement of the internal team was moderately correlated and statistically related to outsourcing result.

#### *Limitation and future research*

As if often the case with any research, there are limitations to this study. As this was an exploratory study, the absence of a theoretical framework to guide the study is a notable limitation. Additionally, the independent variables presented are broad and a more detailed exploration of each facet is strongly recommended. This said, the present work serves as a preliminary paper that future researchers can expand on so as to build a greater understanding of the factors influencing outsourcing success.

Other limitations include the limitation of generalization of findings. It is recognized that the study was a cross-sectional study in a single geographic area. As such, the perception of IT professionals were captured at a single point in time. There is an opportunity for future researchers to move beyond the snapshot studies and broaden the perspective of outsourcing by conducting studies that track the evolutionary progress of an organization's outsourcing initiative. By the same token, it might be interesting for future studies to expand beyond current boundaries. By expanding the study across different geographies and cultures, one may assess the applicability of findings across cultures.

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