Developing the Success Factors of Innovation Adoption Model in UAE: A Case in the Abu Dhabi Judicial Academy

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Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one of the most emerging countries and the most innovative Arab country. In UAE, innovation become an important key success factor for public and private companies nowadays, and it is a requirement for all kind of companies to survive and to grow. Many studies investigated the key success factors toward the adoption and implementation of innovation including the technological, financial, and cultural impact. But only rare are those investigating this matter within the public sector. The purpose of this research is to explore the factors leading as well as those challenging the success of innovation' adoption in public sector in the United Arab Emirates. Hence, the case of the Abu Dhabi Judicial Academy is studied using qualitative research through interviews with ten key managers in the Academy. The research findings provide a detailed look at how this Emirati public institution is succeeding the adoption and implementation of its innovation such as leadership support, IT infrastructure, employees' motivation and satisfaction and collaboration and networking. The model created can be considered as a good contribution to both academic and professional sides.

Keywords: Success Factors, Innovation, Adoption Model, UAE, Abu Dhabi Judicial Academy

Introduction

The innovation process, which is highly knowledge-intensive, depends on both individual and collective expertise, requiring an efficient learning environment. With the advent of sophisticated information and communication technologies, workplace strategies to enhance innovation and creativity have led to the creation of in-house training academies and centers (HP, 2021). In public management, scholars have increasingly discussed global public innovation (Criado et al., 2021). Although public innovation has been anticipated to expand over the past two decades, the concept of public innovation capacity remains underexplored, with its mechanisms still not fully understood (Farazmand, 2009; Meijer, 2018; Piening, 2013; Gieske et al., 2016).

Public innovation is essential in improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the public sector (Bason, 2010; Borins, 2001; Gieske et al., 2019). The UAE serves as a prime example of innovation, with the Abu Dhabi Judicial Academy highlighting its success. Since its founding in 1971, the UAE has become a leading hub for innovation and creativity, improving its social and economic status and attracting global talent. This belief in innovation is ingrained in the UAE Vision 2021, which emphasizes creating a knowledge-based, competitive economy supported by research, science, and technology (UAE National Innovation Strategy, 2021).

Globally, many nations have recognized innovation as a cornerstone of social and economic development. Innovation is defined as the desire of individuals, private institutions, and governments to achieve progress through creative ideas and new products, services, and processes that improve the quality of life. It is a key driver for economic growth, competitiveness, and job creation (UAE Innovation Strategy, 2015). Sheikh Zayed's vision continues to inspire the UAE's leadership, emphasizing the importance of innovation for improving life quality, diversifying the economy, and fostering entrepreneurship.

Over four decades, the UAE has maintained its status as a global icon of innovation. In the 2019 Global Innovation Index, the UAE ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa and 36th globally, reflecting its innovative achievements. However, while the UAE ranks 24th in the Innovation Input Sub-Index, it is 58th in the Innovation Output Sub-Index, indicating a gap between investment and realized outcomes (Global Innovation Index, 2019).

Both public and private sectors in the UAE benefit from innovation. In the public sector, innovation is seen as a critical factor in maintaining high-quality services despite limited resources and increasingly complex socio-economic challenges (Hvit, 2017). However, there are still gaps in research, definitions, and empirically guided policies in public sector innovation, despite a growing focus on stimulating such efforts (OECD, 2016).

The UAE society places great importance on public sector innovation, as it is essential for addressing societal challenges, such as reducing fossil fuel dependency and adapting to an aging population. Sørensen and Torfing (2011) emphasize the government's efforts to tackle these issues through collaboration with businesses, citizens, and societal organizations. The UAE's strategy for enhancing public sector innovation involves creating a supportive environment, which includes regulatory frameworks, technological infrastructure, and financial incentives.

The Innovation Regulatory Framework establishes laws and regulations to promote innovation, including efficient procedures for patent registration and the protection of intellectual property rights. A robust educational system is a key feature of innovation-leading nations, and the UAE is committed to building this foundation by promoting research and entrepreneurship through innovation incubators. These incubators offer training, support, and global business networks to help innovators turn ideas into successful projects.

Technology infrastructure also plays a critical role, enabling the generation and sharing of knowledge among individuals, companies, and governments. The UAE aims to provide a competitive, cost-effective technological environment to facilitate innovation across sectors.

Additionally, investment in innovation is essential for developing new products and services. The UAE seeks new funding options and an advanced financial system to support innovative projects.

Innovation is a key driver of business growth and national economic development. Empirical research highlights that innovation leads to incremental and radical changes, improving competitiveness and overall economic performance (Mickoleit, 2014). Public sector institutions, facing increased complexity and resource constraints, are seeking new ways to innovate in service delivery and citizen engagement (OECD, 2014).

Despite the UAE's success in private sector innovation, challenges remain in the public sector (GII, 2017). However, the Abu Dhabi Judicial Academy stands out as a success story, showing significant improvement in performance after adopting an innovation strategy (Internal Reports, 2017-2019). This study investigates how an Emirati public institution can succeed in adopting and implementing an innovation strategy. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the enablers that contribute to the success of the innovation at the ADJA?
2. What are the leading factors to the success of innovation implementation in a public institution in the UAE?
3. How can the success factor model of innovation adoption at ADJA be developed?

Literature Review

Innovation models help explain how technological advancements and market needs drive the creation of new products and services. Scholars have categorized these models into various frameworks, including technology-push, market-pull, integrated, decision-stage, and network models, each offering unique insights into the innovation process.

A. Technology-Push Model

The technology-push model emphasizes that innovation is driven by scientific discoveries and technological breakthroughs. Companies develop products based on these advances, assuming the market will adopt them once available (Rothwell, 1994). While this model was prominent in the post-war era, it has limitations, such as failing to consider market feedback, which can lead to mismatches between products and consumer needs (Kline & Rosenberg, 1986).

B. Market-Pull Model

In contrast, the market-pull model starts with market needs, where innovation is driven by addressing specific consumer problems or gaps. Market research and user feedback guide product development, ensuring products meet consumer demands (Rothwell, 1994). While responsive to market dynamics, this model tends to focus on incremental rather than radical innovations (Neely, 1998).

C. Integrated Model

The integrated model combines elements of both technology-push and market-pull approaches, aligning technological capabilities with market needs. It encourages cross-functional collaboration and iterative feedback loops, ensuring that innovation is driven by both technological advancements and market demand (Trott, 2005). This model is praised for its holistic approach and adaptability to changing market conditions.

D. Decision-Stage Model

The decision-stage model (Stage-Gate) is a phased approach where innovation projects progress through stages, with evaluations at each gate. Developed by NASA, this model helps manage risk and costs but can slow down innovation. The Stage-Gate model is widely used for its effectiveness in product quality control and cost management (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1993).

E. Network Model

The network model emphasizes collaboration among diverse actors—companies, research institutions, and governments. It focuses on knowledge exchange and leveraging external expertise through open innovation and partnerships. This model highlights the importance of innovation ecosystems, where cross-sector collaboration fosters new ideas (Trott, 2005).

Innovation in Public Services

In public services, models like the Four C's (Creativity, Connections, Challenges, and Champions) and Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1962) guide how governments adopt and implement new innovations. These models stress collaboration, problem-solving, and the need for continuous improvement in public service delivery.

In conclusion, these innovation models—whether technology-driven, market-oriented, or collaborative—offer valuable insights into the complex processes that drive successful innovation. Combining these approaches can create a balanced strategy for innovation that responds to both technological advancements and market needs.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative design to explore innovation strategies at the Abu Dhabi Judicial Academy. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants, as it was practical given the specific population of interest—heads of units at the academy. This method was chosen for its efficiency in qualitative research, considering the time, effort, and cost involved. Recruiting participants during the pandemic presented challenges, such as concerns about confidentiality and misinformation, but these were managed carefully.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, designed to cover key factors identified in the literature. The initial plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews, but due to pandemic restrictions, flexibility was applied, with some interviews conducted remotely. Ten participants were interviewed, and their insights were recorded and documented for analysis. This approach allowed the researcher to gather rich, detailed information while addressing recruitment and logistical challenges effectively.

Findings and Discussion

The study aimed to explore the key enablers of successful innovation at the Abu Dhabi Judicial Academy (ADJA) through qualitative research involving ten senior participants. Using a thematic approach, sub-themes emerged that aligned with the literature on innovation, enabling a deeper discussion of the findings in relation to previous research.

Objectives 1 and 2: Enablers and Success Factors of Innovation at ADJA
The research identified several critical factors that contributed to the successful adoption and implementation of innovation at ADJA. Leadership played a pivotal role by raising awareness about the importance of innovation, implementing ideation mechanisms, and offering training such as design thinking. Leaders also motivated staff by fostering open communication and applying policies that encouraged innovation despite potential mistakes. These findings align with prior research by Schumpeter (1976), Brandsen et al. (2016), and Bekkers and Tummers (2018).

Another key factor was the importance of culture and corporate values. An open, flexible culture where employees felt valued and could freely share ideas and collaborate was essential for innovation success. Core corporate values such as respect, tolerance, integrity, and good communication were also identified as crucial. These findings echo earlier research by Skyrme and Amidon (1997) and Moore and Hartley (2008).

Collaboration, networking, and knowledge sharing were further highlighted as essential for innovation. A strong network, particularly with lawmakers and legal professionals, kept teams proactive and allowed them to innovate effectively. This confirms the work of researchers like Skyrme and Amidon (1997) and Ettilie and Elsenbach (2007). Interestingly, this study contradicts Hansen (2011), who found that strong employee-superior relationships stifled innovation in Danish institutions, whereas at ADJA, strong relationships were seen as drivers of innovation.

Technology was also found to support innovation, particularly in implementation, though it was not deemed crucial during the initial adoption phase. This supports earlier findings from researchers such as Edgett and Jones (2008).

Objective 3: Developing a Success Factor Model of Innovation at ADJA
The literature highlighted information technology knowledge and skills as potential challenges for innovation adoption. However, the findings from this research did not identify any clear technological barriers at ADJA, suggesting that other factors such as leadership, culture, and collaboration may play a more significant role in driving successful innovation within the institution. Based on the results of the qualitative research conducted, the following model (figure 1) can be drawn to help the public sector develops the success factor model of innovation adoption.
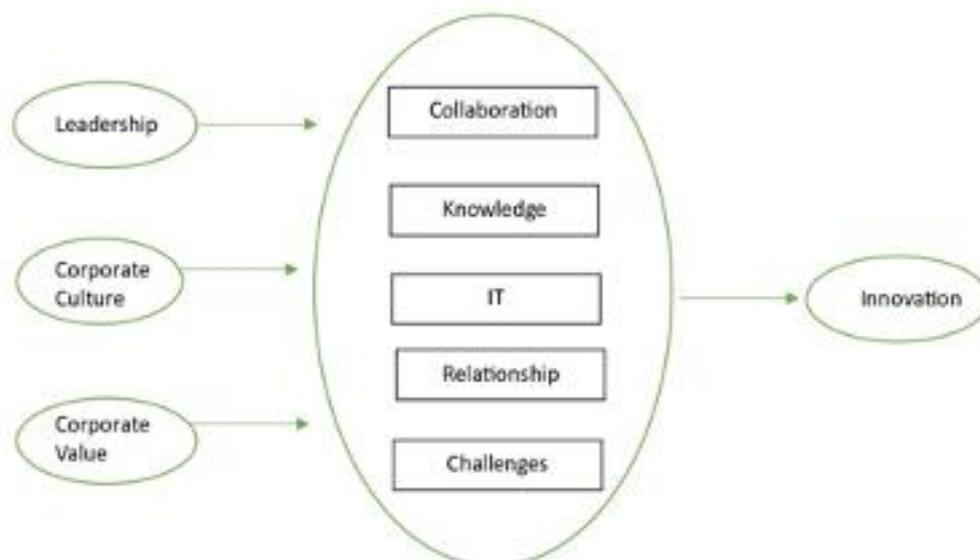
Figure 1: The success factor model of innovation adoption

The figure illustrates a conceptual model for fostering innovation within an organization. Leadership, corporate culture, and corporate values are the foundational elements that drive the central mechanisms: collaboration, knowledge sharing, information technology (IT) utilization, relationship management, and addressing challenges. These mechanisms are interlinked within a central node, indicating that they are integral and interdependent aspects of the innovation process. The diagram suggests that effective leadership nurtures a culture and value system that supports collaboration and knowledge sharing, leverages IT, and manages relationships and challenges efficiently. These efforts collectively contribute to the overarching goal of achieving innovation. The arrows indicate the direction of influence, showing that the foundational elements enable the central mechanisms, which in turn drive innovation forward.

This research makes significant theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the factors that lead to successful innovation in the public sector, particularly within the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The research fills a gap in the existing literature by focusing on the key success factors for public sector innovation in the UAE—a region previously underexplored in this context. While prior studies have typically analyzed innovation and performance separately, this study adopts an integrated approach. It combines innovation enablers from various international contexts with specific characteristics pertinent to the UAE, providing a unique contribution to the theoretical framework on public sector innovation. This integrated perspective helps in understanding how various elements interact to support successful innovation in the public sector.

Practically, the findings from this research offer actionable insights and serve as a model for other public organizations in the UAE and the broader Middle East region. The study outlines several best practices observed at a successful Emirati public organization, providing a roadmap for others to follow. To enhance the practical implementation of innovation, the research recommends:

1. **Leadership Involvement:** Encouraging leaders and top management to actively engage in innovation efforts, motivate their teams to think creatively, and tolerate mistakes made during the innovation process.
2. **Organizational Culture:** Establishing an open and flexible organizational culture that fosters respect, mutual trust, and effective communication, which are crucial for nurturing an environment conducive to innovation.
3. **Employee Training:** Conducting extensive training for employees on design thinking, the ideation process, and information technology to equip them with the necessary skills to contribute effectively to innovation initiatives.
4. **Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Promoting collaboration and the sharing of knowledge among employees to leverage collective intelligence and enhance innovation outcomes.

These contributions not only advance theoretical understanding but also offer practical strategies that can be directly applied by public sector institutions aiming to enhance their innovation capabilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has successfully identified and analyzed the core enablers that underpin successful innovation at the Abu Dhabi Judicial Academy (ADJA). The qualitative investigation reveals that innovation is not driven by a single factor but is the product of a synergistic ecosystem. The foundational pillars of leadership and a supportive organizational culture and values are paramount. Effective leaders at ADJA do not merely mandate innovation; they actively cultivate it by championing its importance, implementing structured ideation processes, and fostering a climate of psychological safety where learning from mistakes is encouraged. This leadership, in turn, nurtures an open and flexible culture built on respect, integrity, and communication, which empowers employees to collaborate and share ideas freely.

These foundational elements enable critical operational mechanisms: collaboration, networking, and knowledge sharing emerge as vital lifeblood for innovation, with strong relationships acting as a key driver—a finding that intriguingly contrasts with some previous international studies. While technology serves as a crucial enabler for implementing new ideas, this study suggests it is secondary to the human and cultural factors that initiate the innovation process in the first place.

The research makes a significant contribution by integrating these elements into a novel Success Factor Model of Innovation Adoption, providing a holistic framework that can guide other public sector institutions. This model, along with the practical recommendations for leadership involvement, cultural development, employee training, and enhanced collaboration, offers a valuable roadmap for public organizations within the UAE and the broader Middle East region seeking to enhance their innovative capabilities. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that sustainable innovation in the public sector is an organizational achievement, built on strong leadership, a empowering culture, and collaborative spirit, all working in concert to navigate challenges and achieve transformative outcomes.

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