

Determining Partner Selection Criteria using Information Communication Technology (ICT) Tools

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Abstract

Selecting compatible partners for business collaboration can be a difficult and time consuming task. Identifying the criteria for partner selection is thus important to organisations that are considering business collaborations or to form a collaborative network (CN). Determining the right set of criteria for partner selection involves careful consideration of both intangible and tangible factors. Partner-related criteria or intangible factors such as trust, reputation and management ability have long-term effects on collaborations. Compared to task-related criteria or tangible factors, intangible factors are not easily determined as they involve subjective judgment. The objectives of the paper are to explore the partner selection criteria which relates to partner-related criteria and to identify the information communication technology (ICT) tools to accommodate the criteria. Mixed methods approach has been implemented in this study which begins with an online survey followed by conducting interviews with selected organisations. The findings show several ICT tools that are suitable to be used to help organisations in evaluating the partner selection criteria.

Keywords

Partner-related criteria, partner selection criteria, collaboration

INTRODUCTION

In selecting partners for a business opportunity in a collaborative network (CN), both tangible (hard) and intangible (soft) factors are needed in order to ensure successful collaboration to gain competitive advantage (Barney & Hesterly, 2008; Solesvik & Westhead, 2010). The hard criteria typically are easily quantifiable, require objective input and look towards a known and defined end (Louise, 1996). They provide support to the implementation of the soft factors and typically relate to tools and systems (Black & Porter, 1996). The soft criteria are defined as those which are mainly related to the behavioural aspects of working life such as culture, trust, leadership, human resource management and commitment (Geringer, 1991). It is usually difficult to assign a numerical value to these and, as such, these criteria are more freely interpreted. In the researcher's view, the 'task-related' criteria are almost identical to hard (tangible) factors even though Geringer (1991) stated that these can be both tangible and intangible. On the other hand, the 'partner-related' criteria are similar to soft (intangible) factors. Therefore, it is important to identify the suitable criteria in selecting partners for collaborative networks. Consequently, the first research question is "What are the appropriate partner selection criteria in collaborative networks?"

An important aspect when selecting partners for collaboration is the difficulty for managers to make a rapid and effective decision regarding partner selection due to the limited information available about the potential partner(s) (Bierley III and Gallagher, 2007). It is important to investigate how ICT can help organisations to support partner selection, particularly in providing information and evaluating the criteria for partner selection. Thus, the motivation of this paper is to investigate and address the following research question: 'How does ICT help or

organisations in selecting partners for collaboration?’ Before addressing this question, issues relating to partner selection are discussed below in order to address the first research question.

ISSUES IN PARTNER SELECTION CRITERIA

Geringer (1991) classified partner selection criteria into two categories: partner-related criteria, and task-related criteria. ‘Task-related’ or ‘operation-related’ criteria refer to “variables which are intimately related to the viability of a proposed venture's operation regardless of whether the chosen investment mode involves multiple partners” (Geringer, 1988; Lou, 1997). In other words, it is associated with the strategic attributes of a partner and influences the operational skills and resources needed for collaboration competitive success (Dong & Glaister, 2006). Examples of task-related criteria are patents or technical know-how, market position, strategic orientation, financial resources or access to marketing and distribution systems. Task-related criteria can be intangible or tangible factors. Task-related criteria are directly related to the contribution each organisation will make to the partnership (Arino et al., 1997). ‘Partner-related’ or ‘co-operation-related’ criteria are those “associated with the efficiency and effectiveness of partners’ co-operation” (Geringer, 1991). This category of criteria usually represents organisational attributes such as trust, commitment, size of organisations and reputation. Examples of these criteria include corporate culture and trust between partners.

Although most researchers in this area agree on the importance of partner selection, determining the ‘right’ or ‘proper’ criteria has proved to be difficult. The chosen partners can affect the overall mix of available skills and resources, the operating policies and procedures, and the short-term and long-term viability of the collaboration (Geringer, 1991). Compared to task-related criteria, partner-related criteria have a more significant impact on both manufacturing and business performance (Kannan & Tan, 2002). Moreover, partner-related criteria can be critical variables since they can influence the efficiency and effectiveness of co-operation between the partners (Al-Khalifa, Peterson, & Stewart, 1999). The consideration of partner-related criteria during the selection stage helps to make relationship management easier and increases the chances of partnership success (Arino et al., 1997). Relationship factors such as trust and commitment are also linked to inter-organisational collaboration success (Child, 2001).

Previous research has listed an extensive set of criteria for partner selection. As partner selection is a time-consuming process, identifying a discrete set of criteria focused on the assessment of partner-related factors at the beginning of the partner selection process could help organisations to rapidly establish a CN. Identifying the critical success factors for partner selection at the beginning of the collaboration can be a vital step towards ensuring the success of the collaboration. A number of partner-related criteria as shown in Table 1 was previously collated by Che Mat et. al (2008). However, several terms for these criteria in the previous literature were re-named and reorganised in order to match the names designated in this.

Even though collaboration has become increasingly important, high levels of dissatisfaction with the actual outcomes and a low success rate of such collaborations are reported (Bierly III & Gallagher, 2007). In a study conducted by Battistella and Nonino (2012), four out of the five reasons identified for unsuccessful collaboration were related to partner selection, namely, strategy, competencies, culture, and trust.

It has become a common expectation that involvement in a CN provides benefits to organisations, and that the main solution to maximising the powerful potential of CNs is to rapidly set up a network that is capable of fulfilling the identified business opportunity. The literature suggests that the identification of virtual organisations (VO) partners should be conducted quickly and that members of the VO can be selected easily among the Virtual Breeding Enterprise (VBE) members (ref). However, such processes are not as simple as they may seem (Baldo et al., 2007) and the path to successful collaboration is also not easy to follow (Camarinha-Matos, 2007a).

One of the main barriers that organisations face in the early stage of establishing CNs is finding the right partners (Baldo et al., 2007; Camariha-Matos et al., 2007; Jarimo et al., 2006). Selecting the right partners is widely viewed as a main prerequisite of successful collaboration (Dong & Glaister, 2006; Elmuti & Kathawala, 2001) and it has been studied by many researchers (Hertz, 2001; Hitt, Dacin, Levitas, Arregle, & Borza, 2000).

Another issue in selecting partners for collaboration is the difficulty for managers to make a rapid and effective decision regarding partner selection due to the limited information available about the potential partner (Bierly III and Gallagher, 2007). Therefore, it is important to investigate how ICT can help organisations to support partner selection, particularly in providing information and evaluating the criteria for partner selection. In order to understand how ICT can help organisations in the partner selection process, a number of ICT tools can be recommended to be used in the process. The following section describes the ICT tools available for the partner selection process. Partner selection for collaboration is a complex process. Even though a number of studies focus on partner selection criteria, there are gaps in the knowledge base relating to ICT tools that can be used by organisations to select suitable partners.

Table 1: Partner Selection Criteria

ID	Criteria	Number of authors mentioned about this criteria in their studies
1	Trust	21
2	Similarity in objectives	16
3	Commitment	10
4	Integrity	9
5	Contribution of complementary resources	15
6	Ability to share/learn the expertise/skill	3
7	Knowledge of host/local market	4
8	Record of pre-existing collaboration	9
9	Size	10
10	Management experience and attitude	7
11	Previous track record in collaborative projects	7
12	Previous track record in business	15
13	Experience in using technology application	6
14	Ability to negotiate with local/host government	4
15	Organisational cultural similarity	8

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

ICT is an impetus for the development of technology-based collaboration between organisations such as collaborative networks as it provides a conducive and supportive environment for organisations to work together (Joo, 2002; Rowe, Burn, & Walker, 2005). Organisations that are unable to adopt ICT in their inter-organisational collaboration will not gain competitive advantages. According to Andriessen (2003a), ICT tools can be categorised based on the basic interaction or group processes that the tools support. The interaction process categories are based on a previous study related to effective teams: communication, information/knowledge sharing, co-operation, co-ordination and group-oriented processes (Jahkola, 2013). In order to understand how ICT can help organisations in the partner selection process, a number of ICT tools are given in Table 2.

These processes are used to classify the ICT tools according to the group of tools: 1) communication systems, 2) co-operation systems, 3) co-ordination systems (including workflow management systems), 4) information sharing and consulting systems, and 5) tools to support social encounters (Andriessen, 2003). However, the present study adopted the modification of the categories as proposed by Jahkola (2013) by changing the fourth and five categories into "Information/Knowledge Sharing Systems" and "Group Maintenance Systems". The classification of ICT tools and examples of ICT tools for each group are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: ICT tools (adapted from Andriessen (2003b) and Jahkola (2013))

System	Description	Example
Communication	Technologies that provide and enable communication between geographically scattered people with low cost, easy and fast	Email, instant messaging, SMS, message board, phone, VOIP, teleconference, Web conferences
Information /knowledge sharing	Technologies that enable large amounts of data to be stored and retrieved quickly, reliably and cheaply	Document repositories, share points/intranet, Wiki, social media tools, newsletter/ mailing lists, blogs, FTP, CRM, SAP, network drives, document/screen applications for Web conferences
Co-ordination	Technologies that facilitate distributed teamwork with synchroniser to integrate the work processes of a team	Group calendar, workflow management system, project management tools
Co-operation	Technologies that provide document-sharing and co-authoring facilities in improving teamwork	Google Docs, Dropbox
Group maintenance	Technologies that enable geographically distributed teams to meet each other	Virtual world, skype

The classification of ICT tools as given by Andriessen (2003) was chosen in this study in order to investigate how ICT tools could accommodate partner selection criteria. In order to understand the role of ICT in the partner

selection criteria process, it is important to identify types of ICT tools that can be used to accommodate partner selection criteria. Consequently, the mixed methods approach has been designed to identify the important criteria in selecting partners followed by identifying ICT tools that could accommodate the selection. The following section describes about the methodology for this study,

METHODOLOGY

The proposed research design contained three main phases. A thorough literature review was conducted to identify the criteria in Phase I. The output of the literature review is a construction of a research model. The first phase is called ‘Partner Selection Criteria and Quantitative Online Survey’, and is the start of this research project. In order to find the criteria that were employed in partner selection in previous collaboration projects, a number of established journals and conference papers were collated. The selected criteria are used to design an online survey. The purpose of employing the online survey as a strategy of inquiry is to gather information about the important criteria for selecting partners in order to answer the first research question as mentioned above.

In Phase II of the project, case studies were conducted “to increase the in-depth understanding of the previous findings” (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989) due to limitations in the ability of the online survey to provide more detailed information about the importance of the partner selection criteria. During the interview sessions with the key person of each organisation, the participants described their work experience with their partners in particular collaboration projects and how ICT help them in selecting partner for collaboration to answer the second research question.

Phase III is ‘Interpretation’ in which the findings of the qualitative research are interpreted. By considering the results of the qualitative research, a research model of the partner selection process (i.e. the final output of this phase) is developed.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis of quantitative and qualitative research can be divided into two phases as given below.

Quantitative : Online Survey (Phase I)

At Phase I, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to gather information about the interrelationships among the variables. EFA was employed to reduce the number of related variables to a more manageable set and to reduce the dimensionality of the critical success factor set as a prelude to further analysis of the data. Results from the EFA were then used in the qualitative case studies. In other words, EFA was employed in this project to summarise the data by grouping the variables that are correlated (Pallant, 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). The findings of the quantitative online survey in Phase I help to provide an overall picture of the partner selection criteria. Table 3 shows the results of the factor analysis of partner selection criteria. The findings show that partner selection criteria can be grouped into three main factors: Attitude, Experience-Local Government and Track Record-Local Market. The first factor, Attitude, had high positive loadings on three criteria: commitment, integrity and trust. Attitude was interpreted as a selection criterion based on the attitude of the potential partner. The second factor, Experience-Local Government, had high positive loadings on two partner selection criteria: the ability to negotiate with local/host government, and management experience and attitude. The third factor, history-knowledge, had high positive loadings on two partner selection criteria: previous track record in business, and knowledge of the host/local market.

Table 3: Factor analysis of partner selection criteria

Variables	Factor 1: Attitude	Factor 2: Experi- ence-Local Gov- ernment	Factor 3: Track Record- Local Market
Trust	.825	.202	.233
Integrity	.938	.072	.147
Commitment	.918	-.012	.118
Ability to negotiate with local government	.219	.844	.206
Management experience and attitude	-.026	.910	.013
Previous track record in business	.056	-.053	.867
Knowledge of host/local market	.318	.086	.713
Cronbach’s alpha	0.904	0.743	0.641

However, due to limitations in the ability of the findings from the online survey to provide more detailed information about why these criteria are important to organisations, a qualitative approach using the interview technique to investigate ICT tools were then conducted.

Qualitative : Interviews (Phase II)

Seven criteria namely trust, integrity, commitment, management experience and attitude, ability to negotiate with local government, track record in business, and knowledge of local markets are discussed in-depth in conjunction with the reasons for the importance of each criterion and the indicators that can be used to identify these intangible criteria. The relationships between some sets of the criteria are also analysed and discussed. Previous research by Mat et al. (2010) identified the importance of each criteria in collaboration.

As mentioned previously, six organisations were involved in the interviews. According to all participants, ICT allowed them to communicate more effectively at low cost, and at the same time to increase the level of trust in prospective collaborators. Frequent communication with their potential partners using emails, video conferencing, webinar or Internet telephone services were one of the common ICT mediums used prior to establishing relationships in collaboration projects. Setting up an electronic forum between organisations and potential partners was also a method employed by organisations. Consequently, as this extract from an interview shows, it indirectly helps them to build up trust in their partners:

“Internet technologies can also help you to find more information about your potential partners and you might also find any other companies that had experience in collaboration projects with your potential partners. You can ask them about their past experience and see whether your potential partners are good partners or not. So I think it might help you to build your trust with your partners.” [ReseCo, Nov 2009].

However, the interviews revealed that the usage of ICT was limited to basic applications such as email or video conference. None of the participants mentioned the use of ranking systems or social networking applications to help them in building up or measuring trust in their potential partners. The findings will assist organisations by giving them meaningful information on how to measure or evaluate the intangible criteria and the sources which they can access to find information on the measured criteria. Table 4 shows the criteria and sources for evaluating those criteria. Most of the criteria were considered intangible criteria as they are recognised but not easily quantified.

However, two criteria, namely, the ability to negotiate with local government and knowledge of local markets, could not be related to any mechanism in this study. Even though these two criteria were important to most of the organisations, the participants could not name the mechanisms which their organisations can rely on to evaluate these criteria in their potential partners. This is due to the nature of these criteria, which is that they are difficult to evaluate or relate to any kind of tangible measure in the early stages of establishing relationships with partners. Rather, these criteria can only be confirmed once the parties are already engaged in collaboration.

Table 4 shows the sources of information that were mentioned by the participants during the interviews regarding the criteria for partner selection and the evaluation of prospective partners. As shown in the Table 4, two factors – namely, previous achievement/reputation/business performance, and company profile – were employed by all organisations at different levels of in measuring the criteria of trust, integrity, commitment, management experience and attitude, and track record in business. Interestingly, the findings show that the six indicated these sources were important to evaluate these criteria. Therefore, organisations could use these two sources to measure or evaluate all the five criteria at the same time.

The “gather/seek recommendations/reviews/references/comments/feedback from other organisations” mechanism was used by organisations as a strategy to measure all five criteria. Organisations could rely on this mechanism to identify the criteria. However, one organisation indicated that they used this mechanism to identify three criteria: trust, integrity, and track record in business. Organisations used this mechanism to identify an additional criterion, namely, management experience and attitude. The source therefore can be used to measure trust, integrity and track record in business.

Organisations used “years of involvement in business” as the information that can be used to evaluate the trustworthiness and track record of their potential partners. Organisation also employed the mechanism to measure the commitment of the partners. Signing an agreement was obviously also a useful mechanism for organisations to identify the trust and commitment of prospective partners. All organisations agreed that integrity can be evaluated by checking the accuracy of the information provided by potential partners. Effectiveness in performing the designed tasks was used by three organisations to evaluate the track record of potential partners. One organisation expressed the view that the information can also be used to evaluate the commitment of partners. This information provides a good solution for assessing the track record of possible partners and at the same time for evaluating the commitment of potential partners.

Table 4: Criteria for selecting partners and sources for evaluating the criteria

Source	Trust	Commitment	Integrity	Track record in business	Management experience and attitude
Look at previous achievement/reputation/business performance	√	√	√	√	√
Examine company profile	√	√	√	√	√
Gather/seek recommendations/reviews/ reference/ comments/ feedback from other organisations					
Consider years of involvement in industry/business	√	√		√	
Check correctness of information provided			√		
Make an agreement	√	√			
Check the effective performance of assigned tasks		√		√	
Look at increase in income over years		√			
Take into account the frequency and rapidity of responses or feedback		√			
Look at seriousness of management at the beginning of establishing relationship		√			
Look at annual sales report				√	
Ask for sales planning					√
Monitor performance		√			
Check documents					√

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study show that two sources of information that can be used to evaluate the five important criteria at one time. Consequently, an organisation's management can rapidly create a CN as they can use these two sources of information to measure the criteria. Simultaneously, the findings contribute to helping organisations reduce their time in finding the right partners to collaborate with them. The explosion of ICT as a new way of conducting business may introduce and require advanced ways of collaboration that may propose unique interdependencies between collaborators (Becket 2012). Consequently, trust is significantly emphasised in many studies (Beckett & Jones, 2011; Katri Nykänen, Westerlund, Rajala, & Järvensivu, 2009; Willem & Lucidarme, 2013). The integration of ICT tools for collaboration such as information sharing and streaming technology allow organisations to gain more valuable resources or information about their potential partners. For example, it can begin with sending an email to potential partners to find suitable partners to collaborate.

Table 4 shows the possible tools that can be provided by ICT in order to identify the trustworthiness of potential partners. As shown in Table 3, information that organisations need to know to assess trustworthiness can be investigated in various ways such as by 'looking at the previous achievement/reputation/business performance' of our potential partners. The suggestion for the possible use of ICT tools to get information about trustworthiness is by using search engines to find out any information regarding the previous record of achievement of potential partners. Moreover, other possible ICT tools such as websites or social media tools can also be sources of information to identify trustworthiness prior to establishing collaboration with potential partners. A mailing list is also a possible means to get to know about other organisations by reviewing their opinions or seeking recommendation from them regarding future partners.

Table 4: Source of information that can be provided by ICT tools to identify trustworthiness of potential partners

Information needed to identify the criteria	System	Possible ICT tool
Look at the previous achievement/reputation/ business performance	Information/ knowledge sharing (Communication)	Search engines, blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Examine company profile	Information/ knowledge sharing (Communication)	Blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Gather/seek recommendations/ review/ reference/comments/ feedback from other organisations	Information/ knowledge sharing	Sharepoints, social media tools
Consider years of involvement in industry/business	Information/ knowledge sharing (Communication)	Blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email

As presented in Table 5, a number of sources of information can be used to find out about the commitment of a potential partner, which are similar to the sources that can be used for the trust criteria such as ‘look at the previous achievement/reputation/business performance’, ‘examine company profile’, ‘gather/seek recommendation/review/reference/comments/feedback from other organisations’, ‘consider years of involvement in industry/business’ and ‘make an agreement’. Social media attracts hundreds of millions of users and can be used to communicate with employees, competitors, customers or clients for various purposes (Picazo-Vela, Gutiérrez-Martínez, & Luna-Reyes, 2012). Organisations may use social media to communicate with potential partners as well as to gather information about them. Then, they could set up a video conference meeting or webinar using streaming technology in order to know more about their potential partners. Organisations can also judge commitment by considering the frequency of responses/feedback by using ICT tools such as project management tools. Such tools allow organisations to create Gantt charts or work breakdown structures which are useful to check whether or not the given tasks are performed according to the scheduled time. These tools can be indirectly used to monitor performance which is another source of information that can be used to assess the commitment of future partners.

Table 5: Sources of information that can be provided by ICT tools to know about commitment of potential partner

Information need to identify the commitment criteria	Systems	Possible ICT tools
Look at the previous achievement/reputation/business performance	Information/ knowledge sharing Communication (email)	Search engine, blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Examine company profile	Information/ knowledge sharing Communication	Search engine, blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Gather/seek recommendations/ review/ reference/ comments/ feedback from other organisations	Information/knowledge sharing	Search engines, sharepoints, social media tools
Consider years of involvement in industry/business	Communication Information/ knowledge sharing	Email, blogs, social media, mailing list, website
Make an agreement	Co-operation	
Check the effectiveness performance of assigned tasks	Co-ordination	Workflow management system
Look at increase income over years	Co-operation	
Take into account the frequency and rapidity of responses or feedback	Information/ knowledge sharing	Document repositories
	Co-ordination	Project management tools,
	Co-operation	Google docs
Look at the seriousness of management at the beginning of establishing relationship	Communication	Email, web conference, webinar
	Co-ordination	Group calendar, workflow management
	Group maintenance	
Monitor performance	Co-ordination	Workflow management system

Table 6 shows the possibility of using ICT tools to identify the integrity of potential partners. These tools are similar to the tools used for commitment and trust. However, one unique source of information that can be used to identify integrity found in this study is ‘check correctness of information provided’. This can be performed by

using social media tools. LinkedIn is an example of a social networking tool which connects people in professional occupations. It allows people to build networks and connect with other professionals as well as to search for any organisations with similar interests. One of the benefits of LinkedIn is it allows other organisations to give recommendations and endorsements for the skills and past work that the organisations have performed. Organisations can also show projects or copies of work completed by adding links or images or other documents as evidence of the work. These information can be seen on an organisation’s profile in LinkedIn and shows that the organisations have other experts or organisations backing the organisation’s claims of their work. Therefore it helps other organisations to check accuracy of information provided by the organisations.

Table 6: Information that can be provided by ICT tools to identify the integrity of potential partners

Information needed to identify the criteria of integrity	Systems	Possible ICT tools
Look at the previous achievement/reputation/business performance	Information/knowledge sharing (Communication)	Blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Examine company profile	Information/ knowledge sharing (Communication)	Search engine, blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Gather/seek recommendations/review/reference/comments/ feedback from other organisations	Information/knowledge sharing	Search engine, sharepoints, social media tools,
Check correctness of information provided	Communication	Social media

Table 7 shows the tools that can be used to get information about the potential partners’ track record in business. It is also similar to the tools for the previously described criteria except for ‘look at annual sales report’. Organisations may use search engines to find out information about the annual sales reports of their potential partners or it can be performed by referring to documents that are kept in a shared virtual place such as in Sharepoint or collaboration tools that allow organisations to share an entire folder or folders. Organisations can create workspaces for different projects and share the workspace with other organisations. Consequently, it makes file sharing easy and provides a collaborative environment for similar documents in real-time and get prompt feedback on document changes.

Table 7: Information that can be provided by ICT tools to identify the track record of potential partners

Information needed to identify the criteria of track record	Systems	Possible ICT tool
Look at the previous achievement/reputation/ business performance	Information/ knowledge sharing (Communication)	Search engines, blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Examine company profile	Information/ knowledge sharing (Communication)	Blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Gather/seek recommendations/review/reference/comments/ feedback from other organisations	Information/ knowledge sharing (Group maintenance)	Sharepoints, social media tools, Group maintenance
Consider years of involvement in industry/business	Communication Information/ knowledge sharing	Email, blogs, social media, mailing list, website
Check the effectiveness performance of assigned tasks	Co-ordination	Workflow management system
Look at annual sales report	Information/ knowledge sharing	Search engine, website, document repositories

Table 8 shows the sources of information that can be provided by ICT tools in order to identify the experience and attitude of management of their potential partners. There are two unique information sources that can be used for this criterion, namely, ‘ask for sales planning’ and ‘check documents’. Organisations may share their documents in Sharepoint for example in order to exchange the required documents. Every organisation will get the same updated documents or files. Organisations are also able to read or check public documents such as annual reports that are kept in document repositories and are opened for other organisations to access in order to identify the experience and attitudes of their future partners.

Table 8: ICT tools to identify management experience and attitudes of potential partners

Information needed to identify the criteria of management experience and attitude	Systems	Possible ICT tools
Look at the previous achievement/reputation/business performance	Information/knowledge sharing (Communication)	Blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Examine company profile	Information/knowledge sharing (Communication)	Blogs, social media, mailing list, website, email
Gather/seek recommendations/review/reference/comments/ feedback from other organisations	Information/ knowledge sharing	Sharepoints, social media tools,
Ask for sales planning	Information/ knowledge sharing	Sharepoints
Check documents	Information/ knowledge sharing	Document repositories

Collaboration among business organisations creates a unique environment for organisations to establish new relationship with partners. Besides this, in the case of companies with limited resources such as SMEs, through collaboration they can capture market share that would otherwise be impossible if they were operating on their own. However, they need to be selective in choosing the right partners as the partner characteristics have a great impact on organisations' performance. Consequently, the partner selection process is significantly important to organisations to ensure the success of collaboration by gaining more advantages and creating more value from the collaboration. The integration of ICT tools to evaluate the characteristics or criteria of potential partners needs to be considered by organisations as it could help managers to efficiently and effectively make decisions to select the suitable partners.

FURTHER WORK AND CONCLUSION

Future work of this study will expand the findings to design a model that could help organisations in selecting the appropriate partner for collaboration. This study has identified a number of partner selection criteria for collaboration and the usage of ICT in helping organisations to select partners based on the criteria. ICT applications such as social media have a significant impact on helping organisations to form collaboration by providing information to evaluate the partner selection criteria and will continue to do so. ICT tools were only relevant in five of the seven partner selection criteria to gather further information on the partner selection criteria. These criteria were 'trust', 'commitment', 'integrity', 'track record in business' and 'management experience and attitude'. By integrating social media in the establishment of a CN, it will be at a distinct advantageous position in the market. Popular social media sites disseminate up-to-the-minute information which help organisations to gain rapid insight into the collaborative environment. In conclusion, it is clear that, in the competitive market, the process of identifying and acquiring suitable new business partners has become more and more crucial. By integrating ICT in the early stages of establishing CNs, managers could select more suitable and compatible partners to collaborate with. Organisations can also quickly form a CN when they have a standard for evaluation of partner selection criteria. As a result, the findings presented help reduce the time organisations spend in deciding which partners to collaborate with.

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