

Chapter 11

Knowledge Sharing in Distributed Teams: Influence of National and Organizational Culture

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ABSTRACT

Recent trends in the world economy, including globalization and advances in ICTs and social media, have enabled networking as a business model. As a result, distributed teams have emerged. This chapter provides a basis for discussion and analysis of knowledge sharing between distributed team members working in a global context in different organizational and national cultures. Cultural dynamics influencing knowledge sharing in different cultural settings is examined by investigating the different cultural values and perceptions related to knowledge sharing. The aims are to make the human and cultural dynamics that bear on knowledge sharing and knowledge management success more explicit. The use of the cultural and organizational diversity evaluation (CODE) model is proposed for assessing the fit between national and organizational culture. The objective of using the CODE model is to raise awareness of the cultural values and attitudes in distributed teams and to help ensure an effective quality management process, and foster a knowledge sharing culture within distributed teams.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive global business environment there is a push for organizations to produce innovative products and services for survival, growth, and sustainability. At the same time processes need to be innovative and to promote knowledge sharing in order to keep costs down and to improve productivity. Increasingly large numbers of organizations use distributed teams in their international operations.

Knowledge is an important competitive factor and one of the most valuable strategic assets of businesses. If knowledge is considered a critical resource and an important tool for competition in the global market, then it demands a good process for acquiring, sharing and managing knowledge. Many organizations are struggling to comprehend the Knowledge Management (KM) concept and do not perform any KM activity (Holsapple & Joshi, 2002). In a global context the problem is intensified due to the distance and the fact that people rarely meet. Metaxiotis et al. (2005) assert that the primary objectives of KM are to identify and leverage the collective knowledge in an organization in order to achieve the overriding goal of supporting the organization to compete and survive.

In order to increase competitiveness in the global market place distributed teams, such as dispersed knowledge workers of multinational organizations, service providers and clients in outsourcing partnerships, and partners of joint ventures, need to improve their knowledge in order to gain competitive advantage. Although the field is under-researched, scholars have started to pay attention to global and cultural dynamics influencing the KM process (Holden, 2001; Bhagat et al., 2002; Siakas & Georgiadou, 2006; Ang & Massingham, 2007; Ai-Alawi et. al, 2007; Siakas & Siakas, 2008; Siakas, et al., 2010; Melon et al., 2016; Al-Busaidi & Ohlman, 2017; Paliszkiewicz et al, 2017).

The aim of this paper is to unfold the human and cultural challenges that can help understand and address cultural disparities, and help in creating added competitive value for distributed and networked organizations and teams. The main contribution is the analysis of the cultural dynamics influencing knowledge sharing in different cultural settings. The CODE model and associated tool is proposed to be used for assessing the fit between national and organizational culture in order to raise awareness of the cultural values and potential conflicts arising from differences.

BACKGROUND

In today's highly competitive and rapidly changing global environment an increasing amount of distributed teams are formed in order to gain access to world class capabilities, reduce costs and integrate diverse perspectives (Siakas & Balstrup, 2006). Distributed teams, by their very nature, imply the presence of a group of geographically dispersed individuals often from different cultural, educational and professional backgrounds. They work within a specific time frame on a joint project or common task originating from collaboration between subsidiaries in multinational organization, between customers and service providers in outsourcing relationships, between members of joint ventures or other types of global partnerships. The distributed team is comprised of experts and staff usually situated in different locations, organizations, countries and time zones. Distributed teams consist of goal oriented team members / knowledge workers, who collaborate towards a shared goal (Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; Handy, 2000; Mansour-Cole, 2001), more apart than in same location. Distributed team members are dispersed geographically and

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