Chapter 26
The Influence of National and Organisational Culture on Knowledge Sharing in Distributed Teams

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive business environment increasingly large numbers of organisations use distributed teams in their international operations. This paper provides a basis for discussion and analysis of knowledge sharing between distributed team members working in a global context in different organisational and national cultures. Examining the different cultural values and perceptions related to knowledge sharing, the authors aim at making more explicit the human and cultural dynamics that bear on knowledge sharing and knowledge management success. A lifecycle for knowledge creation and sharing is discussed. The use of Cultural and Organisational Diversity Evaluation (CODE) is proposed for assessing the fit between national and organisational culture. The objective of using the CODE model is to raise awareness of the cultural values and attitudes in distributed teams and in combination with the life-cycle to ensure an effective process quality management and foster a knowledge sharing culture within distributed team members.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent trends in the world economy, including globalisation of markets and technology supply, networking as business models and technologies enabling distance mode of working, have increased the complexity and competition level of organisations (Siakas et al., 2012). There is a push for organisations to produce innovative products and services for survival, sustainability and growth. At the same time processes need to be innovative and to promote knowledge sharing in order to keep costs down and to improve productivity.

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 and good management. Many organisations are still 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 seldom meet. Today the primary objectives of KM are to identify and leverage the collective knowledge in an organisation to achieve the overriding goal of helping organisations compete and survive. The emphasis should be on the link between knowing and action (Metaxiotis et al., 2005).

In order to increase competitiveness in the global market place distributed teams, such as dispersed knowledge workers of multinational organisations, service providers and clients in outsourcing partnerships and partners of joint ventures need to improve their knowledge 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 (Siakas & Siakas, 2008; Al-Alawi et. al, 2007; Ang & Massingham, 2007; Siakas & Georgiadou, 2006, Bhagat et al., 2002, Holden, 2001).

The complexity of the field and the many sciences involved call for particular caution. Organisations in the new knowledge-based global economy place great importance on creation, use and distribution of information and knowledge by focusing on maintaining and enhancing their knowledge capital. The ability of organisations to learn, adapt and change has become a core competency for their survival. Successful organisations are those that create new knowledge, disseminate it throughout the organisation and swiftly embody it into new products and services.

The main contribution of this paper is the analysis of the cultural dynamics influencing knowledge sharing in different cultural settings. CODE is proposed for assessing the fit between national and organisational culture in order to raise awareness of the cultural values and a lifecycle is proposed for knowledge creation and sharing aiming to ensure an effective process quality management and to foster a knowledge sharing culture within distributed team members.

DISTRIBUTED TEAMS

In today's highly competitive and rapidly changing global environment more and more organisations strive to form distributed teams in order to gain access to world class capabilities to reduce costs and to 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 (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999).

Teamwork is essentially a result of human interaction. Distributed teams consist of people who primarily interact electronically and collaborate from different locations using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The team members may meet face-to-face occasionally and in some