

Chapter 12

India to China – Repurposing Learning Software across Cultures: Positioning an E-Learning Framework of a Technical Library Program for Success

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study follows an international e-learning software development project between the India and China Technology Centers of the largest independent software company in the world. The case presents many of the major intercultural project challenges that can typically arise in an information technology workplace. This example focuses on the customization and deployment of an e-learning framework supporting online and physical libraries of technical publications. This library forms an integral component of blended e-learning solutions for the technical workforce. The case uses a running narrative, project artifacts, e-mails, and team debriefings. Students will encounter reflective questioning and be given the opportunity to recognize key milestones and strategies that they might consider adopting when working with intercultural, virtual teams in their professional careers.

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ORGANIZATIONAL AND SITUATIONAL BACKGROUND

What if you develop something at work that is a smashing success? So successful that executives take note and ask you to repurpose it for use by other offices at thousands of miles away? This is the case study of a component of a blended e-learning solution: a software development project that created an online library application, originally built for the world's largest independent software development companies' technology centers in Hyderabad, India (ITC). This chapter traces the adoption, development, management, and transfer of this application as a volunteer effort to another of the company's technology centers in Beijing, China (China Technology Center, or CTC). These offices had a different operations support structure, a different first language, and were multiple time zones away.

The teamwork, camaraderie, troubleshooting, and workarounds for significant information technology obstacles were considerable for these two teams. Underlying this effort was coordination through the United States' resulting in a project team distributed through 12 time zones, volunteering their time, communicating to others whose first language was different than their own, and multitasking between a myriad of projects. However, the teams championed the project through to completion. This chapter presents the actual project artifacts that bear witness to that camaraderie, the thoughts of the main developer and director of the ITC and CTC while reflecting and debriefing project, and some best collaborative practices learned when positioning and executing a global project that involved the repurposing of proprietary software between cultures.

The existing ITC's library is a physical space on the Hyderabad campus. Figure 1 illustrates the opening screen of the application, showing its operating hours, designated librarian, and borrowing policies.

SETTING THE STAGE: SCOPE OF THE PROJECT AND ITC'S LIBRARY SYSTEM APPLICATION

The library is administered by the ITC Employee Education team, which developed the requirements for the application and created it through an onsite, internal software development team. The library is highly used and referenced as a part of blended e-learning solutions to enable the technical workforce. The function of the library software touched a real need for software developers: much of the ever-changing knowledge base of software development is quickly published as text books or self-paced instruction guides, which are costly and quickly outdated. For many years very few soft copies (downloadable copies of books available in electronic form) were ever produced as the traditional book market, driven by competitive technical marketplace need, had been lucrative. This model is being driven out, however, by the growing market for hand-held, digital readers and downloadable books.

Learning roadmaps found on a learning management system frequently recommend books as part of a blended learning solution. Developers taking e-learning would purchase a book, go through it, and then place it in a drawer to be forgotten was not proving to be an effective or efficient model. With the electronic library software, one book, if centrally located, could be accessed by many going through the same e-learning blended solution. Access to books could also be tracked by looking at the borrower history of any volume. Stocking would be no problem: many books were already available as previous acquisitions. The purchase of new or previously used books could be forecast and built into budgets and balanced with business need. Everything seemed to fit except there was no commercially available software designed for corporate libraries that would fit that need.

The ITC contracted the internal development team to create an e-learning software solution that would allow a developer to register, borrow, request,

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