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Project Knowledge Management: A Case Study of IT Offshoring between Japan and China

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Over the last 20 years, IT technology development and Internet expansion have reduced informational imbalance. With the growing popularity of globalization, the knowledge society has also globalized. The way of working in organizations has been becoming task-based in projects in response to diverse situations, which necessitates an increase in project management. Reflecting on this trend, we propose a theoretical model for knowledge management in offshoring projects from a cross-cultural perspective.

A literature review is presented to describe unexplored areas of knowledge management, project management, and cross-cultural knowledge management. A case study is conducted for one global IT company that has worldwide subsidiaries, including Japan and Shenzhen, China. Data was collected by questionnaires and interviews with members of the Japan and China departments. The results were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed as a triangulation of data and methods.

From the results of the analyses, we found three major findings: i) Empirical knowledge of project management was created through the joint project activities between Japan and China in the company. The knowledge processes of “Notice,” “Clarify,” and “Share” were repeated for each project, respectively, and new knowledge creation spiraled. ii) “Notice,” which represents personal knowledge, was transformed to group knowledge, and then the group knowledge was transformed to organizational knowledge. iii) Through the knowledge creation process, the knowledge management styles were different between the Japan and China departments. Knowledge management style consists of *Ba*, knowledge management strategies and ontological levels of knowledge, and was found to be influenced by national culture.

From the literature review and analyses, we present the Triple-C Model of Knowledge Management in IT Offshoring Projects as a theoretical implication. This model focuses on three points. i) It consists of three phases: “*cognition*,” “*clarification*,” and “*cumulation*.” ii) Explicit and tacit knowledge exist in each of the three phases. iii) It has multi-layered ontological levels of knowledge, such as the individual, group, and organization. Individual knowledge is created in the *cognition* phase. Group knowledge is additionally created in the *clarification* phase. Organizational knowledge is created in the *cumulation* phase along with these two knowledge levels.

This theoretical model explains the process of knowledge creation in offshoring projects from a cross-cultural perspective between high- and low-context cultures. This is a collaborative model of knowledge management in a project-based organization, as opposed to an independent model for each context group. With the spiral of these three phases, common understanding gradually emerges along with global value through the cumulation of local knowledge resulting into achievement and accumulation of phronesis.

Conclusively, we have suggestions for future research; specifically, further studies are needed in other cases involving high- and low-context cultures to examine this theoretical model. Further study of cultural influences on offshoring projects is required to contribute to an effective application of the model for international business projects.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Project Management, Cross-Cultural Management, IT Offshoring, Knowledge Management Style, Common Understanding