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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

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Abstract

The importance of knowledge management has intensified as globalization has become more prevalent in the business world. Globalization has led to a dispersion of general knowledge, clusters of specific knowledge, and numerous cultural differences in organizations. Organizations that implement effective knowledge management systems have the ability to leverage knowledge-based assets that can lead to increased organizational performance. Cultural differences are central to knowledge management because an organization's culture shapes the assumptions about what knowledge is, what knowledge is worth managing, and how knowledge is created, legitimized, and distributed. However, much of the conceptualization of knowledge management is still Western centered.

This paper posits that by understanding the best fit of organizational culture to knowledge management methods, organizations will have a greater opportunity to implement effective knowledge management systems. Specifically, we introduce several propositions relating cultural fit, as understood by Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions, to knowledge management strategies, as outlined in Earl's Knowledge Management Taxonomy (2001). Several organizations are identified that exhibit various knowledge management strategies and several countries are identified for each cultural dimension to show how these categorizations relate to the real business world.

If organizational success is important to managers in this age of globalization, they must recognize how culture affects the way people share knowledge. Using our framework, executives and managers can encourage the development of knowledge management systems that take cultural dimensions into consideration and promote a higher degree of knowledge sharing. The propositions presented in this paper also help to illustrate how each cultural dimension is not limited to a best fit with only one knowledge management school but can fit well with several of the schools. This allows for more flexibility in creating knowledge management systems in diverse cultural settings. Different mixes of approaches may be needed for organizations that span across countries with significantly different cultures

Future research is needed to test our propositions in organizational settings. Since the Earl Knowledge Management Taxonomy is based on observations of current organizations, these organizations would be a natural setting for ongoing research. Studying international organizations would also be beneficial, since they would allow the comparison of common company strategies operating under different cultural dimensions. Lastly, longitudinal qualitative studies would be valuable since they could lead to a greater understanding of how the best fit between various cultures and knowledge management schools can contribute to a sustained competitive advantage.

References

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