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CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING MANAGEMENT DIFFERENCES IN INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

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This paper provides an approach to helping participants and stakeholders in international projects understand and appreciate the specific management and organisation related issues that occur in this type of project. A holistic approach to understanding and communicating the management issues relating to projects in an international environment is discussed. This approach takes account of the different internal and external factors, which may also effect the management of this type of project.

With the continuing moves towards free trade between nations, such as within the European Union, there is a greater incentive for organisations to undertake international projects. The current trend towards the merging of large international organisations also provides opportunities for different nations to work collaboratively together in the new organisations, within a project environment.

Nations working together often have different approaches to managing and working. The differences can be found in a number of business areas, including: management style, empowerment, culture and risk perception. These can provide significant benefits to projects, including:

- ✉ Providing novel approaches to resolving problems
- ✉ Utilising different perspectives and experiences
- ✉ Providing additional insights into cultural and language issues
- ✉ Using different work patterns and approaches to work

However, in reality, there can also be distinct differences in the way organisations from the various nations work. The differences in the way nations work are often more noticeable when undertaking, long term, international collaborative projects. A good understanding of the differences and their influence on management is necessary for any business involving more than one nation.

A survey, by the Author, investigated some of the differences regarding perception, management and communications within international projects. The survey comprised a series of semi-structured interviews, conducted at various European locations, with business travellers directly involved with international projects.



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Analysis of the survey indicated that the different management approaches of nations can be a direct cause of problems in international projects. The research also indicated that problems in communicating these management problems can compound the difficulties in understanding them. The survey findings are supported by personal experiences and related literature. A number of factors were identified, which could contribute to these practical problems, including:

- ✦ Language and comprehension
- ✦ Differences in organisation and management methods
- ✦ Differences in hierarchy and levels of empowerment
- ✦ Cultural differences at work
- ✦ Differences in approaches to managing risks
- ✦ Differences in communications technology and usage preferences

Within international projects, there is a need for participants and stakeholders to understand these differences at an early stage. This will allow them to be taken into account when developing the project. There is also a need for appropriate mechanisms to be established in order to assess and minimise any difficulties relating to the management approaches of nations. These will also provide additional help and guidance to participants.

This paper provides a framework to help identify the issues relating to the understanding of national differences in management styles that may actually be encountered in international projects. The framework includes approaches used to:

- ✦ Identify management differences which influence international projects
- ✦ Prepare appropriate project management procedures
- ✦ Provide efficient communications to participants and stakeholders
- ✦ Ensure appropriate monitoring and reporting within the project

Methods of overcoming some of the problems, resulting from differences in management styles of nations, are also provided. Some of these methods have been developed from personal experiences and encounters with international projects. The methods provided utilise a combination of soft systems and international management techniques, together with adaptations of project management techniques.

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