Review article

Richa Thapliyal[1], Vjay Paul[2], Dr. Mandakini Sharma[3]

[1]HSS, Graphic Era Deemed to be University, Dehradun,
[2]HSS Graphic Era Deemed to be University, Dehradun,
[3]Associate Professor, Department of Visual Arts, Graphic Era Hill University

ABSTRACT

The role of cultural differences in IT project management is being elaborated in the study. In the study, a case study (DB case study) example has been discussed which relates to a failed IT project conducted in Taiwan by an Australian project team. Based on a case analysis by the students pursuing a course in MIS project management in a popular UAE national university, cultural differences are being identified which may be particularly relevant for projects in the Middle East region.

Keywords: Jewels, T., & Albon, R. Implications of cultural differences in international projects.

INTRODUCTION

Bibliography

Jewels, T., & Albon, R. Implications of cultural differences in international projects.

Article Summary

The role of cultural differences in IT project management is being elaborated in the study. In the study, a case study (DB case study) example has been discussed which relates to a failed IT project conducted in Taiwan by an Australian project team. Based on a case analysis by the students pursuing a course in MIS project management in a popular UAE national university, cultural differences are being identified which may be particularly relevant for projects in the Middle East region.

Assumption

The study rests on the assumption that cultural differences have an important role in determining the success or failure of management projects.

Participants

Students pursuing an MIS project management course in a popular UAE-based university are being chosen as respondents.

Measures

Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) are being invoked for the present purpose -power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity

and time horizon. Further, selected dimensions applicable to the Middle East (musayara, social collaboration, high & low context, monochromic & polychromic time, linguistic relativity, ethnocentrism, communication patterns) are being analyzed at length in the study.

Hypothesis
Hypotheses have not been spelt-out in detail but it is clear that the study seeks to probe the extent to which cultural differences impact the performance of projects in a typical corporate setting.

Design
The study is a qualitative one wherein a case study (DB case study) is being discussed and deliberated at length by the students enrolled in a UAE-based university.

Procedure
A case study (DB case study) was selected and while the students of an MIS project management course were familiarized with it in their class, they were required to assess the extent to which the Middle East cultural forces impact the performance of projects in a corporate setting. Students were asked to relate the case study in their own cultural setting and provide their responses. Students were required to provide written narratives and thus, two data sets were generated over a period of 2 years. Out of 100 responses, 60 were considered usable.

Analysis
With the help of two datasets, content analysis was done and significant words and phrases were identified. Based on the observations of the students, ten issues were identified (employee manager relationship, socially collaborative society, gender, culture, outsourcing, contract, executive support, management style, wasta, language).

Results
Issues such as contractual obligations, working conditions and working styles, communication patterns and management decision-making were identified as determining factors while operating in a multi-cultural corporate setting.

Discussion
From the case study, ten themes were derived which underscored the impact of cultural differences in management of projects. Content analysis of students' narratives showed that cultural implications in the Middle East are peculiar in a corporate setting:

a. The relationship between employee and manager is based on 'musayara' which calls for honoring the superior's commands.
b. UAE favors a socially collaborative society being a high-context society.
c. Gender has a specific role in the UAE society and it impacts functioning in corporate settings.
d. Culture: Long working hours are unwelcome in Muslim cultures. Also, there is more concern for looking after people (sociability) than caring about the task itself (solidarity).
e. Outsourcing: For handling management projects in the UAE, it is important to secure outside support in the form of consultants and experts.

f. Contract: It was underlined by the respondents that contracts should be respected and initial negotiations should be solidly founded.

g. Executive support: UAE has a more supportive culture in terms of the support from the government to the newer companies and projects.

h. Management style: Management practices following the Muslim culture evince characteristics of a theory X in place of Y (McGregor, 1960).

i. Wasta: With nepotism and favoritism rampant in the UAE, incompetent people may be employed in critical positions. Therefore, this cultural issue was considered important in determining project performance.

j. Language: While language barriers are not an issue in the UAE, lack of a suitable software compatible in Arabic setting is a major problem.

Limitations

The study identifies that sampling frame as one of the limitations because it is conceded that project managers might serve as better respondents than the students themselves.

Conclusions

The study provided a glimpse of the factors which might influence a corporate setting with employees hailing from multi-cultural backgrounds. In the present case, with the help of a case study analysed by students of a UAE-based university, it was suggested that cultural influences play a dominant role in determining the performance of management projects.

Article Evaluation

Importance of Problem Investigated

The problem investigated in the case holds merit because cultural differences hold significance in determining the project performance.

Review of Literature

Literature was reviewed adequately. Invoking theoretical edifice of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2005), the study was able to substantiate the key research question pertaining to the extent to which cultural differences influence the performance of a management project. Cultural differences have been known to be determining dimensions in impacting organizational performance (Moberg & Leasher, 2011; Nguyen & Aoyama, 2015; Stehle & Erwee, 2007; Yi, Ribbens, Fu & Cheng, 2015).

Hypotheses

The study did not provide any clear delineation of research hypotheses. However, the problem statement was amply clear.

Objectives

The study had outlined clear objective of probing the extent to which Muslim cultural setting might impact management project performance given the multi-cultural work operations.

Participants
Students pursuing an MIS project management course are selected as respondents. Overall, 100 students were chosen over a period of two years and 60 responses were found to be usable.

Instruments
While keeping Hofstede's cultural dimensions as the base, ten cultural factors which were especially relevant for Muslim cultures were identified. However, it would have been appropriate if the rationale behind the identification of the ten cultural factors was also provided.

Procedure and Design
Over a period of two years, responses in the form of written narratives from students pursuing a course in MIS Project management in a UAE-based university were picked. Overall, responses from 100 respondents were taken and 60 usable responses were content-analyzed to identify ten relevant themes holding relevance for Muslim cultural dimensions. However, it is important that details regarding case length and discussion be provided in the research design. Readers would be interested in knowing the manner in which narratives were collected and analyzed. Further, readers would be interested in knowing if the content analysis was done with the help of a qualitative software or otherwise.

Analysis
Analysis of the data sets was done adequately. The themes identified were well-elaborated and linked with the responses.

Findings
The study provided an elaborate account of the findings.

Discussion (Conclusions and Recommendations)
Although there are no separate sections on "discussion" and "recommendations" in the study, the "summary of findings" section is well-done. It would be appropriate if a section on "recommendations" be included wherein practical and academic implications are discussed. Finally, the study has not discussed the "limitations" and an independent section is required for the same. While the study points out that the selection of students as respondents is one of the possible drawbacks of the research design, there are other limitations regarding the selection of the ten cultural themes which may not be exhaustive.

Overall Critique
The study threw light on the possible cultural implications for a project management in a typical Muslim-cultural backdrop by soliciting responses from students of a UAE-based university. The study was grounded in sound evidences and the results were well-illustrated. There is immense potential in improvisation as far as the study is concerned. Besides detailing the sampling frame, it is important to align the ten cultural themes within a modular framework. Besides, it is significant to appreciate the details regarding the academic and managerial implications of the study.

References:

1. Hofstede, G., & Hofstede, G. J. 2005. *Cultures and organizations-Software of the mind*. New York: McGraw Hill.
2. McGregor, D. 1960. *The human side of enterprise*. New York (NY): McGraw-Hill.
3. Moberg, C.R., & Leasher, M. 2011. Examining the differences in salesperson motivation among different cultures. *American Journal of Business*, 26(2), pp.145-160.
4. Nguyen ,N.T.D., & Aoyama , A. 2015. The impact of cultural differences on technology transfer: Management practice moderation. *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*, 26(7), pp.926 – 954.
5. Stehle, W., & Erwee, R. 2007. Cultural differences influencing German HR policies in Asia. *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, 2(1), pp.34 - 47.
6. Yi, X. , Ribbens, B., Fu L., & Cheng, W. 2015. Variation in career and workplace attitudes by generation, gender, and culture differences in career perceptions in the United States and China. *Employee Relations*, 37(1), pp.66 – 82.