



CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Knowledge Management

Edited by David J. Pauleen

Libraries Unlimited Knowledge Management Series

Danny Wallace, Series Editor



A Member of the Greenwood Publishing Group

Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cross-cultural perspectives on knowledge management / edited by David J. Pauleen.
p. cm. — (Libraries Unlimited knowledge management series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-59158-331-4 (alk. paper)

1. Knowledge management. 2. Corporate culture. I. Pauleen, David, 1957-
HD30.2.C78 2007

658.4'038—dc22 2006028274

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Copyright © 2007 by Libraries Unlimited

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2006028274

ISBN: 1-59158-331-4

First published in 2007

Libraries Unlimited, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

A Member of the Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.lu.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Foreword</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
SECTION 1: CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT	1
1 Exploring the Relationship between National and Organizational Culture, and Knowledge Management <i>David J. Pauleen, Ling-Ling Wu, and Sally Dexter</i>	3
2 Culture: An Overlooked Key to Unlocking Organizational Knowledge <i>Robert Mason</i>	21
3 The Art of Systems: The Cognitive-Aesthetic Culture of Portal Cities and the Development of Meta-Cultural Advanced Knowledge Economies <i>Peter Murphy</i>	35
SECTION 2: EFFECTS OF CULTURE ON KEY ASPECTS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT	65
4 Cultural Stretch: Knowledge Transfer and Disconcerting Resistance to Absorption and Application <i>Gerhard Fink and Nigel Holden</i>	67

5	From Concept to Context: Toward Social-Cultural Awareness and Responsibility in the Organization of Knowledge <i>Chern Li Liew</i>	81
6	Managing Innovative Knowledge: Cultural Perspectives on Patenting <i>Chad Saunders and Mike Chiasson</i>	95
7	The Influence of National Culture on Knowledge Management in Virtual Teams <i>Doug Vogel, Anne-Francoise Rutkowski, and Michiel van Genuchten</i>	111
8	People's Twist: The Cultural Standard of Loyalty and Performance in Former Socialist Economies <i>Gerhard Fink and Maren Lehmann</i>	135
SECTION 3: RESEARCH AND CASES ON CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT		155
9	Institutional and Cultural Influences on Knowledge Sharing in Russia and China <i>Kate Hutchings and Snejina Michailova</i>	157
10	Asian Organizations Meet North American Management Theory: The Case of Singapore and Senge <i>Kala S. Retna and Jane E. Bryson</i>	175
11	The Peruvian Asparagus Cluster: Realizing Profitability from Social Capital and Shared Knowledge Management in a Traditionally Low-Trust Environment <i>Luis S. Chang</i>	195
12	Research and Development Knowledge Transfer across National Cultures <i>Marjolyn S. W. Thiessen, Paul H. J. Hendriks, and Caroline Essers</i>	219
	<i>Afterword</i>	245
	<i>Index</i>	249
	<i>About the Editor and Contributors</i>	255

List of Figures

1.1	Culture, values, attitudes, and behaviors (Adler 2002)	8
1.2	Extending Adler's model to the level of organizations, groups, and teams	9
1.3	KM model emphasizing the development of knowledge sharing behavior	12
1.4	National culture, organizational culture, and KM	13
5.1	Klemke's context typology	86
5.2	Structure of a cross-contextual knowledge organization system	90
7.1	Significant attitude change between the pre-test and post-test on the item "Any kind of relationship had to be structured hierarchically to obtain harmony" on a 5-point scale (From -2 = Strongly Disagree to +2 = Strongly Agree)	121
7.2	Convergence between the pre-test and post-test on the item "How much is the presence of a leader in the group required?" on a 10-point scale, from 1 = not at all, to 10 = very much	122
11.1	The Road to Frío Aéreo	211
12.1	Knowledge transfer model	227
12.2	Indicators of the impact of national culture on knowledge transfer	228
12.3	National cultures of the Netherlands, the United States, and India	233

List of Tables

5.1	Selected definitions of knowledge	86
7.1	Synchronous versus asynchronous communication activities	115
7.2	Experience of HK and Dutch respondents	119
7.3	Expected and encountered problems	120
7.4	Pre- and post-test characterization rankings	124
7.5	Between and within nationality comparisons on the item “leadership”	126
11.1	Culture and progress	197
12.1	The knowledge transfer cultures at Akzo Nobel Car Refinishes R&D units	235
12.2	Assessment of cultural differences and their impact on cross-cultural R&D knowledge transfer at Akzo Nobel Car Refinishes	237

Foreword

What is knowledge management? To keep it simple, we could say “making sure you know what you need to,” where *you* refers to some group or organization that manages knowledge. Usually it is a company, but it could be a scientific community, or any other social entity, so let us use the word *organization* for now. In order to manage knowledge, the organization needs two things: a memory and means of communicating the knowledge.

Knowledge management has been used as a synonym for information management. In this case it usually revolves around the use of technology, both “memory” and communication technologies. For others, knowledge management means the management of practices—and, by extension, people—in the organization. This means that learning, rather than technology, takes centre stage. The emphasis rests on managing organizational practice in such a way that people can learn what they need to know from one another. According to either school, communication between people is a crucial aspect of knowledge management.

In its emphasis on communication, knowledge management is similar to culture, if we define *culture* as the set of implicit rules for the social game. Culture in this sense would refer to the management of the tacit knowledge of a group of people. This is the knowledge that specifies, for instance, when to see others as friends, competitors, enemies, or potential loved ones, and how to treat them accordingly. Groups that have culture in this sense range from teams to societies. Very few people have explicit knowledge of their culture; they take it for granted. This can happen even to those who are aware that faraway people have different cultures. To accept that we are culturally embedded ourselves can be even more difficult than to accept that others are.

If we accept that the notions of culture and knowledge management are similar in their focus on communication, there is no escaping the idea that knowledge management as a conscious activity must build on the sort of implicit rules of the game set by culture. This book addresses a number of issues that come to the fore when one considers

knowledge management as a culturally contingent activity. For instance, the very idea that knowledge can be managed as an asset separate from relationships between people is alien to most cultures in the world. Knowledge is always related to a person you have a relationship with, and any other knowledge is simply not relevant. As a consequence, to anybody who wishes to be socially visible, knowing people is still far more important than knowing the sort of things that are usually called “knowledge.”

“Making sure you know what you need to” is dependent on culture in many ways. In most countries, some knowledge that might be very relevant is not managed because nobody could profit by doing so, or because powerful groups might take offence. In some cases the state itself acts as a censor. There may be limited communication between groups or between hierarchical levels. Organizations all over the world have a tendency to inherit the knowledge management mechanisms that prevail in other institutions of their society, such as the family and the state. Did you learn that it was wise to keep your mouth shut in front of your father? This is a lesson about hierarchy. You will probably do the same later, with your boss—despite knowledge sharing programs.

Knowledge management is often formally undertaken in order to support innovation. But it is by no means a precondition for innovation that all members of the organization be engaged in knowledge management. Asian tiger countries have achieved tremendous growth and innovation while maintaining very authoritarian business models. When one looks at knowledge management across cultures, it turns out that one size does not fit all.

This volume brings together a very readable collection of chapters that tackle the connections between culture and knowledge management from various perspectives. They are very different. Some I found creative, others thorough, most of them insightful; but every one was well worth reading. Together, they include many parts of the world and illustrate what I have just put forward—that knowledge management in its many facets is intimately connected to culture. I am pleased to be able to invite you, the reader, to enjoy this timely and important volume.

*Professor Gert Jan Hofstede
Associate professor of Information Management in
International Chains Social Science Group Wageningen University*

Acknowledgments

David J. Pauleen would like to acknowledge the help of all those involved in the collection and review process of this book, without whose support the project could not have been successfully completed. These include, first and foremost, the authors, but also his colleagues at Victoria University of Wellington—in particular, Professor Gary Gorman. Special thanks to Jackie Bell, who was instrumental in helping to prepare the manuscript. A further note of thanks goes to the staff at Libraries Unlimited, which has made the publication of this book possible.

Introduction

Companies, educational institutions, nongovernmental organizations, governments and, of course, individuals work globally these days, and generally the modus operandi of each is the gathering, synthesis, sharing and storage (in no particular order) of data, information, and knowledge. In this global economy, knowledge is a critical resource (Drucker 1995), and organizations are striving to capitalize on their knowledge assets through effective knowledge management strategies and practices. Organizational knowledge can be in the form of patents and processes (manufacturing, etc.), but perhaps more importantly it is in the skills, knowledge, and experience in employees' minds and the ability of individuals and organizations to learn and adapt to new situations.

Most knowledge management is understood, and written about, from the perspective of the West and in particular the United States. This perspective tends to be scientific—that is, objective, quantifiable, analytical. There is nothing wrong with this as far as it goes, but it is limited and represents a form of cultural bias (Pauleen and Murphy 2005; Pauleen et al. 2006). And when we step outside a Western frame of reference, we discover that knowledge is a global phenomenon, which may be managed differently in different cultural contexts. To survive in a global age, we must understand this critical point. The manifestation of global knowledge occurs in many forms: from how foreign markets and financial systems operate, to why foreign people think and interact in particular ways that we cannot always understand or predict.

It is clear that seeing others from our own limited perspective will lead to inadequate understanding and imperfect knowledge, lessening individual and organizational effectiveness. How, then, can we learn to both expand our knowledge assets and effectively manage knowledge in a global age?

The answer lies partly in perspective taking—the ability to understand other worldviews and to relate this understanding to knowledge management. Worldviews underpin the insight and knowledge generated by a particular community. As much of the world's knowledge is local in nature, we must learn to develop the ability to understand what knowledge is from as many perspectives as possible. With perspective taking as

our foundation, we can then begin to develop more effective ways of managing knowledge across multiple functional perspectives: engineering, psychology, management, philosophy, religion, and many more.

This book looks at knowledge and knowledge management from a cultural perspective. We argue that culture fundamentally influences how entities—from individuals to countries—understand and interact with information and knowledge. *Culture* has been defined as a “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group from another” (Hofstede 1984, 21). This programming determines how people think, what they count as knowledge, how they solve problems—indeed, how they know and interact with the world. Such programming is rarely explored; yet it is deeply embedded in all of us. As they say, “You can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy.”

However, understanding the impact of culture on our daily lives requires significant effort, and for this reason the study of culture is problematic in many areas of research and practice. As mentioned previously, culture operates at our deepest individual and societal levels and is generally not recognized in either researchers’ or practitioners’ worldviews. Some may be aware of the impact of cultural influences but place it in the “too hard” basket, perhaps at best paying it lip service with some off-the-shelf program or some basic cultural training, possibly in order to meet a prescribed regulation. Even for the few who are cognizant of the underlying and often overwhelming influence of culture on so much of what we do as individuals and organizations, it is a genuine challenge to recognize and learn the lessons of culture and apply them in even-handed and effective ways.

This, then, is the challenge of this book: to introduce knowledge and knowledge management perspectives from different cultures, in different contexts, using different processes for different purposes. The authors, who come from many different countries and cultures, as well as a variety of backgrounds, have done a commendable job. Since the iterations of culture and knowledge are nearly limitless, all we can do here is begin the journey to increase awareness among those individuals and organizations wishing to learn from and share with others. In the final analysis, it is for the reader to have a mind open to the challenges and opportunities of culture.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into three sections: Conceptual Approaches to Culture and Knowledge Management, Effects of Culture on Key Aspects of Knowledge Management, and Research and Cases on Culture and Knowledge Management. The reader will soon discover that many of the issues raised in each of the chapters relate to and build upon each other, like parts in a complex but challenging puzzle.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter 1, “Exploring the Relationship between National and Organizational Culture, and Knowledge Management,” discusses and links the concepts of national culture, organizational culture, and leadership. The authors suggest that not only is culture a critical factor in the understanding of knowledge management, but that complex

relationships exist between the different cultural contexts of national, regional/ethnic, and organizational culture. These relationships affect knowledge management strategies and processes at both national and organizational levels. They model these relationships and discuss their implication for research and practice.

In Chapter 2, “Culture: An Overlooked Key to Unlocking Organizational Knowledge,” the author argues that the multiple cultures of the people who comprise global organizations represent a potential knowledge asset that should be managed like any other organizational asset. He maintains that this can be done by understanding the cultural basis of learning and knowledge. This chapter outlines the recursive relationship between learning and knowledge, reviews recent research on the cultural foundations of learning and knowledge, and proposes a model of boundary spanning that can help global organizations meet the challenge of unlocking the knowledge represented by their diverse membership.

Chapter 3, “The Art of Systems: The Cognitive-Aesthetic Culture of Portal Cities and the Development of Meta-Cultural Advanced Knowledge Economies” is an essay that leaps past current views of culture, suggesting new ways to understand the knowledge dynamics of successful local economies. The article discusses the role of pattern thinking, aesthetics, and design in the rise and sustenance of economically powerful portal cities, where knowledgeable people—regardless of culture—congregate and form part of a greater whole.

Section 2 begins with a look at cultural factors in global knowledge transfer. Chapter 4, “Cultural Stretch: Knowledge Transfer and Disconcerting Resistance to Absorption and Application” summarizes the findings of a number of case studies to determine that time constraints and communication problems caused by cultural differences have a negative impact on initially positive expectations between international partners. The authors suggest it can take between two and seven years—or even longer—to achieve a smooth transfer and acceptance of knowledge from one party to another, if ‘the right people’ are deployed in the ‘right situation’. The right people are individuals who are locally sourced and equipped with appropriate personality characteristics; the right situation is a society which is open to the application of the knowledge being made available.

Chapter 5, “From Concept to Context: Toward Social-Cultural Awareness and Responsibility in the Organization of Knowledge” argues that human language—and by extension information and knowledge—is highly context based. As such, it is detrimental to cross-cultural information retrieval and knowledge discovery systems if diverse contexts are forced into a single representational system, as they currently tend to be. The author argues that a hermeneutic approach could provide a promising avenue for developing a more productive framework that would support free and open dialog across competing heterogeneous contexts in the knowledge discovery environment.

Chapter 6, “Managing Innovative Knowledge: Cultural Perspectives on Patenting” takes a cross-cultural perspective on patenting to explore differences and similarities in the management of innovative knowledge over time. Patents operate at the nexus of individual, legal, political, organizational, and societal interests and as such provide a useful vantage point for exploring cultural perspectives in the management of knowledge. The authors explore several interesting and critical tensions in the management of knowledge across cultures in the global environment, including the ownership of

knowledge, effects on innovation and knowledge flows, and global enforcement, particularly in the area of the patentability of new innovations such as computer software, genes, and so on.

Chapter 7, “The Influence of National Culture on Knowledge Management in Virtual Teams” contends that knowledge management is now clearly a critical factor in both organizational and academic settings in distributed contexts that increasingly engage multiple national cultures. This chapter explores aspects of national culture with respect to knowledge management in virtual teams based on the HKNET project, which involved participants from three continents and continued for seven years. Using their findings, the authors develop and present a model of the interaction dynamics associated with national culture, technology choice, and knowledge management processes and outcomes.

In Chapter 8, “People’s Twist: The Cultural Standard of Loyalty and Performance in Former Socialist Economies,” the authors use knowledge management as a lens to focus on cultural standards, particularly with regard to issues of loyalty and performance in the former socialist economies of Eastern Europe. They explain how people—in order to survive—developed personal and internal knowledge management approaches in the face of external and hierarchical state controls. One result was the concealment and shift of knowledge from the state into private networks, thus establishing a form of market rationality within the planning rationality of a socialist economy.

Section 3, “Research and Cases on Culture and Knowledge Management,” begins with Chapter 9, “Institutional and Cultural Influences on Knowledge Sharing in Russia and China.” This chapter, following up on the general topic of knowledge transfer introduced in Chapter 4, takes an in-depth look at the challenges inherent in transferring knowledge between western industrialized economies and the transition economies of (former) communist nations such as Russia and China, particularly in the context of home nation and subsidiary operations. Using interviews conducted with western and local managers in Russia and China between 1996 and 2003, the chapter specifically addresses the cultural and institutional factors that impede and facilitate knowledge sharing in Russia and China.

Chapter 10, “Asian Organizations Meet North American Management Theory: The Case of Singapore and Senge,” reviews the connection between knowledge management and the learning organization, and argues that both concepts rely on culturally embedded theories and practices. The authors present a case study of the use of Senge’s learning organization concepts in one large Singaporean organization and reveal the cultural challenges that emerged in the process of applying essentially Euro-American management theories within an Asian culture. The chapter includes a discussion of the practical implications of these cross-cultural challenges for Singaporean organizations, multinational organizations, and transnational consulting.

Chapter 11, “The Peruvian Asparagus Cluster: Realizing Profitability from Social Capital and Shared Knowledge Management in a Traditionally Low-Trust Environment” tells the story of the Peruvian asparagus cluster and how it became the world’s top exporter of fresh asparagus. The case focuses on how collective action and a shared knowledge management program tackled the problems of a complex asparagus logistic chain in spite of the historical low levels of trust and social capital in Peru. The author uses a three-pronged analysis to provide the background to understanding the basis for

cooperation in traditionally noncooperative populations and signals hope for trust and cooperation building in other clusters and possibly Peruvian society as a whole.

Finally, Chapter 12, “Research and Development Knowledge Transfer across National Cultures” offers another look at the important topic of knowledge transfer, this time focusing on the area of multinational corporations’ dispersal of research and development activities across countries. The authors contend that the integration of the dispersed research and development (R&D) knowledge via knowledge transfer across cultural borders is essential for managing multinationals. The research confirms that cross-cultural knowledge is very often problematic, but it also provides a more positive outlook by showing that cultural differences are not just barriers to knowledge transfer; rather, they can also provide a stimulus to learn from and with others from different cultures. Interestingly, the research also shows that cultural differences tend to increase the difficulties of transferring explicit knowledge more than that of tacit knowledge.

REFERENCES

- Drucker, P. 1995. *Managing in a time of great change*. New York: Truman Talley Books/Plume.
- Hofstede, G. 1984. *Culture’s consequences: International differences in work related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Pauleen, D., and Murphy, P. 2005. In praise of cultural bias. *Sloan Management Review* 46(2): 21–22.
- Pauleen, D., Everisto, R., Davison, R., Ang, S., Alanis, M. and Klein, S. (2006). Cultural Bias in IS Research and Practice: Are you coming from the same place I am?. *Communications of the Association of Information Systems* 17(17): 354–72.

SECTION 1

Conceptual Approaches to Culture and Knowledge Management

Exploring the Relationship between National and Organizational Culture, and Knowledge Management

David J. Pauleen, Ling-Ling Wu, and Sally Dexter

ABSTRACT

Globalization and ICT have opened up opportunities for organizational knowledge to be shared across national and cultural boundaries both intra- and interorganizationally. In this context, an understanding of national (societal) culture and its relationship to knowledge management (KM) has become an essential requirement. In this chapter we discuss the concepts of national culture, organizational culture, and leadership and suggest that not only should culture be an element in the understanding of KM, but that there are complex relationships between the different cultural contexts (national, regional/ethnic, and organizational) and the way in which they relate and interrelate to affect KM strategies and processes at both a national and an organizational level. We then develop a conceptual model that shows the interrelationship of national culture and organizational culture and their mutual influence on organizational KM. We conclude with a discussion of implications for research and practice.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the global knowledge economy has been greatly driven by rapidly advancing information and communication technologies (ICT). These technologies have served to reduce traditional business boundaries and increase opportunities to participate in networks far beyond immediate physical locations (Barker 2000).

In this new economy, knowledge has become an extremely valuable resource (Drucker 1995; Nonaka 1994), and organizations are striving to capitalize on their knowledge assets through effective knowledge management (KM) strategies and practices. Initial KM strategies relied heavily on ICT-based solutions to store and retrieve explicit organizational knowledge. However, these ICT-based strategies often failed to deliver meaningful results (Ambrosio 2000). Although technology is still a key component, this

single focus has been eclipsed by an increasing awareness of the importance of the organizational and social aspects of KM.

To date, much of the KM literature has focused on corporate and organizational culture, with relatively little attention paid to the implications of national culture. However, KM, which is context embedded, is a particularly culturally dependent process (Glisby and Holden 2003; Nonaka and Toyama 2003). Effective KM practices developed by and for one culture may not necessarily be successfully used by other cultures (Pauleen and Murphy 2005). This is an important point as cross-cultural knowledge sharing has become more prevalent through the forces of globalization, advances in communications technology, and increasingly culturally diverse workforces (Cox 1991; Nemetz and Christensen 1996), as well as through international mergers and acquisitions, Internet-based e-commerce, and an increasing trend to global outsourcing. Meanwhile, dominant Western cultural assumptions about knowledge and KM influence KM research and development. Given these factors, an understanding of the influence of national culture is now, arguably, a critical requirement in understanding and implementing successful KM in organizations.

Although it has been suggested that globalization will act as an antecedent to cultural homogeneity (Levitt 1983) and that cultural distinctiveness will be lost as global strategies displace strategies that revolve around national, regional, and cultural differences, a quick look at current world events may cause one to doubt the validity of this view, at least for the present. Within the international management area in general, as well as within the KM arena, this implicit culture-free assumption has been seriously challenged (Adler 2002; Glisby and Holden 2003; Holden 2002), and it is argued that cultural context is an important KM dynamic.

This chapter expands on this argument by examining the relationship between national culture, organizational culture, and KM. We suggest not only that national culture is a significant factor in the understanding and practice of KM, but that complex relationships between the different cultural contexts (national, regional/ethnic, and organizational) and the way in which they relate and interrelate to affect KM strategies and processes must also be considered. The role of leadership is also explored, and we maintain that leaders who embody organizational culture and context may act as mediators in the relationship between national culture and KM.

DEFINING CULTURE

There is a seemingly inexhaustible array of definitions of culture, with more than 160 definitions identified more than 50 years ago (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1963). Although this range of definitions could be interpreted as representative of the complex nature of culture, in fact, the notion of culture is so deeply ingrained that it has become almost synonymous with our identity to the extent that everyone believes they understand culture (Westrup et al. 2002).

Culture can be categorized in terms of three main elements: content, construction, and sustainability. In terms of content, *culture* has been defined as “a system of ideas” (Namenwirth and Weber, 1987, 8), “a distinctive, enduring pattern of behavior and personality characteristics” (Clark 1990, 66), and “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group from another” (Hofstede 1984, 21). In essence,

the content of culture consists of a set of underlying norms and values of behavior, shared by a group of people tied together by powerful affiliations or bonds.

The construction of culture, according to Schein (1985), results from the interaction of people and their environment. In particular, Schein emphasized the aspect of problem solving in culture, which is considered to be a valid way of thinking in order to respond to the surrounding environment. That is, culture is a set of valid knowledge, created and shared by a group of people, to solve the problems they face in their environment.

In terms of sustainability, culture is transmitted by symbols, rituals, and stories, passed on from one generation to another (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1963). The implicit (or even tacit) part, as well as the explicit part of cultural knowledge is sustained and transferred through information expressed in various ways. In this vein, Hall and Hall (1990) view culture as a system for creating, sending, storing, and processing information.

However, Barham and Heimer (1998) point out that the standard anthropologically derived concepts of culture are out of touch with the connectivities and networks of the modern global economy. Recent research highlights the active role of people and the emergent, contested, and ongoing nature of culture, and people's reaction to dynamic contexts (Giddens 1984, 1990; Myers and Tan 2002; Walsham 2002). Holden (2001, 162) calls for "a paradigmatic shift in the way culture is viewed and suggests that researchers reframe culture as infinitely overlapping and perpetually redistributable habitats of common knowledge and shared meanings."

NATIONAL CULTURE

There are a number of theories and models that have informed cross-cultural research, both methodologically and philosophically. Many of these are centered on the concept of national culture and are based on dichotomies or continuums of values, such as individualism/collectivism (Hofstede 1984); high and low context (Hall 1976); and monochronic/polychronic (Lewis 1996). These value-based models predict individual and group attitudes and behaviors based on national culture. However, Corbitt and colleagues (2004) suggest that such widely accepted structural frameworks may be too reliant on categorical descriptions that ignore differentiation within cultures, as well as the individual exceptions likely to be found to any general rule.

Several studies have identified national culture in terms of work-related attitudes and values, to distinguish groups of people from other groups (Hofstede, 1984; Ronen and Shenkar 1985; Smith et al. 1996). Hofstede (1984, 1988) proposed five dimensions of national culture: individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term versus short-term orientation. Some researchers have used this model to account for KM processes and found that the cultural dimensions of the Hofstede model might play a role in the KM processes (Ford and Chan 2003; Rossen 2003).

The legitimacy of the concept of national culture, however, remains in question, as evidenced by the continuing debate in the literature. Scholars argue that globalization has enabled the emergence of the multicultural society, in which members of different regional and ethnic groups live and work in the same shared environment. Therefore, an identity based upon the notion of a nation-state does little to reflect regional and ethnic differences (Holden 2001; Myers and Tan 2002; Westrup et al. 2002). Indeed, McCrone

(1998) asserts that the quest for regional identities and decentralization reflects the need for the idea of national cultural identities to be challenged and usurped. The concept of national sovereignty has been linked to the notion of a national cultural identity, and it has been suggested that as globalization and economic, political, and cultural pressures further negate the importance of national sovereignty, this will affect the idea of a national cultural identity (Castells 1996, 1997; Featherstone 1990; Waters 2001). Hall (1992) contends that instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, they should rather be regarded as a discursive device representing difference as unity or identity.

Most authors agree that nations may contain different cultures or subcultures within national borders, and that national borders do not necessarily represent culturally homogeneous populations (Groeschl and Doherty 2000). Rather than emphasize single national cultural identities, the challenge is developing theory that furthers understanding of heterogeneous cultures (Mercer 1992). Doney, Cannon, and Mullen (1998) stress their view that national culture is not a characteristic of individuals or nation-states but of a large number of people conditioned by similar background, education, and life experiences. Weisinger and Trauth (2002), through a combination of theoretical argument and practical research suggest that culture is, in fact, locally situated, behavioral, and embedded in everyday social negotiated work practices—a view also subscribed to by Holden (2001). Based on the social construction of reality theory (Berger and Luckman 1967), Corbitt and colleagues (2004) argue that national culture can be more accurately understood by seeking out the dominant social codes that frame a society's values, attitudes, and behaviors.

The debate between proponents of national cultural models and those who favor a more discrete or localized understanding of culture is unlikely to be resolved soon. National culture models certainly help to simplify cross-cultural research, whereas a more localized view of culture will more likely reflect the culture under study. An example of a local description of culture is the fascinating analysis of the factors that shape Taiwan's character (as a people) by Yu and ChiangLin (2002).

Based on personal observation, a review of secondary sources (e.g., educational statistics), and reflection, Yu and ChiangLin described five life experiences that together constitute a unique Taiwan experience: motorcycling, a belief in higher education, crisis consciousness, compulsory military service, and studying abroad and returning well-educated. Together, these life experiences heavily influence individual mental attitudes and behavior and society as a whole.

For example, Yu and ChiangLin (2002, 354) argue that the overwhelming use of motorcycles in Taiwan, which—though often causing congestion and chaotic traffic conditions—shapes motorcycle riders' personalities and skills (including young children riding with their parents) and the greater society in the following ways¹ by training riders:

- to move accurately and swiftly with clear, specific goals
- to look for opportunities almost anywhere and anytime
- to be adaptive and flexible
- to be tough and take risks
- to act individually, with a small scale of vision
- not to strictly obey laws and regulations

Yu and ChiangLin's five life experiences, although not proven in an experimental sense, nevertheless resonate with Taiwan residents and actually do go a long way

to providing an understanding of the local culture, one that is much more accurate and relevant than Hofstede's descriptions, which in the case of Taiwan may no longer be accurate. Two of the life experiences—belief in higher education and studying abroad—point to a culture supportive of knowledge and knowledge acquisition from other countries.²

National Culture and Knowledge

Drawing from psychology and cultural history, Nisbett and colleagues (2001) argue that the considerable social differences that exist among cultures affect, among other things, tacit epistemologies (theories of knowledge, including what counts as knowledge and degrees of certainty about knowledge) and the nature of cognitive processes (the ways by which people know the world). Comparing Eastern and Western traditions, Nisbett and colleagues (2001) group the cognitive differences between ancient Chinese and Greeks under the headings of holistic versus analytical thought. Holistic thought involves an orientation to the “context or field as a whole, including in particular the relationship between a focal object and the field and a preference for explaining and predicting events based on the existing relationships” (Nisbett et al. 2001, 293). They define analytic thought as detaching the object from its context, a tendency to focus on attributes of the object, to assign it to categories, and a preference for using rules about the categories to explain and predict the objects behaviour” (2001, 293). Nonaka and Toyama (2003) and Glisby and Holden (2003) state that Eastern people tend to think about their work in terms of the whole picture, whereas Western people tend to think of their work from their own individual vantage point. These cognitive biases are a major component of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation processes (Pauleen and Murphy 2005).

According to Chia (2003), it has been a Western tradition to regard a knowledgeable person not as someone who has the ability to perform a task, but as one who can understand and render articulate and explicit—particularly in writing—the underlying causes of events. In contrast, in traditional Chinese culture learning and knowing came through direct, sustained, experimental practice. Chia (2003, 959) goes on to suggest that “the current preoccupation with explicit knowledge creation and management may need to be tempered by an equally important emphasis on direct experimental action as a valuable source of meaning, innovation, productivity and enhanced performance.”

All that has been discussed here converges to support the major contention that national culture deeply affects how people process information in their environment and strongly suggests that this effect should be taken into serious account during the development and implementation of KM initiatives, especially in global contexts.

Culture, Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors

Adler (2002) developed the model in Figure 1.1 to show how national culture influences the values of a culture and subsequently its attitudes and the behaviors of its members. An example of this is the Japanese culture: it values social harmony, which in turn creates an attitude of cooperation and subsequent behavior in which disagreements are rarely openly expressed. In this model, national culture appears fully fledged and hence