Education programs on Project Management with Cultural implications: *Phronesis* Project Management Approach

Hiroko Nagaya¹, Toshihisa Honma²

1. Hokkaido University, North 14 South 9, Kita-ku Sapporo Japan, himiko.nagaya@nifty.com
2. Hokkaido University, North 9 West 8, Kita-ku Sapporo Japan, honma@ist.hokudai.ac.jp

Abstract

In the era of globalization, cross cultural understanding becomes critical issues in managing culturally diverse stakeholders. This paper covers case studies of Hokkaido University’s Education programs aiming to foster global leader and an importance of *Phronesis* approach (practical Wisdom) in developing globally active human resources with project management competencies.

Firstly, Education programs initiated by Hokkaido University will be introduced along with its school philosophies. One of underlining concepts of the programs is importance of cross cultural understanding and applications of the knowledge into practices, which is thought to be the very essence of *Phronesis* approach.

Cross cultural understanding starts with knowing native culture. In this context, secondly, Japan unique cultural values, such as “Bushido”, “Wa(Harmony)”, and “Genba(Workplace power)” will be introduced here in order for the audience to gain better insights on managing a project with cultural awareness.

Keywords: Project Management, Cultural awareness, Phronesis approach

1. Introduction

From the fall of bubble economy in 1993, Japan has been suffering from over 20 years of economical recession. During that period we encountered the 9-11, IT bubble, and the Lehman shock, all those events had serious impacts on Japanese economy, Japan, like any other countries is not free from waves of globalization. Global standardization or so called de-fact standard movement which started in the late 90’s launched in the areas of hardware or infra-structure first, then gradually reaching to areas of software such as human resources. Lately in Japan, development of globally active human resources is hot subject raised from enterprises, from government and from academic institutions. Globally active human resources generally mean in Japan a person with leadership skills, a good command of English, and ICT literacy.

The trend of globalization is also prominent in the world of Project Management. From the first edition of PMBOK® Guide introduced in 1996 to the 4th edition of 2008, there has been an increase in numbers of the words “Culture” or “cultural” appeared in the books (the first edition was 10 words, in the 5th edition is 64). One of important skills expected on today’s project manager is undoubtedly global awareness.

2. School philosophies of Hokkaido University

Hokkaido University is a comprehensive university that places importance on its graduate schools. The university started out in 1876 as the Sapporo Agricultural College, the first modern academic institute in Japan. Over the years, it has declared and cultivated the basic philosophies of education and research, namely “Frontier Spirit”, “Global Perspectives”, “All-round education” and “Practical Learning.”

Frontier Spirit

The Frontier Spirit represents the idealism that each student and staff member should take up the problems of their generation and resolutely mark out a new path. This basic philosophy originated from the words “lofty ambition” uttered by Dr. W. S. Clark during the opening ceremony of the Sapporo Agricultural College and has served as the backbone of Hokkaido University over a century.

Global Perspectives

Hokkaido University has played an active role in placing its graduates in positions overseas and its philosophy of Global Perspectives has taken on many different forms. Hokkaido University is engaged in developing internationally active human resources by cultivating better understanding of other cultures, being supported by self-awareness of our own culture and by improving communication skills in foreign languages through enriching liberal arts education.

All-Round Education

Sapporo Agricultural College was established not only for training agricultural experts, but also for the development of human resources with a rich humanity, a high intellectuality and a broad range of knowledge. The philosophy of the All-round Education has been observed through the tradition of focusing attention on liberal arts education as the basis of developing human resources.

Practical Learning
The philosophy of Practical Learning was established to signify two different meanings in the development of today’s comprehensive university. Firstly, research as the creation of universal learning in the real world, and secondly, emphasis on returning the fruits of research to society by placing importance not only on basic research but also on the application and practical use of research. Hokkaido University endeavors to return the fruits of research to local, national and international industries, by promoting the academia-industry-government collaboration.

3. Examples of the educational program to foster Global talent initiated by Hokkaido University

Hokkaido University initiated new education programs in 2013. Three of the programs will be introduced here.

3.1 “New Nitobe College” Program

This program was founded aiming for developing would-be leaders with spirits of Frontier and Pragmatism. Target number of students is 200 with passing grade of English proficiency. A half year oversee study is required for the program. The curriculum of this program is aimed to develop global mind leader who is equipped with skills of managing a global project. Prorosis approach is placed throughout the curriculum in forms of practical learning and cross-cultural understanding. Table 1 shows the curriculum of the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Preparation course for oversee study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Cultural study and Special course in English</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural understanding</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of Japanese culture</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer activity or internship program</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study oversee</td>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 “New Nitobe Net”

It is Hokkaido university alumni members’ social network system. The members are from private and academic sectors. This network is designed to support career development of the post graduate students of the New Nitobe College.

3.3 Program to Foster Pioneers to Transform the Populations-Activities -Resources –Environments (PARE) chain

Hokkaido University in coalition with 6 universities in ASEAN started a program called the PARE. This program is joint education for large number of students in ASEAN countries and Japan. It aims for developing human resources who are capable of taking a lead in resolution of the PARE issues. This program covers the four requisites, “Field Research capability” “Cross Cultural Capability” “Frontier Sprits” and “Problem Solving Competencies”. The output of the program are, Fostering over 266 pioneers, Joint/Double degree schemes and PARE textbook.

Figure 1 illustrates the scheme of the PARE graduate education consortium.

![PARE Graduate Education Consortium](image)

Hokkaido University
4. Project Management and culture

Project management is an integrated effort. A single project is surrounded by multiple layers of environmental factors all of which have influences over a project. Figure 2 illustrates an environment surrounding a project.

Figure 2 The world surrounding a project

![The world surrounding a Project](image)

In managing a single project, the PMBOK®Guide is used here since it is globally recognized de-fact standard of project management. The external environmental factors such as interpersonal skills or general business practices shown in the figure 2, has its cultural implications. For an example, there is difference in leadership style in Japan and that of in Western culture. In managing a project it is crucial to take the differences into considerations and put them in right context. That is considered to be the very essence of the phronesis project management approach.

5. Phronesis project management approach

"Phronesis" is one of the wisdoms presented by Aristotle. Project Management is an integration of Knowledge, Tools and Techniques, Emotions, Behaviors and Practical Application. We believe that the Phronesis approach plays important role in managing a project especially in Japan where we enjoy our unique social and cultural norms. Today’s globalization movement makes this phronesis approach even more demanding of those who are seeking for Project Management approach better fit to Japan.

6. Japan unique cultural values that are to be applied in Global Project Management

We would like to introduce some of Japanese cultural values wished to be applied to project management environment.

6.1 Bushido

The book Bushido: the Way of the Warrior by Inazo Nitobe is one of the first books on Samurai written in English for Western audience in 1899. Mitobe thought the Bushido was the sources of virtues of Japanese people. In this book, he made a comparison between Japanese mentality and that of Westerners by pointing out similarities and differences. The Bushido spirit of politeness, sincerity, loyalty and self-control are still with us and wish to be carried out in project management practices.

6.2 Spirit of “WA”

The Japanese team building approach reflects the Japanese cultural stance of group harmony, so called the spirit of “Wa”. The western team building takes an orchestral type approach whereas Japanese team building takes a traditional Japanese court music approach or Gagaku. In orchestral-team, each member has a specialty coordinated by instructions given by conductor, where team members have clearly defined roles and responsibilities under a strong leader or project manager. Gagaku teams do not have a leader. There is no clear boundary between one and the other. The quality of the performance is the outcome of collaboration obtained by aligning one’s own role with line that of the others. With Global project team, members are expected to think and act with their own discretion, which we could from Gagaku team.

6.3 Satisfying customer needs with a spirit of “Omotenashi”

For Japanese people the mindset of making others happy, the spirit of “Omotenashi” is deeply rooted as a source for personal happiness. In project management, managing stakeholder means understanding his/her expectation. The project manager wholeads a culturally diverse team must understand each stakeholder’s socio-cultural needs. Treating stakeholders with the spirit “Omotenashi” works well in managing stakeholder expectation.

6.4 People oriented mentoring system “Shu””Ha””Ri”

Historically and culturally Japan has cherished the mentoring concept of Shu-Ha-Ri. It is the steps you take to master the way or do of doing things in arts of flower arrangement, tea ceremony, and martial arts of judo, kendo. “Shu” is the observation stage. The mentee follows the way his master shows. The mentee acquires the basic forms of the task. “Ha” is an improvement stage. The mentee begins to branch out from the master, by working out his own way from trial and error. “Ri” is the creation stage. The mentee creates their own original world becoming a master.
The “Shu” “Ha” “Ri” way is still with us in many Japanese organizations. Employee career development is carried out in form of human interactions. Nowadays, however, with a rapidly changing workplace, this type of mentoring is becoming harder to maintain, still the concept of “Shu” “Ha” “Ri” is a valuable practice wished to be re-evaluated and utilized in a global environment.

6.5 “Genba” or Workplace Power

Today, there is a growing trend for Japanese companies to adopt a Western based top down management style, focused on numbers and analysis. Even so, the tradition Japanese approach of Genba or the bottom up style of management is still practiced in many Japanese organizations. Genba is lean. Genba works as a team. Genba is open with flat communication. Globally recognized Kaizen or continuous improvement was derived from the Genba power.

Global project needs this Genba power of constantly striving for quality enhancements,

6.6 Balance between science and art. The spirit of “Takumi”

Traditionally in Japan, from the world of art to science, there exists a spirit of Dou. Dou is the “way” to develop professional achievements both mentally and technically. As seen in “Shu” “Ha” “Ri”, an apprentice, by constant learning, pursues his/her own Dou or “way” until he/she reaches to “Takumi” (Master) stage. Japanese are not only pursuing efficiency or practicality, but also in disciplining oneself in seeking personal as well as professional growth.

Project management is no exception. A competent project manager is created through self-disciplines and constant learnings.

7. Closing and future development

One of important factors of education program to foster global human resources is nurturing his/her practical wisdom (Phronesis). This could be accomplished by a program which facilitates students to gain insights on his/her inherited cultural values as well as understanding others. Knowledge and skills acquired will be put in practices with sprits of Pioneer, as the philosophy of Hokkaido University holds.

As a next step, we would like to explore methodologies, tools and techniques to realize the phronesis approach of Project Management as well as the ways to access the effectiveness of the Phronesis approach in Education Program.

References

2. www.abic.or.jp/activity/07_daigaku/index.htm
3. www.hokudai.ac.jp/introduction/information/kihonrinen.html
4. www.hokudai.ac.jp/international3/ryugaku/nitobe/
5. www.hokudai.ac.jp/international3/ryugaku/pare/
8. Hiroko Nagaya, Hisato Hama, Gagaku (Japanese Traditional Court Music) Type Project Team vs. Orchestra Type Project Team Building, Proc. of the 4th Int. Conf. on Project Management (ProMac 2008), J014 , Anchorage, USA (2008)

Biography

Hiroko Nagaya, MBA (Ohio State University USA), PMP.
She had worked for several multi-national companies as IT project manager for over 20 years. She served in the position of Secretary General of PMI Japan Chapter for several years. She Started own Global Project Management Consulting company in 2012.
She is currently being enrolled in Doctoral program of engineering department of Hokkaido University as a working student. The research theme focuses on Project management of Information technology.
She had authored several books on Project Management and PMO.

Toshihisa Honma Ph.D
He was a distinguished Professor of Engineering in the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology at Hokkaido University, Japan. He received his BEng, MEng and DEng in Electrical Engineering from Hokkaido University, Japan, in 1970, 1972, and 1976 respectively. He has been the emeritus Professor of Hokkaido University since 2011. He has authored and edited several books, journals and conference proceedings and has served in high profile organization, coordinating, and implementing various national and international strategic academic and industrial committees. His research interests include Project Management,