Chapter XIV

Cross-Cultural Implementation of Information System

Wai K. Law
University of Guam, Guam

Karri Perez
University of Guam, Guam

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GHI, an international service conglomerate, recently acquired a new subsidiary in an Asian country. A new information system was planned to facilitate the re-branding of the subsidiary. The project was outsourced to an application service provider through a consultant. A functional manager from another subsidiary in the country was assigned to assist the development of specifications. The customized information passed numerous benchmarking tests, and was ready for implementation. At that point, it was discovered that the native users at the rural location of the new subsidiary could not comprehend any of the user interfaces programmed in the English language. A depressed local management team, with a depleted technology budget, must reinvent all operating procedures dependent on the new information system.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

GHI was an international service conglomerate operating globally in more than 500 locations with established clienteles in high-value-added markets. As a member of a highly competitive industry, the business found success in carefully nurtured brand images of quality and consistent services. GHI has been a strong leader in its industry and earned a respectable ranking among the Fortune 1,000 companies. In recent years, GHI has grown its annual revenue substantially beyond the billion-dollar mark. As part

of an ongoing strategy, GHI aggressively sought opportunities to improve performance of undervalued business operations, through the introduction of better and more efficient management techniques and practices, including the injection of capital through ownership and contracts. GHI valued its workforce of more than 100,000 as a key asset in retaining loyalty from corporate clients as well as individual customers. The corporate values of GHI emphasized a passion for excellence, promoting cultural diversity; encouraged innovation and changes; and fully committed to serve communities where GHI maintained business interests.

Recent GHI business strategy included a goal to improve operating efficiency through the increased use of technology. A small corporate IT team coordinated numerous projects to deploy technology throughout its global locations. GHI relied heavily on technology providers outside of the company to construct information systems (Best, 1997), with developmental projects to integrate systems from the various vendors. A challenge was to centrally control the flow of information through uniform technology platform, a practice with significant benefits, as GHI attempted to provide consistent services to its customers who rapidly entered global market locations.

GHI insisted on the implementation of corporate systems to collect and analyze transaction data and customer demographics. This centralized reporting requirement allowed GHI to detect trends, allowing the corporate office to adjust its global strategies according to dynamic economic conditions, and identifying potential problems that required corporate attention. For example, capital budget could be planned for common needs for capital improvement. At the same time, the company realized cost reduction through purchasing economies in business services, supplies, capital goods, telecommunication services, and technology. A senior IT official emphasized the benefits of removing technology decisions from the local level, eliminating the duplication of efforts in acquiring and deploying packaged software. Standardization also reduced the challenges of data communication through an assortment of technology platforms (Aggarwal, 1993).

GHI also pursued a strategic goal to expand e-business applications to improve sales and services. In 2002, a Web-based Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system was deployed to formalize the delivery of customer services. In the past, individual locations devised their own system to manage customer service problems, often as scribbled notes informally trickled through the corporate communication channels. The new system provided a tool to spot problem areas, and provided a way to expedite problem resolution while customers were being served. The managers gained real-time visibility on service activities, while the corporation could use the tool to promote and enforce uniform customer satisfaction levels across its many locations. The system was also instrumental in employee training, and for empowering front-line service personnel to mitigate service deficiencies. CRM enabled GHI to provide fast, convenient, dependable, and consistent service to its customers. The systems were tested in locations in North America with satisfactory results.

CRM was also employed to enhance sales and marketing (O'Brien, 2002). GHI anticipated growth in demand for its quality services, especially from its loyal customers. The integration of its regional propriety customer databases represented an effort to enhance the consistent delivery of services to its customers throughout the world. Centralized established information standards facilitated the sharing of data, and promoting uniform practices of data analysis and data-supported decision making. The

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