Chapter 18

The Project Manager in the Theatre of Consciousness:
A New Approach to Knowledge Creation and Communication

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on knowledge management stressing an individual project manager's point of view. First, the authors outline two knowledge management strategies as well as the notion of project manager. The authors concentrate on the project manager's knowledge creation and communication using the so-called theatre metaphor for conscious experience. According to this metaphor, the human brain and consciousness work together like a theatre. With the help of the metaphor, the authors describe and attempt to understand important aspects of the project manager's mental action in the above tasks.

INTRODUCTION

Project management is the dynamic process of leading, co-ordinating, planning, and controlling a diverse and complex set of processes and people in the pursuit of achieving project objectives (Pinto & Kharbanda, 1995). That is, the successful management of projects is both a human and a technical challenge, requiring a far-sighted strategic outlook coupled with the flexibility to react to conflicts and problem areas as they arise on a daily basis. This means that a project manager participates continuously in ongoing processes of evaluating alternatives for meeting an objective, in which expectations about a particular course of action impel him or her to select that course of action most likely to result in attaining the objective. In other words, a project manager is a participant in uninterrupted situations where new knowledge is created and communicated.

However, in a project work context knowledge creation and communication is often a complex task. This is due to the fact that the individuals involved in project planning and deliveries are often a set of diversely thinking people with different needs and opinions. Therefore, the personality of a project manager plays an important role in how the project is executed.

Thus, it is obviously very important to know how a project manager's knowledge creation and communication processes are structured and how they function. Therefore, the goal of this conceptual paper is to describe the project manager's knowledge creation and communication processes with the help of the theatre metaphor presented by Baars (1997) (see also Pihlanto, 2009). In the pursuit of this goal the following discussion first describes in principle two different knowledge management strategies. Then follows a description of the concept of project manager. After that follows an illustration of the notions of knowledge creation and communication. Then the discussion deals with the concept of working with metaphors, and particularly our analytical tool - the theatre metaphor. And then follows the main content of this article – an analysis of the project manager's knowledge creation and communication processes.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Depending on the type of company and industry, different strategic approaches can be utilised in adopting a knowledge management strategy (Haggie & Kingston, 2003; Joia, 2007). Hansen, Nohria, and Tierney (1999) propose codification- and personalisation strategies as alternative ways by which companies can develop their knowledge management strategies. They suggest, for example, that the companies producing customised solutions to unique problems – as many technological project deliveries are – should use

the information technology to help people to communicate. Nevertheless, actual problem solving should often take place with the help of personal interaction (e.g., Jonassen, 2006).

Codification strategies are heavily based on technology and they use large databases to codify and store knowledge. The rationale of a codification strategy is to achieve 'scale in knowledge reuse' (Jashapara, 2004). This means that after completion of a project, companies will retrieve key pieces of knowledge from the assignment and create 'knowledge objects' to store valuable knowledge such as key solutions to problems. This knowledge is stored in knowledge repositories so that other projects and individuals in the company can use the same material for their projects. This means that there is little room for creativity and innovation in this approach and they are likely to be discouraged. Instead, the tried and tested methods of problem solutions are promoted. This is what the projects operating in mechanical project work environments (Koskinen, 2004) is utilised: a solid knowledge management approach based on previous knowledge without the potential risks of innovation. In this case, codification strategies are clearly aligned with the company's business strategy focused on efficiency, cost savings and cost leadership.

Personalisation strategies are less about technology and more about people. Companies which function in organic project work environments are more interested in developing people through brainstorming exercises and face-to-face communication and gaining deeper insights into problems. They place considerable emphasis on knowledge sharing, either by face-to-face interaction, or over the phone, by e-mail or via videoconferences (Hansen, Nohria, & Tierney, 1999). The focus is on networking within the company and through dialogue developing creative solutions for unique problems. Knowledge sharing, mentoring and the use of creative and analytical skills are keys to this approach. In this sense, a personalisation is in alignment with the business strategy focused

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