2022

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Recommended Citation

Noble, D., & Vaidyanathan, G. (2022). A framework of leadership cultural dimensions in outsourced projects. Issues In Information Systems, 23(1), 256–267. https://doi.org/10.48009/1_iis_2022_120

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Abstract

Outsourced projects are implemented often in environments that are impacted by factors that are internal and external to a firm. One key factor that impacts the success of outsourced projects is corporate culture. This paper explores how corporate culture impacts outsourced projects and what factors of corporate culture influence outsourced projects. We formulate a framework of key cultural dimensions in outsourced projects to help business and Information Technology leaders understand and mitigate cultural issues in outsourced projects.

Keywords: outsourced projects, culture, framework, leadership, information technology

Introduction

In general, many businesses have outsourced their Information Technology (IT) services and projects. Many businesses are changing their outsourcing views by narrowing to projects that are tied directly to business innovation, strategic growth, and revenue generation rather than non-mission-critical tasks and/or support roles (Frazzetto, 2020). Outsourcing is the process where strategic partners implement their clients' projects by integrating people, process, and technology. Client organizations can take advantage of a global labor pool, process innovations, and technological advances by using their strategic partners or contractors. These strategies allow client organizations to focus on their core competencies and enable them to shift their investments and resources to strategic business areas. Cost savings, access to expertise, improved performance, reducing time to market, risk transfer, quicker goods and services delivery, and overall flexibility are the benefits of outsourcing. The United States (U.S.) Government and Defense contributes about 81% to outsourcing contract value and the global market for outsourcing amounted to U.S. $92.5 billion in 2019. India is the leader in global IT outsourcing partnerships with an index of 7.07, followed by China and Malaysia, which have 6.31 and 6.11, respectively. Seventy-eight percent of respondents in a recent survey by Deloitte point out that clients feel positive about their outsourcing relationship with other companies as their costs of outsourced projects are reduced and they can access a deeper talent pool. (Statista, 2021; Ivana, 2020).

Outsourced projects are implemented in environments that are impacted by both internal and external factors. The internal factors include organizational culture, various governance policies and processes, various assets to the project, security, safety, capability of project teams, and available infrastructure and resources. External dynamics to project environment include social and cultural influences, market conditions, government regulations, applicable codes and standards, political stability, and legal issues. In these environments, team members come from diverse cultural backgrounds to attend meetings, work in the same physical environment, and tend to share commonly held information. Shared cultures, values, and

learning among outsourced project team members are important in such environments (Vaidyanathan, Sabbaghi & Debrot, 2010). Furthermore, project environments must position themselves as a place of learning (Blodgood & Salisbury, 2001) with reduced negative consequences of uncertainty (Perminova, Gustafsson & Wikström, 2008). Project environment refers to the atmosphere or situations where the project is implemented and project environments play a pivotal role in the success of projects (Vaidyanathan, 2021; PMBOK 2021). Successful implementation of projects requires a corporate culture that emphasizes the value of sharing common goals over individual pursuits and the value of trust among team members and stakeholders (Stefanou, 1999). Organizations look to their leadership teams to introduce and maintain a culture that helps projects to run smoothly and be successful. The processes that organizations implement and the values they communicate determine their corporate culture (Schneider et al., 1996).

Although past research has identified a plethora of factors regarding culture in outsourced projects, there exists a need to formally develop a framework using project culture dimensions that can be used to further research in this topic. We start this paper by posing two questions: How does corporate culture impact outsourced projects? What factors of corporate culture influence outsourced projects? First, we plan to answer these questions in this paper by formulating a framework using the key dimensions of leadership culture that are aimed towards the cultural issues in projects. Second, we describe how leaders could use those dimensions to alleviate and/or eliminate cultural issues in outsourced projects.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we illustrate the cultural aspects of leadership. In the following section, we address the cultural issues faced in outsourced projects. Using the cultural issues, we categorize the cultural issues as dimensions to formulate a framework and describe how leaders can use those dimensions to mitigate cultural problems in outsourced projects. We conclude by showing how this paper impacts both academicians and practitioners.

Organizational Culture and Leadership

Organizational culture is based on three categories of beliefs including beliefs about how employees are treated and the opportunities presented to them, beliefs about professionalism and support of efforts to do an excellent job, and beliefs about how an organization maintains its environment to accomplish its mission (Chell, 1994). Organizational culture is typically defined as a complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols by which a firm conducts its business (Schein, 1990). Organizational culture has a pervasive effect on an organization since the firm's culture not only defines who its relevant outsourced project team members are, but it also characterizes how the firm will interact with them. Such conception of organizational culture blurs classical distinctions between an organization's culture and its governance, structure, and strategy (Tichy, 1983). A firm's culture can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage if that culture is valuable, rare, and imperfectly imitable. The sustained superior performance of firms like IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Proctor and Gamble, and McDonald's may be, at least partly, a reflection of their organizational cultures (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

"Culture is the antecedent to all human behaviors" (Moodian, 2009, p. 9). Culture, a collective phenomenon, is described by Hofstede (2005) as the "programing of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 4). Culture is learned rather than innate and is derived from social conditioning and is differentiated from traits that are attributed to hereditary.

Founded in 1991 by Robert J. House, the Global Leadership and Organization Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research program is a multi-phase, multi-method, multi sample project in which hundreds of investigators spanning the world examined the relationships between social culture, societal effectiveness,

and organizational leadership. For the purposes of their work, they defined culture as the "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations" (GLOBE Project, 2020, para. 2) and defined leadership as "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members" (para. 5).

More than 17,000 middle managers in sixty-two societies contributed to the research which examined leadership attributes and their relationships to societal cultures. Their analysis led to the identification of six global leadership dimensions (Table 1) and twenty-one primary leadership dimensions that constitute the researchers' notion of culturally endorsed leadership theory (CLT). They also identified universally desirable and undesirable culturally contingent attributes of leadership. Their findings show numerous relationships among cultural dimensions, organizational practices and culturally endorsed leadership dimensions. For example, "societies that value high performance orientation desire leaders who are charismatic, team-oriented, and participative" (para. 8).

Table 1: Global Leadership Dimensions

Global Leadership Dimension	Definition
Charismatic/Value-Based	The ability to inspire, motivate, and expect high performance from others based on firmly held core values
Team-Oriented	Team building and the implementation of a common purpose or goal among members
Participative	Degree to which managers involve others in making and implementing decisions
Humane-Oriented	Supportive and considerate leadership including compassion and generosity
Autonomous	Individualistic leadership attributes
Self-Protective	Ensuring safety and security of the individual and group through the status enhancement and face saving

While the context of leadership has changed dramatically over the years, the content has not and the fundamental behaviors and actions of leadership have remained the same (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Kouzes and Posner (2017) have analyzed thousands of leadership experiences and their work has been "substantiated empirically by millions of respondents and hundreds of scholars" (p. 13). They identified the five practices of exemplary leadership that have stood the test of time and they are: a) model the way; b) inspire a shared vision; c) challenge the process; d) enable others to act; and e) encourage the heart. Connerley and Pedersen (2005) contend that "these practices should be easier for leaders who have an enhanced level of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills" (p. 153). And yet, according to the *Global Leadership Forecast* 2018, 50% of human resource (HR) managers surveyed do not feel their organizations have well-integrated and strategically aligned leadership development programs or processes (Ray, 2018) and only 14% of chief executive officers (CEOs) have the leadership talent to execute their strategies (Cranwell, et.al., 2018). The study also shows that organizations with effective leadership and talent will outperform their peers (p. 8). What is needed is a coherent and integrated leadership strategy.

Purpose is critically important for organizational leadership as well. "Purpose is an aspirational reason for being that inspires and provides a call to action for an organization, its partners, stakeholders" and "enables organizations to perform well in times of volatility" (Cranwell & Cotton, 2018, 10) – clearly another asset when it comes to outsourced projects. Purposeful organizations boast higher levels of employee

engagement and greater retention. Companies with purpose have a threefold stronger culture and greater psychological levels of safety than those that are less so. When opportunities present or danger threatens, the purposeful organization is more agile and can respond quickly and efficiently to the demands. Purposeful companies also enjoy higher levels of trust and loyalty and are more resilient. Finally, the purposeful company creates a learning environment that proactively supports leadership development by and through coaching, mentoring, and other activities (Cranwell & Cotton, 2018).

Day and Antonakis (2011) assert that the practice of leadership is easy to identify but that defining it is more difficult due to the complex nature of leadership as a practice and as a discipline. As more firms continue to expand and coordinate their activities (including outsourced projects) and engage in geographically distributed and virtual works, it becomes increasingly necessary to acknowledge the variability of roles and responsibilities and settle on a commonly understood definition of global leadership. Which for the purpose of our work is, "the processes and actions through which an individual influences a range of internal and external constituents from multiple national cultures and jurisdictions in a context characterized by significant levels of tasks and relationship complexity" (Reiche, et.al., 2015, p. 556).

Cultural issues in outsourced projects

Cultural issues in outsourced projects are multifaceted. All parties have to work hard to resolve potential problems arising from cultural differences. There are several factors that contribute to cultural issues in outsourced projects. In fact, culture can affect project management in at least four ways: a) departmental expectations in terms of interaction and support while in pursuit of project goals; b) employee commitment to the project goals and potentially competing goals; c) variances in the ways the work is estimated to be completed and allocation of resources; and, d) how managers evaluate the performance of project teams (Pinto, 2010). Cultural diversity is inescapable in the 21st century however, these differences can lead to decreased cohesion and communication and increases in dissatisfaction, distrust, conflict, ambiguity, and complexity (Robbins, 2001; Yukl, 2006).

Another crucial factor in outsourced projects is that societies tend to have distinct ways of working that can pose problems in a working environment. For example, Indian software companies have found they need to approach communication with U.S. and Japanese clients in quite diverse ways (Krishna, Sahay, & Walsham, 2004). U.S. companies expect their clients to work with extensive written agreements and explicit documentation, reinforced with frequent and informal telephone and email communication. In contrast, Japanese companies prefer verbal communication, continuously negotiated agreements, and less frequent but more formal use of electronic media.

Another problem is associated with the cultural adaptation of working in the various client countries. The challenges posed are adaptation to diverse ways of working, adherence to cultural norms of social behavior, attitudes toward authority, and language issues. For example, the appropriateness of gestures may be different among cultures. For instance, a raised thumb or a thumbs-up means 'all is good' in the western world, but in many Arabic countries a thumbs-up is as profane as signaling with one's middle-finger (Knapp & Hall, 2007; Matsumoto, 2006). Some companies from Norway prefer Russian software suppliers instead of Indian companies; the reason being the European mindset and the relative ease with which Russians learn the Norwegian language (Krishna et al., 2004).

From the client side, relationship management is a crucial factor. Relationship quality is defined as the degree of connectedness between a client and a vendor to achieve specified goals and characterized by four attributes including trust, vendor performance, cooperation, and conflict (Grover, Cheon, & Teng, 1996;

Lee & Kim 1999). Integrity (Martin et al., 2013), team cohesiveness (Wendt, Euwema, & van Emmerik, 2009), and the reliance of subordinates by leaders (Van de Vliert & Smith, 2004) also differ across countries and cultures. To address cultural differences, we need to think about them in terms of the dimensions of national culture – "a dimension is an aspect of culture that can be measured relative to other cultures" (Hofstede, 2005, p. 23).

Hofstede (1980; 2005) describes individualistic cultures as those where the ties between individuals are "loose" and people are expected to look after themselves and/or their immediate family (2005, p. 76). Collectivist cultures are those wherein people, from birth, are integrated into strong cohesive "in-groups" and are highlighted by unquestioning loyalty (2005, p. 76). These two characteristics of one dimension impact outsourced project culture. For example, he found that Germany was more individualist, whereas India was more collectivist. Differences between the two characteristics may influence the cooperation between the client and the vendor. Individualists and collectivists perform differently in different group settings. If a group is made up of employees from diverse cultures, differences in individualism may result in various levels of performance in a given group setting. Another factor is the degree of active and passive behaviors which influences the effectiveness of management styles. Triandis (1982) suggested that management styles that are participatory in nature are likely to be more effective in active cultures, whereas directive management style are most likely to be effective in passive cultures.

Power distance, the extent to which unequal distribution of power is accepted within a society, is another factor in outsourced projects (Hofstede, 1980; 2005). For example, in Germany, power distance was found to be quite low, suggesting an equal distribution of power between superiors and subordinates, whereas in India power distance was found to be rather high and there is substantive hierarchy even in social relationships. Differences in power distance can affect the performance in offshore outsourcing and can lead to conflicts and decrease trust (Winkler, Dibbern & Heinzl, 2008).

Masculinity and femininity, as dimensions of societal culture also contribute to the challenges of outsourced projects and are associated strongly with the importance related to work goals (Hosfstede, 2005). For example, masculine cultures place significance on assertiveness, material success, high earnings and recognition for a job well done. Having challenging work and opportunities for advancement are also key features of a masculine society. On the other hand, modesty, tenderness, good working relationships, employment security, cooperation, and desirable work locations are the hallmarks of a feminine society. Slovakia, for example, has one of the highest rates of masculinity for a nation is very much focused on success, competition, winning, etc. Denmark, on the other hand, has one of the lowest rates of masculinity for a nation. Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which members of a given society feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. "This feeling, among other things, is expressed through nervous stress and in a need for predictability; a need for written and unwritten rules (Hofstede, 2005, p. 167). In countries with weak uncertainty avoidance, anxiety levels are low, aggression and emotions are not to be expressed and stress is internalized (Hofstede, 2005). Anxious cultures tend to be very expressive and it is deemed acceptable to raise one's voice, talk with one's hands, and released pent up aggression.

The final dimension presented in this paper that impacts outsourced projects is long-term/short term orientations. A long-term orientation fosters the virtues toward future rewards including perseverance and thrift. Family and work are not separate in long-term orientations and family enterprises are normal. Short-term orientations foster the virtues of past and present – traditions, saving face, and the fulfilment of social obligations (Hosfstede, 2005). Tenacity and the pursuit of goals are ideal for the entrepreneurial short-term orientation.

Another factor impacting societies and outsourced projects is diversity. "Diversity is not a liberal ideological movement…it is a reality in today's business environment" (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2009, p. 35). Diversity takes on many forms – race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic level, etc. – and given globalization, changing demographic patterns, the increasing number of joint ventures, mergers, strategic alliances, etc., managing it is a critically important responsibility for leaders in the 21st century (Yukl, 2013) – particularly when it comes to outsourced projects. The effective leader will display a unique blend of behaviors, motivations, and skills that allow them to guide projects and organizations toward successful outcomes. Elements of leadership that are foundational to intercultural competence include vision and alignment, trust and openness, communication, decision-making, respect and value, emotional intelligence, task, and relationship orientation, and finally, flexibility and adaptability (Fischer, 2009). Based on the above observations and studies, we formulate a framework for cultural considerations in outsourced projects in the next section.

Cultural dimensions of leadership

Project culture reduces the relationship between project efficiency and project quality, as workers are considered to be less influenced by the harmful or detrimental consequences of project efficiency amidst supportive or high-project culture (Brewer & Faye, 2002). Schneider (1994) describes four types of cultures including a control culture, a collaboration culture, a competence culture, and a cultivation culture. We draw upon these four types as cultural considerations to formulate an outsourced project framework as shown in Figure 1.
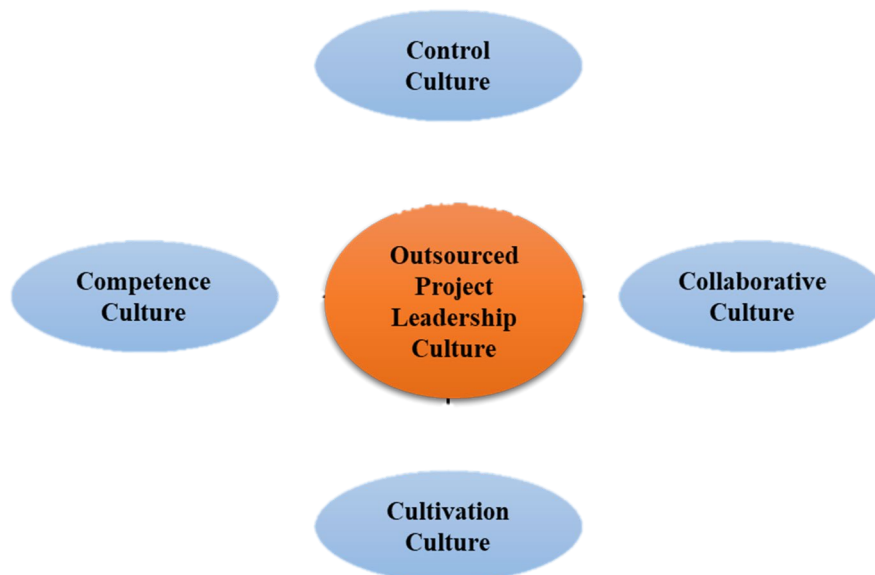

Figure 1: A Framework of Outsourced Project Leadership Culture

Control culture

Control culture revolves round power. Senior leadership can design, develop, and promote desirable cultural orientations to create a successful project environment (Vaidyanathan, 2021). Senior management usually uses two types of control mechanisms including informal and formal control modes. Formal controls are comprised of performance evaluation strategies of an organization and involves setting desired goals, performance targets, and a reward system when goals and targets are met. Management influences these processes by promoting specific rules and procedures and implements the mechanisms by gathering

pertinent information and evaluating the results. Informal control modes are based on social or people strategies. They are used to converge values and beliefs between the management and outsourcing vendors. Such controls include monitoring the work done by individual employees as well as the teams. Informal controls are based on the idea that self-managed individuals are intrinsically motivated to achieve their objectives in a structured work environment that encourages teams and individuals to exercise self-control (Manz & Angle, 1986).

Collaboration culture

Collaboration culture encourages teamwork. Collaboration between partners in outsourcing projects includes working in harmony with trust and openness. During the team-forming stage, the reputation of vendors impacts the trust in vendors. During the team-storming and team-norming stages, responsible team climate and structural assurance are important. During the team-performing stages, benefit impacts the trust factor (Cheng, Fu, & Vreede, 2021). Outsourced projects are frequently performed by people with different ideals, beliefs, values, and cultures. The differences in team member culture and corporate culture can lead to the success of a project. The culture of an outsourced project includes open collaboration, encouragement and partnership, the exchange of information, the assessment of individual experience, common values, and ideas in accordance with project goals, over a defined period of time (Marrewijk, 2007).

To bridge cultural gaps, many companies offer cultural training, cultural awareness initiatives, and team-building workshops as part of any global outsourced project. In internal projects, successful implementation requires a corporate culture that emphasizes the value of sharing common goals over individual pursuits and the value of trust among team members and stakeholders (Stefanou, 1999). In outsourced projects, the demands are greater since there are multiple organizations with different goals, leadership styles, varying cultural differences to name a few. A project manager executing an outsourced project may experience a cultural shock, the anxiety experienced in a new environment (Oberg, 1960). In such new environments, project success hinges on a supportive leadership style that encompasses harmony and paternalism as important behavioral components (Fellows, Liu, & Wong, 2003; Kasapoglu, 2014).

Cultivation culture

Project managers must tailor their projects to align with their organizational culture. An easy approach to handle the difficulties of cross-cultural working is to choose the most appropriate outsourced projects. For example, software to be coded by vendors can be specified in a culturally neutral way, so that less cross-cultural understanding is needed. Another approach is to choose projects that have been successful before and use the knowledge gained from those successful projects and many Indian software companies use such a strategy. For example, many Indian software suppliers have acquired knowledge in the telecommunications and e-business domains through projects conducted for North American and European companies. They have successfully used that knowledge to execute similar software development in Japanese companies (Krishna, et al., 2004). Good cultural match is important. Indian software companies who know the English system and cultural aspects of the English, have successfully conducted outsourced projects in U.K. (Krishna, et al., 2004).

Competence culture

Competence culture endorses achievement. Leaders must be aware of and sensitive to cultural diversity. Thuerback (2014) argued that cultural awareness proactively encourages awareness, sensitivity, and patience between the team members. If a project manager is unaware of cultural differences, it may result in misunderstandings and delays in deliverables as well as cost overruns in projects. A study by Wong,

Wong, & Li (2007) found that to be successful, project managers must value both project value and high productivity, emphasize project time deadlines, and efficient task performance and place strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships and maintain good relationships with external parties.

Using the cultural dimensions framework formulated in this paper, Table 2 illustrates how an outsourced project potentially differs from an in-house project.

Table 2: Comparison of Outsourced and In-house Projects

Cultural dimension	Outsourced project	In-house project
Control	Proper controls to monitor work of external team must be exercised	Internal mechanisms and governance are used to control in-house projects
Collaborative	Cultural training, cultural awareness initiatives, and team-building workshops must be implemented	A collaborative environment should be created by management for all projects to be successful
Cultivation	Project managers must tailor their projects to align with the culture of the outsourcing organization	Projects must be tailored by selecting appropriate development approach based on organizational factors, and various project factors
Competence	Project managers must maintain good relationships with external team members and organizations	Project managers must maintain good relationships with internal team members

Conclusions and future research

Information Technology and other project management activities revolve around people and work management. Therefore, project managers must ensure that their project team performs well and their overall work results in project success. Individual project team members' capabilities are critical for the project success. To achieve project success, especially in outsourced projects, where team members come from diverse cultures, project managers must use their cultural intelligence to stimulate individual and team performance (Beck, Gregory, & Prifling, 2008). Project managers may employ team building activities, socialization activities, regular meetings, and communication on a personal and work level. The development of cultural intelligence in IT project teams and the appropriate selection and use of project management techniques in an offshore outsourcing project depends on the cultural intelligence of the project manager. Cultural intelligence and project management skills jointly reduce the inherent cultural risks in IT offshore outsourcing projects and are necessary components of offshore outsourcing project success (Beck, et al., 2008).

Understanding the project culture before and during an ongoing project is a critical challenge that every project manager faces. This paper illustrates a framework of leadership cultural dimensions in outsourced projects. Practicing project managers will benefit from the discussions in this paper. We have suggested many ways to address cultural issues and challenges that arise in outsourced projects. We have synthesized the cultural issues and challenges faced by most project managers and created a framework from current research literature on leadership culture. By choosing and getting involved in appropriate projects, senior leadership teams can establish good controls mechanisms including cultural training, cultural awareness initiatives, and team-building workshops, and by cultivating sensitivity to other cultures, project managers can mitigate issues and challenges in outsourced projects. We would like to further this research by investigating the empirical model of the framework formulated in this study. Academicians can use the cultural dimensions and the proposed framework to study leadership variances by culture.

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