

Western PM Methodologies in Eastern Cultures, Can It Work?

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The popular PMBOK from PMI is mostly America centric pm approach. ICB from IPMA and PRINCE2 from APMG are considered European centric pm approach. However, there are many complex and large scaled projects going on in Eastern countries like China, India, Japan and ASEAN.

Could these Western PM methodologies workable with projects in countries with Eastern cultures and stakeholders grow up in a Eastern philosophy environment?

Just take an example of "Guan Xi", the social relationship or networking in doing business in China.

It is rather common to exchange gifts and having meals or drinks among the suppliers, vendors and customers. In fact, some of the project decisions could be derived during these "Guan Xi" events.

We are so used to black and white contract negotiations on the table. How should the Project Managers to maintain professional code of ethics while developing "Guan Xi" with stakeholders in China? They have to be flexible in Eastern Cultures yet not breaking the legal stand. One thing we should learn is that China's culture prefers long-termed commitment, trust and relationship rather than signing the contract. Rushing into signing the contract is a big No-No, we need patience.

Doing projects in India is another complex situation as the country is divided by religion, region, caste, and class. Avoid aggressiveness and apply gentle communication in project meetings while doing projects in India. Bargain and negotiation are part of Indian culture, Project Managers need to brush up their communication and influencing skills to get things moving.

I read the news about Obama bowed to Japan's Emperor. Doing projects in Japan, we need to be aware of the Japanese culture: respect, hierarchy, self-discipline and team decision. Remember Kaizen philosophy when dealing with projects in Japan.

Western PM methodologies are working well in the Western world and I believe they have an important role in doing projects in Eastern world as well. However, beside all the "hard skills", Project Managers should adopt some of the "soft skills" in order to be successful in managing projects in the Eastern cultures. Here are some of my suggestions:

- understand the local language or get a translator
- understand the local culture
- understand the local political, economic and social environment
- understand the local law and regulations
- be sensitive on local etiquette, protocol and business customs
- be open-minded and flexible and yet not breaking the professional ethics