CODIFYING PROJECT MANAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES: AN APPRAISAL OF PROPERTY DEVELOPERS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

A postal questionnaire survey on Malaysia property developers reveals that they have either made their project management best practices (PMBP) explicit, merely borrowed ‘commodified’ (i.e. commercialised) versions, plan to render their accumulated PMBP a more solid existence some time in the future or simply continued to rely on their personnel as repositories of PMBP. Even though the desire to operate professionally, and to a lesser degree, quality compliance stimulated the codification trend, the analysis suggests that the choice to do so should really be contingent on the size of the organisation by manpower, project size and degree of dependence on external parties in the development process. Age of organisation was not found to be influential. Whatever the choice may be, there are benefits as well as drawbacks to making PMBP explicit. Case studies were conducted on four varying companies to bring to life the full ramification of the knowledge repository mode on knowledge-oriented tools and administrative procedures adopted during the knowledge generation, storage and dissemination.

Keywords
Codification, knowledge management, project management best practices, property developers, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

Academic interest in knowledge management has intensified over the years (e.g. Senge, 1990; Nonaka, 1994; Quintas et. al., 1997; Beamish and Armistead, 2001; etc.). Knowledge management refers to all activities pertaining to the creation, storage, transfer, use and protection of knowledge. Codifying all or certain portions of an organisation’s knowledge base is one approach to storing knowledge. Knowledge becomes codified when it is expressed in words, numbers, scientific procedures, or universal principles and is stored in paper or electronic form, thus rendering it the characteristics of being explicit and systematic (Coombs and Hull, 1998; Cohendet and Meyer-Krahmer, 2001). The opposite of codification is personalisation. Personalised knowledge is knowledge that is “closely tied to a person who developed it and is shared mainly through direct person-to-person contact” (Hansen et. al., 1999). It is tacit or implicit in form, and tends to manifest in routines or unwritten procedural rules. The knowledge that this paper is concerned with is the project management best practices (PMBP). PMBP refer to the optimum ways of performing work processes to achieve high project performance (Bogan and English, 1994; Zairi, 1996; Walker, 1984; Kertzner, 2000). Project information per se in the guise of design drawings, work schedules, bill of quantities, specifications and other documentation is not regarded as part of PMBP.

This study arose out of a curiosity over the extent to which PMBP have been codified by property developers in Malaysia. Within pure project-based organisation, projects embody most, if not all, of the business functions normally carried out (Hobday, 2000). The organisational knowledge, capabilities and resources are accumulated through project