MISQ Archivist

Cultural Sensemaking in Offshore Information Technology Service Suppliers: A Cultural Frame Perspective

Ning Su

Abstract

In today’s global IT outsourcing relationships, individual employees need to operate effectively in culturally diverse environments. Such intercultural interactions can be especially challenging for members of IT service suppliers based in offshore locations. Through an in-depth qualitative case study of one of the largest China-based IT service firms with diverse clients from Japan, the United States, and China, this research elaborates the cultural sensemaking activities of the supplier’s individual employees. Specifically, drawing on the dynamic constructivist view of culture, this study develops the construct of “cultural frames” in the context of global IT outsourcing to characterize the knowledge structures guiding an individual’s collaboration with diverse clients. A portfolio of cultural frames emerges and evolves through the individual’s cultural sensemaking activities, which consist of the iterative enactment, alignment, and retention of cultural frames. In the cultural sensemaking process, the activity of frame bridging, in particular, creates significant value for the outsourcing relationship, and is especially salient among bicultural employees.

Keywords: IT outsourcing, IT supplier, cultural sensemaking, cultural frame, China