

*Global Project Strategy (011) (603) 862-3374*

## China: Communication and the PM Process

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It's a cold winter's day here in Beijing where I am working with graduate students at Renmin University of China and have just finished reviewing their projects. Several interesting observations help us to understand the emerging use of project management principles in Asia.

First, the students, most with at least three years of business experience, are quite eager to explore the methodologies, princesses and skills of project management.

But they are quick to ask how this knowledge can help them in China, whose culture - especially management culture - is so different from that of the East.

But, there is no difference between the use of Business cases to define a project, the use of the Work Breakdown Structure to help in the planning and scheduling process, risk management (RBS) and the range of most all of the techniques and methodologies that are common across the world.

Where the big difference

occurs is in the process of creating project ideas, initiation, planning, executing, management, control and even closing.

It is a difference that relates more to *how* (project management culture) things are done than it does to *what* (WBS, RBS, Schedule) things are done.

How things are done does matter. In fact it matters quite a bit. Let's look at just one critical success factor, communication. It can be argued that this knowledge area is tied directly to how things get done. Indeed, many failed projects are linked to failed communications!

Most would agree that communication needs to take place across a range of stakeholders and it needs to be two way. One way communication from the top down is certainly different from two way communications. In the two way process we have discussions, collaborations and negotiation. In the one way, there is much less of all three.

So here is the first difference between Asia and the West. While in the

West there is significantly less power distance between the top and bottom of many organizations, in China there is more.

Research has shown that where there is less power distance there is likely to be more discussion, collaboration and negotiation.

So we would expect that in Chinese companies we would find less of all three than in the West.

This does not mean that all organizations in the West are open to discussion, collaboration and negotiation. Indeed there are many examples of just the opposite. Ikea comes to mind as one company in the West that has prospered from a top down culture. Infosys, on the other hand, in Shanghai has done quite well with a more democratic style.

So, like any generalization there are many exceptions. Yet, my experience suggests that generalizations do help provide some insight into the differences in how projects are managed between China and the West