Chapter 4.26
Open Collectivism and Knowledge Communities in Japan

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to introduce an Eastern CoPs’ specific approach that is quite different from that of Western communities. In a collectivist prevalent societal type, the “sharing of feelings should come first, naturally followed by knowledge sharing” type of approach works very well even in a business environment.

One of Japan’s traditional manufacturers has launched several interesting knowledge communities that are different from the accepted Western KM approach that emphasizes cost and effect straightforwardly. Their approach emphasized the generation of social networking on intranet first, and at a later stage, they proceeded to knowledge sharing through communities of practice.

This “go slow to go fast” approach may look like one of the typical and traditional Japanese management styles. However, in this approach, the culture of this company group steadily changes from introverted and closed to extroverted and open.

Their approach to build open and extroverted collectivism that is generated by knowledge communities could be one of the new management style prototypes of Japanese companies in the future.

BACKGROUND

QP Corporation is a top-class Japanese company, manufacturing and marketing mayonnaise and salad dressings in Japan. One of the group companies manufactures jam. QP is one of the top brands in the food industry. They have been in the food manufacturing business more than 80 years with 2,200 employees. The total number of employees including group companies is 6,000.