Clarification of Abilities and Qualities of Knowledge Coordinators: The Case of Regional Revitalization Projects

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ABSTRACT

Abilities and qualities of key persons in regional revitalization projects are unclear, although in connection with the recognition of the importance of these projects, fostering talent is an urgent task. Based on the concept that a key person in regional revitalization projects is the knowledge coordinator, this paper explores abilities and qualities of knowledge coordinators. As a result, the knowledge coordinator in regional revitalization projects is a person who has abilities and qualities as shown by the i-System, and is a person who puts a comprehensive and process-like approach for knowledge creation into practice. This paper visualizes and structures their abilities and qualities from the viewpoint of knowledge coordination by using the i-System.

Keywords: Ability, i-System, Knowledge Coordination, Knowledge Coordinator, Regional Revitalization Projects

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, regional revitalization projects are very active, and one of the main themes in Japan (Economic and Social Research Institute, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2009). The purpose of those projects is to revitalize regional economy and employment by making effective use of regional resources through wisdom and innovative ideas (The Japanese Cabinet Secretariat, Regional Revitalization Office, 2006). One of the key factors leading to a project’s success is the existence of a key person in the project. Therefore, it is imperative for both central and local governments to train such key persons (Economic and Social Research Institute, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2007). Training and discovery of a key person is an urgent necessity today. It requires clinical research regarding regions which were reactivated in recent years by the Japanese Cabinet Office. Based on this recognition, many regions set up training seminars for key persons of regional revitalization projects. However, presently the major way to train key persons is to hold a seminar to introduce suc-
cessful projects and methods from the past. There are very few cases, and it is difficult to find what kind of roles key persons should play, and the abilities and qualities key persons should have (Kitajima, 2008). Also, studies of key persons related specifically to regional revitalization projects have not been sufficient, even though leaders and leadership (Shamir et al., 1993; McCleland & Boyatzis, 1982; Santora & Joseph, 2001) are extensively studied in general. Furthermore, the key person is often described in different ways, not only as a leader, but also as a coordinator, expert (Japan Tourism Agency, 2005), manager (Japan Foundation for Regional Vitalization, 2010), and so on. This means that the concept of a key person remains unclear, although it is necessary to unify their role, abilities and qualities.

Meanwhile, the Japanese Cabinet Office (2007) has conducted research on key persons in successful regional revitalization projects. That research showed several important factors of key persons, including their abilities and qualities. However, it was focused on only having “human network”, as one of the key person’s most important abilities and qualities leading to a project’s success. Regarding their roles, Miyashita (2007) suggests 8 intermediary actors; producer, director, innovator, broker, mentor, facilitator, coordinator, and monitor, and describes that their general roles are flexibly changed and covered by others, depending on the external environment. Additionally, Lawrence et al. (2009) suggest that leaders should play not only one role but also every role equally, since they have 12 actors qualities inside them, such as; facilitator, emphasizer, mentor, monitor, coordinator, regulator, innovator, visionary, motivator, producer, competitor, and driver. As shown in the above two previous studies, there are numerous similarities and overlapping functions among these actors, and at the same time, they may need to play another role in the context of the actual situation in the external environment. In this paper, we put aim to find key persons’ abilities and qualities for successful regional revitalization.

This paper is organized as follows: first, we describe our viewpoints as hypothesis. Second, we show the coverage field and persons who are the targets of our surveys. Third, we present two different approaches; interview and document survey respectively. Fourth, we discuss the key persons’ necessary abilities and qualities, and compare the results with the Japanese Cabinet Office’s research from the viewpoint of “human network”. Then finally we give our conclusion.

VIEWPOINT (HYPOTHESIS)

Based on the presupposition that a key person is a knowledge coordinator who can create innovation, we explore this issue from the viewpoint of knowledge coordination using a knowledge construction system model called the $i$-System (Nakamori, 2003, 2006; Nakamori & Zhu, 2004).

The Key Person and the Knowledge Coordinator

The knowledge coordinator is defined as the person who can make innovation in each field by using interdisciplinary knowledge, free-thinking and total skill of judgment, deep insight and systems thinking (Nakamori et al., 2010; Kikuchi et al., 2007). It can be further defined as a person who can make innovation using knowledge (Chihara & Nakamori, 2007). The term “knowledge” here includes not only knowledge based on information and data, but also insight and wisdom (Nakamori, 2003). Therefore, this term, “knowledge coordinator” is suitable to express the key person, since a definition of regional revitalization projects is to create innovation.

The Knowledge Coordinator and the $i$-System

The $i$-System is a model for a knowledge construction system, which is a systemic and process-like approach to knowledge creation (Nakamori, 2003, 2006; Nakamori & Zhu,
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