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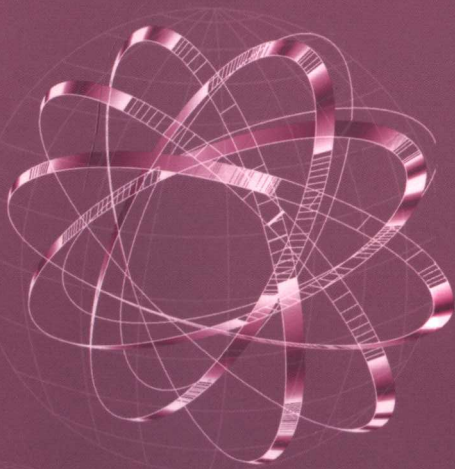
刘世敏 著

An Integrated Approach to Organizational Learning in International Joint Ventures

中外合资企业中的组织学习



北京市教委共建项目资助出版



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BY **SHIMIN LIU**

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＝ 中外合资企业中的组织学习

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关于本书

This book is concerned with organizational learning in an intercultural context. It looks at what organizational learning entails in Chinese—Western joint ventures by examining both the technical and the social perspectives to learning. An integrated approach is offered that explores the possibility for mutual/collaborative learning in Chinese—Western joint ventures. This approach incorporates a relational perspective that emphasizes the ways in which people make sense of their experience. It seeks to bring to the surface different layers of knowledge and meaning created and recreated in the process of learning and change.

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出版说明

我社以中国经济为名，那么瞩目经济现实、映照本地风光当属我社倾心竭力的出版方向之一。近年来，通人作媒引介了不少经济学、管理学译著，这些迳译流转、梓刻辛劳在引进西学新知、开阔国人眼界方面，功不可没。然而，学术翻译终究不能完全替换自家见识，将中国学术的终身大事托付西洋文化，亦有失偏颇，西学尝论“地方性知识”一说，学人当有所警醒。中国的发展，与国际接轨的趋势自然不可阻挡，但在既趋将趋之际，未成将成之时，总有诸多学问虽自成格式，却真实有效。名其学问，为经世济用；言其真实，是处于国情限定之下，围绕“中国经济”这一主题，发出富有学术理性的声音。它们或为前瞻预言，或为结而论之，甚至是即席评点，逐节成文，然而不管是哪一种形式，却有共同的特点——有助于解决实际问题。中国的学者深入到中国的真实，以开放的世界眼光探求中国的经济走向，论证的主题、运用的方法、援引的数据以及尤为重要的——节制的姿态，都昭示着国内学术研究的日益规范与成熟。

这些专门的学术研究，虽然视角有别，方法各异，但在关怀

的主题、探究的趋向方面，皆在“中国”二字得以交叉。假如能适时地汇而编之，系统出版，面向学界，满足学人殷切之期待；于实务参照，则寻症究结，切中之论，裨其高屋建瓴，延展视界；在出版推动而言，我社既以“中国经济”为名，自然责无旁贷，倘收微功之效，洵可欣慰也。

职是之故，此次以“商学前沿学术文库”为丛书纲目，冀在收散归整，将学界中未成条理之单行本系统辑录，一并出版，庶几蔚为大观，有利于研读参观，相互发明。于当下之读者，可致连带左右，索源更易；于来日之读者，不致探失求佚，无功而返。此种出版计划，幸蒙学界大力支持，并获国内多所知名商学院切近襄助，“商学前沿学术文库”可望薪传流长，伴随中国经济之发展，辉芒熠熠。

丛书辑录之时，虽求风格一致，融洽齐整，然而限于人力时日，在注释体例、编排格式诸多方面未臻尽美。对此，尚希读者见谅，既登梨枣，广布深传，衷心期待学人指正，出版事务因此得益，学术前途循而光明，文化同人，均感荷无极也。

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Introduction

Scholars from various disciplines attribute many different meanings to learning in general and to ‘organizational learning’ in particular. They can be distinguished by the stance they take towards OL as a technical or social process (Easterby – Smith, Araujo and Burgoyne, 1999). The technical view emphasizes organizational learning as the effective acquiring, processing, interpreting and storing information, through which the potential behavior of an entity can be changed (Huber, 1991).

Learning in or through strategic alliances or joint ventures has attracted growing attention. The idea of gaining access to sources of know – how through joint ventures is becoming increasingly popular. One of the objectives of joint ventures has been to obtain, absorb, and transfer partner knowledge to parent companies (Hamel, 1991; Inkpen, 1994). In addition to this, many firms also seek the objective of learning from joint venture experience in order to become more effective in managing joint ventures. This includes implementing technology transfer, managing the joint venture per se and knowing about a new business environment (Tsang, 1999).

Most of these studies are about learning in joint ventures formed between partners with comparable strengths and technical competence. Joint ventures formed between developed and developing countries, however, are characterized by asymmetrical learning because of the

apparent gap in technical competence. In Chinese – Western joint ventures, for example, local Chinese partners learned technology and sometimes management skills from their foreign partners, who in turn, learned the way of doing business in China. For both Chinese and foreign partners, technology transfer and learning about new business environment were not much of an issue. More often, foreign partners encountered serious setbacks in introducing management knowledge and practices, and in managing partner relationships.

This implies that in international joint ventures, in particular in Chinese – Western joint ventures, the conventional way of approaching learning from a technical perspective is inadequate in achieving joint venture success. A social perspective that focuses on how people make sense of their experience is required towards the understanding of partner relationship and its impact on the process of organizational learning in joint ventures.

This research is concerned with organizational learning in Chinese – Western joint ventures. Chinese – Western joint ventures are chosen as the subject of the study because they have received little attention in organizational learning literature. On the other hand, studies of joint ventures in China often focus on issues of control and structural determinants such as strategy, structure and systems. For practitioners within joint ventures, learning tends to be narrowly understood as technology transfer and/or information processing, and the purpose of learning is simple and clear; to improve organizational effectiveness. Given such a state of affairs, it is not difficult to understand why organizational learning in Chinese – Western joint ventures is often limited to the technical, and single – loop level.

In this study, I attempted to explore issues that promote or impede learning at higher levels in an intercultural context. The emphasis is on

learning that goes beyond acquiring partner skills towards an inquiry into an experiential learning process of how people make sense of their experience, and the knowledge created and recreated in such process. To be more specific, it explores the possibility for both Chinese and Western partners to have a deeper understanding of the different cultural assumptions they brought to the joint venture. If such understanding can be achieved, both sides will be able to move beyond the constraints of their individual cultures and to create an environment for collective learning.

In this book, I critiqued the rational approach towards learning that currently dominates the field of organizational learning in general and learning in international joint ventures in particular. I am not intending to refute the significance of technical learning and rationalized knowledge, my argument is that a relational perspective is necessary towards the understanding of learning in Chinese – Western joint ventures. The relational framework I developed was based on the assumption that knowledge is created through a social process of collective human actions and interactions. It enquired into issues integral to experiential learning processes. These include understanding what is emotional and political in the learning process. The argument was illustrated through data collected from case studies with joint venture managers and my personal experiences. The link between my experience and that of the Chinese managers working in joint ventures generated knowledge that made explicit both the possibilities and difficulties involved in learning in an intercultural context.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book consists of three parts.

Part One discusses some of the thinking in the fields of

organizational learning and management science that informs this study. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the key concepts and ideas of organizational learning focusing on three areas. They are; the outcome of learning as either cognitive or behavioral; the link between individual and organizational learning and learning from experience. I argue that the political and emotional are integral to the process of learning from experience.

This leads me to look at the politics of learning and organizing in Chapter 2, in which I highlighted three conceptions of power that are important for understanding organizational learning in Chinese – Western joint ventures. These include Lukes ‘three dimensional view; Giddens’ ‘structuration’ theory and Gergen’s relational perspective. I examine how power is configured and exercised in the process of learning and change within organizations. In Chapter 3, I look at the theory and practice of dialogue. I discuss its limitations as it is currently applied in learning organizations as well as its implications for learning in an intercultural context.

Part Two explores issues involved in organizational learning in Chinese – Western joint ventures. In Chapter 4, I review current research on learning in international joint ventures. The main argument is that the rational approach towards inter – partner learning is inadequate in addressing learning issues in joint ventures formed between partners of asymmetrical competencies, therefore a relational perspective that focuses on emotions and relations in the learning process is needed. In Chapter 5, I discuss the intercultural context in which learning takes place. In Chapter 6, I carry out an in – depth exploration in the processes of learning in joint ventures in China. I consider the technical aspect of learning in the joint ventures I studied as well as the relational aspect, focusing on the differential power

relations between Chinese and Western partners. This is followed in Chapter 7 with case examples drawn from my research studies with joint ventures in China to illustrate the key issues discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 8 links issues emerged from case examples to the preliminary framework I outlined in Part One. It looks at the impact of partner relationship on the process of learning and change in joint ventures.

Part Three concludes the research study. In Chapter 9, I give an overview of the research findings. This is followed by the development of a theoretical framework in Chapter 10. This framework is underpinned by the argument that knowledge is created through a social process of collective human actions and interactions. It is illustrated with examples from Chinese – Western joint ventures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research aims to develop a conceptual framework for organizational learning in Chinese – Western joint ventures based upon emerging issues rather than testing existing theory. The focus is on the understanding of intercultural partner relationship and its impact on learning within joint ventures. Data of this kind cannot be captured by using a traditional quantitative approach. That means access to qualitative data by in – depth case studies is essential.

The study adopts multiple approaches in data collection and data analysis. They are case study approach and action research approach. Two types of data were collected and analysed. Data from studies with joint ventures in China was collected through open – ended interviews, and observations of board meetings and the work environments of some joint ventures. Experiential data was captured from a collection of my diaries and writings that recorded my personal experience in learning and research.

Chapter 1

Key Concepts and Ideas of Organizational Learning

Since Simon (1976) formally introduced the concept of organizational learning some 40 years ago, it has been gaining popularity both with academics and practitioners. Despite this, no single theory or model is widely accepted. Different disciplinary perspectives have contributed to the understanding of the concept. The popularization of the concept can be attributed to the work of Argyris and Schön (1978) which provides a source for many later works on both organizational learning and the learning organization.

Theorizing in the field has focused on the dichotomy between prescriptive writings that stress ‘how an organization should learn’ in order to achieve continuous improvement; and descriptive studies, which delve into the meaningfulness of organizational learning and see it as process rather than outcome. Within these two streams there are diverse perspectives towards the understanding of the phenomenon of organizational learning, which fall largely into two categories: the technical view and the social view, according to whether they emphasize learning as a technical process or social process (Easterby – Smith et al. ,1999).

For the technical view, organizational learning is about the effective processing of information. It assumes that organizations are capable of processing, interpreting and responding to information both inside and

outside the organization (Huber, 1991; Daft and Weick, 1984; Hedberg, 1981). Learning is oriented towards achieving organization effectiveness. For the social view, organizational learning focuses on the sense – making process of people ’ s experiences, and as a result, it emerges from social interactions. This view is supported by those writers who perceive organizational learning as socially constructed (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Nicolini & Mezner, 1995; Addleson, 1996), as a political process (Coopey, 1995, 1998; Coopey and Burgoyne, 1999), and as implicated in the culture of an organization (Cook and Yanow, 1993). Currently, there is a tendency in the field to move away from the ‘ technical ’ and towards the ‘ social ’.

The diversity of perspectives in the field reflects the difficulties involved in defining and interpreting the concept of organizational learning. Some organization theorists argue that this fragmented and noncumulative situation is not conducive to building a coherent theory, and there is a need for integration of theory and practice (Huber, 1991; Nicolini & Mezner, 1995; Crossan et al, 1995; 1999). Others, however, advocate a multidisciplinary approach. The argument is that approaches to organizational learning are based on distinct, and largely incompatible views of the nature of learning itself, and each of the perspectives leads to distinctive contributions to the understanding of organizational learning. Therefore, it might be best to embrace contributions from different perspectives rather than be confined by a unified body of knowledge and practice (Easterby – Smith, 1997; 1999).

This study looks particularly at organizational learning in international joint ventures. The nature of the study requires an examination of the insights from different perspectives and disciplines towards the understanding of learning in an intercultural context. In

particular, in order to understand the complexities involved in learning in Chinese – Western joint ventures, it is important to emphasize a social perspective. This is because learning in international joint ventures involves not only access of partner skills but also interactions between partners in which knowledge appropriate for the specific joint venture context might be created. This will be explored in Part Two.

In this chapter, I discuss some of the existing areas of theory that inform this study. Firstly I look at different ‘types’ of learning that provide different levels of analysis for the outcomes of learning. I then discuss the link between individual learning and organizational learning, and explore how individual learning might transfer into organizational learning. Finally I look at some of the ideas behind experiential learning.

LEARNING AND CHANGE

Although there are many contesting ideas around the definition of learning, many emphasize change as an outcome of learning. The idea of change, most commonly behavioral but also cognitive, is deeply embedded in notions of learning. As Bateson observes “the word learning undoubtedly denotes change of some kind” (1973). Bateson (1973) provides a framework for understanding the ‘hierarchy’ of human learning and its implications for change. He suggests that different forms of learning could be logically related to each other, such as: Zero Learning, Learning I, Learning II, and Learning III, which may lead to different categories of change (Table 1.1).