



*Nichols and Associates, Inc.*

## CASE ONE

Different Problem-Solving Approaches: Confusion and Mistrust in Project Management

### **The Background**

The Port Authority on the West Coast wanted to increase the flow of commercial traffic from Korea. After lengthy conversations, the deal was set. Having given the contract to this Port Authority, culturally, the Korean firm expected some show of gratitude.

However, they realized that such behavior in this country carried a negative connotation and was viewed as illegal. Therefore, the Korean firm suggested that they should be permitted to build the *off-loading cranes* for the Port Authority.

During negotiations, it became clear that the Korean firm had no experience in building such cranes. However, "one hand washes the other" and the deal was signed. Mr. Soft was the project officer from the Port Authority and Mr. Kim was the project officer for the Korean firm.

After several months of telephone calls to Korea, Mr. Soft was assured that progress was being made and he should continue the monthly funding. Mr. Soft's boss, Mr. Loud, demanded that he go to Korea to see what progress had been made. When Mr. Soft arrived at the warehouse factory in Korea to inspect the construction of the crane, he found nothing there. Absolutely nothing was in the warehouse factory that even resembled a crane. However, Mr. Kim assured him that the project was on track and on schedule.

It was very difficult for Mr. Soft to explain to Mr. Loud that he had not seen a crane and only heard Mr. Kim's assurances.

Had Mr. Soft asked the right questions? **Nichols and Associates, Inc.** was solicited for consultation. What concept could explain Mr. Kim's approach and behavior? What is the concept of **pedagogical epistemology** and the **process** within the Asian culture?

### **Fast forward six months...**

Mr. Soft and Mr. Loud were in Korea inspecting Mr. Kim's warehouse factory. The crane was being assembled before their eyes, with additional parts arriving hourly. The crane was delivered on the exact date of the contract.

### **The Interpretation**

From the perspective of western project management, the **methodology** is **linear and sequential** versus an Asian methodology, which is **cyclical** and **repetitive**. From the perspective of the Korean pedagogy the factory floor is the place where the **whole** and **parts** are seen **simultaneously**.

### **The Outcome**

The efficiency of **keiretsu**, which corresponds to the **Asian process**-all sets are independently interrelated in the harmony of the universe-was the method of Mr. Kim's productivity.