



Selecting management talent for joint ventures: A suggested framework

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Abstract

Joint ventures (JVs) and other forms of interfirm collaboration continue to be an important part of the strategy of a substantial number of firms. Although JVs are interfirm level phenomena, individuals play very important roles in managing the relationship. This article presents a framework for the identification and selection of individual talent for JV management teams. The framework relates (1) general management skills; (2) technical competence and industry knowledge; and (3) individual dispositions to an individual venture manager's ability to deal with the challenges of JV management. The framework goes beyond just fitting individuals to the role demands. It considers factors that are relevant to the venture context as a whole. This is important, given that the venture context imposes constraints on the managers and the effectiveness of each individual must therefore be viewed within the context of the position. It may be possible to identify individuals most suitable for the role by determining ahead of time how they rank on the dimensions in the framework. In other cases, firms can prepare individuals for the role by providing opportunities for their employees to develop the types of skills and competencies that are useful for performance in the role.

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1. Introduction

Interorganizational collaboration has become an important source of competitive advantage for firms in a wide range of industries. Joint ventures (JVs) are one example of the many organizational forms that arise as a result of this development. JVs are contractual cooperative forms in which two parent firms share ownership of a third organization, the JV (Harrigan, 1988). Despite their popularity, managing this and other new organizational forms may not be easy. This paper explores some human resource issues that have been associated with JVs, specifically selection issues.

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A substantial amount of research and theory has focused on the important role JV managers play (e.g. Shenkar & Zeira, 1992; Yoshino & Rangan, 1995). For example, Geringer and Hébert (1991) contend that venture managers play very important roles in developing the relationship between parent firms. Ring and Van de Ven (1994) suggest that those who manage the boundaries between partners affect how the relationship between parent firms develops. Considering the important role these key individuals play in venture management, a deeper understanding of the role and its occupants is warranted.

Prior work on JV management has tended to concentrate on organizational issues, such as the problems of JV managers (Shenkar & Zeira, 1992), and how relations between the partners affect dynamics in JVs (Pearce, 1997). Other researchers have also explored the unique nature of management in alliances in general (Shenkar & Zeira, 1992; Yoshino & Rangan, 1995). Some human resource issues associated with alliances have also been addressed (Björkman & Lu, 1999). These and other prior contributions have made valuable contributions to our understanding of JV management. Prior work, however, has not directly addressed a key question: (1) what kind of individual is most suitable for this role? A second and related question is (2) what type of skills and competencies are desirable for effective performance in the role?

Answering both questions is important for at least three reasons. First, the development of normative guidelines on human resource management in JVs can help improve the performance of JVs. Specifically it will help address some of the vexing human resource and personnel issues that have been associated with JV management. For example, Yoshino and Rangan (1995) observed that partnering firms face serious difficulties in addressing human resource issues in JVs. Studies of international JVs in China have shown that human resource issues, including recruitment of suitable personnel, is a critical problem facing international JVs (Björkman & Lu, 1999; Leung & Kwong, 2003). Second, and related, answers to these questions may help improve the rather mixed performance record of JVs and interfirm alliances in general (Chowdhury, 1992; Harrigan, 1988). Finally, such a research thrust may help extend existing work on both alliance research and boundary role management in general.

This paper builds on existing work in JV, boundary role, and human resource research to illuminate our understanding of JV management by providing a framework for analyzing the identification of appropriate talent for JV management positions. The variables selected are based on previous research. The paper is organized as follows: The paper begins by looking at the unique nature of JV management, including the roles of JV managers. This will include an exploration of the complex nature of venture management tasks and the roles of JV managers. Then, a number of individual factors, including competencies and dispositional factors, are discussed and linked to management in a JV context. The concluding section presents a discussion of some of the practice and research implications of the paper.

1.1. Objectives and approach of the paper

In what follows, a framework relating individual level factors to JV management is presented. The presumption is that the selection of the right individual in terms of general management and interpersonal skills, individual dispositions, and technical and industry knowledge leads to competencies that will positively impact performance in the role. Fig. 1 presents a summary of the main arguments in schematic form. It relates key skills, knowledge, and dispositional factors to a set of management competencies (+). These in turn reduce the challenges of JV management (–), thereby positively impacting performance in the role.

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