

Knowledge Management as an Extension of Organisational Learning Process

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Received: 8 December 2017 Accepted: 4 January 2018 Published: 15 January 2018

Abstract

It is no longer strange for individuals and organisations alike to appreciate that only organisations that are innovative will survive in very turbulent economic landscape. It is also a fact that innovations can only be achieved when an organisation continuously learns and becomes a learning organisation. A learning organisation is characterized by the stock of both tacit and explicit knowledge which it has acquired over time and how the stock of knowledge is utilized. The stock of knowledge becomes useful only when it is shared and utilized for the overall improvement in all organisational processes and human capital enhancement. This conceptual paper suggests that as important as the concept of knowledge management is, rather than treating it as a different management concept, it ought to be treated as a major component of organisational learning process. In fact, knowledge management is and should be an extension of organisational learning because when there is no learning; there will not be any knowledge to manage. This paper also revealed that lack of interpersonal relationship, lack of organisational trust, skills, and time inadequacy are the major factors that hinder organisational members from sharing knowledge.

Index terms— Keywords: information; knowledge; organisational resources; competitive advantage; innovativeness.

1 I. Introduction

he management of our stock of knowledge resources or intellectual assets has become a topic that is universally popular to both academicians and practitioners (Koochang, Paliszkievicz, & Go?uchowski, 2017). Little wonder, most contemporary organisations have realized the importance of utilizing knowledge resources, in order to enhance their competitiveness and innovativeness, and have therefore shifted their emphasis to knowledge based systems (Mills, & Smith, 2011). In fact, our dynamic environment, as a prerequisite, requires an increase in corporate capabilities so as to create sustainable competitiveness in organisational processes and performance (Rehman, Asghar, & Ahmad, 2015).

No wonder, Omotayo (2015) has indicated that knowledge management (KM) remains a key to the door of competitive advantage among firms in the same industry because it broadens acquired knowledge by increasing the ability of organizations to be creative, thereby putting them at an advantageous position in relation to their competitors. Therefore, the only firms that will remain competitive in their dynamic environments are those ones that are outstanding in terms of innovativeness and creativity .

That is why some authors argue that a lot of studies is now carried out with a view to identifying why knowledge acquisition, sharing, and application in organizational settings has rapidly increased from the 1990's, and has remained so (Serenko, Bontis, Booker, Sadeddin, & Hardie, 2010).

To some authors, the term knowledge management is a phenomenon that became popular for a very short while and it is not practically attainable ??Wilson, 2002).

43 Wilson went further to state that he could not formulate a coherent definition of knowledge management,
44 which to him, is quite different from information management. The reason could be that the concept has so
45 many perspectives and no definition can fit into all of these perspectives.

46 The growth and development of knowledge management as a concept is understandable, considering the
47 history of the concept, which, to me ought to be treated as an offshoot or extension of organisational learning.
48 According to Gurdal and Kumkale (2014), the need for knowledge management is to provide some benefits to
49 the organisation (as cited in Paliszkievicz, Svanadze, & Jikia, 2017).

50 Although it is relatively recent, its historical development and popularity has helped to throw weight on the
51 importance of intellectual activities over traditional form of resources like land and capital (Spender, 2014).
52 It is no longer strange that knowledge management has now been known to be a source of an organisational
53 competitive advantage, just like the concept of organisational learning. Knowledge management is an extension of
54 organisational learning because an organisation that does not learn can never have any knowledge to store, to share
55 and to use. Knowledge has come to be regarded as an organisational resource that must be managed effectively
56 if an organisation is desirous of standing the pace of competition and environmental dynamism. According to
57 Dalkir (2005) knowledge is now regarded as a commodity or an intellectual asset, but possesses significantly
58 distinct features different from normal commodities, for instance, when individual shares knowledge with

59 The link between data, information, knowledge and wisdom was developed in 1989, by Russel Ackoff (Bernstein,
60 2009). Through knowledge management system, data can be transformed to information and to knowledge and
61 to wisdom that could help organisations make better decision which will enhance the achievement of their goals.
62 According to Ackoff (1989) "on the average about forty percent of the human mind comprise of data, thirty
63 percent comprise of information, twenty percent consist of knowledge, ten percent consist of understanding, and
64 almost zero consist of wisdom" (as cited in Bernstein, 2009, p. 68).

65 Data is a simple or mechanical measurement of values, such as age, height, weight etc taken at a particular
66 period of time (Warier, 2003). He further posits that "data is often stored in a database and it is not important
67 to any other person except the person for whom it is meant" (Warier, 2003, p. 3). In order to analyze and
68 process data, meanings must be attached to those discrete values. Data is raw, unprocessed facts that are obtained
69 through the use of measuring instrument. Data may be classified as unprocessed information, no wonder; Ackoff
70 (1989) defines data as figures and facts that are not in any way structured that make no sense on its face value.
71 Some data are structured but they are personalized to the specific needs for which they are collected. That is
72 why it becomes difficult to really distinguish it in very clear terms, from information.

73 Information means data that have been processed and structured to make it more meaningful and useful to
74 the person that will need it. It is about adding context to discrete data. Information tends to be more refined
75 than data. In other words, what constitutes information to one person may not be information to another person.
76 Information consists of data that have been processed and has become useful to a user (Warier, 2003). It is
77 therefore, a matter of relevance and meaningfulness. "Information provide answers to questions that begin with
78 such words as who, what, where, when, and how many" (Ackoff 1999, p. 129). The physical conversion of data
79 into information can only be accomplished by humans with the application of information technology apparatus,
80 especially when large amount of data is involved.

81 Knowledge is the ability to use information in a way that it will enable you to achieve your objectives.
82 According to Kakabadse, Kakabadse and Kouzmin (2003), knowledge and "information" may be assumed to
83 be synonyms; however, it is imperative to distinguish them. In other words, "information is imbedded in the
84 form of theories, processes, or systems" (Omotayo, 2015, p. 3). Epetimehin and Ekundayo (2011) state that
85 knowledge is a non-visible or physical asset, whose acquisition occurs through a convoluted intellectual process
86 of perception, learning, communication, association and reasoning. Knowledge is classified into two: tacit and
87 explicit (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka, & Takeuchi, 1995).

88 Wisdom is the ability to select objectives that are consistent with and supportive of a particular set of values.
89 Wisdom is the application of knowledge for the purpose of achieving a particular objective. Wisdom refers to
90 the capacity to improve effectiveness through the application of mental effort often referred to as judgment. It
91 has the attribute of being personal in nature and it is domiciled in the actor (Rowley, & Richard, 2006).

92 2 III. Tacit and Explicit Knowledge

93 According to Baloh, Desouza and Paquette (2011) tacit knowledge is rooted firmly in action, procedures and
94 processes, commitments and values and can only be indirectly accessed.

95 Explicit knowledge is formalised and systematic. It is codified, collected, stored and easily transmitted from
96 person to person. It is not personally bound and it possesses the qualities of data (Omotayo, 2015).

97 Explicit knowledge is mostly easily handled in knowledge management software which is effective in handling
98 and facilitating storage, retrieval and modification of documents and texts (Wellman, 2009). Tacit knowledge has
99 to do with intuition and reside in the knower and it is largely experienced based (Nonaka, 1994). According to him,
100 tacit knowledge is action based, very hard to disseminate, and it is highly contextual and personalized. It is also
101 considered the most valuable form of knowledge which most of the time, leads to innovations and breakthroughs
102 (Wellman, 2009). It is embodied in the hearts of the individuals and comprises mental models, values and norms
103 of behaviour. another person, his stock of knowledge does not deplete, rather, his knowledge base expands. A
104 very good understanding and appreciation of the fact that information in particular, and knowledge in general

105 has become recognized as veritable organisation assets, has made it imperative for organisations to put a lot of
106 energy in its management. This therefore involves the application of different strategies, policies and tools in the
107 effective management of knowledge as an organisation asset (Barclay, & Murray, 2000). This paper will first of all,
108 establish the meaning of data, information, knowledge and wisdom. Thereafter, we will discuss the link between
109 organisational learning and knowledge management, and also identify some of the reasons why knowledge sharing
110 is not well accepted by some organisational members.

111 Knowledge is therefore activated and gained when information is utilized for a new understanding or an
112 insight into the application of new information. KM is "the process of acquiring, sharing, using and managing
113 the knowledge and information of an organisation" (Girard, & Girard, 2015, p. 1). In other words, it has to do
114 with making the optimum application of our intellectual resources in the achievement of group objectives using
115 a multidisciplinary approach. We can therefore define knowledge management as a conscious effort of sourcing
116 for the right knowledge and making it readily available to the right people and helping to distribute and making
117 information actionable in ways that improve organisation capabilities.

118 When we deliberately study the concept of organizational learning and innovative capability, we discover that
119 it inevitably enhances an organisation's competitive advantage and its innovative strength. It tells us to focus
120 on improving our learning capabilities both at individual, groups and organisational level, in order to achieve
121 desired level of organizational outcomes, which can be performance enhancement or increase in profitability.
122 (Garc?a-Morales, Llorens-Montes, & Verdu-Jover, 2006).

123 Organizations should endeavour to encourage timely and accurate documentation of our learning and
124 experience and make it accessible for others so that everyone within the organisation will stand to benefit from
125 such experiences. It is only by so doing that the benefit of organisational learning will remain continuous and
126 fruitful (Chawla & Joshi, 2010).

127 According to Watanabe and Senoo (2010) organizational characteristics and national culture have considerable
128 influence on the practice of knowledge management. Organizational features, such as organisation structure
129 employees' management relationship and such other characteristics of the organisation influences on the knowledge
130 capabilities of an organisation, which is one of the components of knowledge management.

131 **3 a) Information Technology and Knowledge Management**

132 Information technology is an essential aid and should never be discarded when we are discussing knowledge
133 management. That is why Ahmad and Schroeder (2011) suggest that the establishment of strategies relating to
134 information technology that are on knowledge-based which will provides employee's friendly environment that
135 will encourage the refinement of information and transfer of both tacit and explicit knowledge for the benefit of
136 the whole organisation.

137 **4 b) Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management**

138 According to Singh and Sharma (2011) knowledge management and organisational learning has a positive
139 relationship and by extension, with employee's performance. In order to improve the employee's performance,
140 knowledge management systems must be enhanced and organizations must have to adopt different policies to
141 enhance its learning capabilities.

142 KM has grown to be an important concept that is why the concept has gained considerable attention from
143 scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers ??Spender, 1996;Nissen, 1998; Pirro, Mastroianni, & Talia, 2010). It
144 is on that basis that organisations are now paying special attention to their stock of both tacit and explicit
145 knowledge. Knowledge is no longer regarded as a freelance source of organisational competence.

146 **5 c) Factors that influence Knowledge Management**

147 The three most important factors that influence the management of knowledge are knowledge distribution,
148 organizational change and organizational learning (Danish, Nawaz, & Munir, (2012).

149 Knowledge sharing is an integral part or stage in the KM process. When intellectual assets are stored in
150 archives via documents, procedural manuals, work processes and so on, without sharing, it is of no value. It
151 is only when we share valuable information to those that need them, that we can be said to have engaged in
152 meaningful knowledge management process. It does not end there too, because knowledge that is shared without
153 the practical application or utilization by the receiver is of no benefit to anyone.

154 Organisations do not change for nothing. There are indeed a lot of reasons why organisations change. It could
155 be a planned or anticipated change, arising from executive or managerial game plan to restructure in order to
156 capture a new market opportunity. Or it could be caused by a reaction by a competitor's action. In other words,
157 an organization may be acting in such a way to counter a competitive maneuver. Whichever one it is, it is very
158 important for organisations to be current in terms of knowledge creation, storing, sharing and utilization in order
159 to cope with any of such challenges (Danish, Nawaz, & Munir, (2012).

160 The major components on interest in organisational learning are knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing
161 and knowledge utilization ??Warier, 2003). Interestingly, this corresponds also to most definitions of knowledge
162 management given by acclaimed scholars and practitioners. When an organisation learns and keeps stock of
163 what it has learned through individual, groups and organisational level interactions, it is said to be a learning

164 organisation (Watanabe, & Senoo, 2010). Learning organisations keep stock of knowledge and use old knowledge
165 as a basis of acquiring new insight in knowledge creation. They discard outdated knowledge and ensure that
166 knowledge is given to every member of the organisation that requires it. In other words, learning organisations
167 are those organisations that are visibly able to manage the knowledge that they have acquired over time.

168 Knowledge management focuses on gathering, organising and analyzing the knowledge base of individuals
169 and groups across the organisation in a way that an organisation can benefit through enhanced organisational
170 performance (Wellman, 2009). Many organizations devote a lot of attention to the system of transferring best
171 practices, experiences and knowledge as well as increasing the knowledge base of their organisations.

172 Knowledge management is the product of tacit knowledge or what may be called undocumented ideas or
173 experience and explicit knowledge that are captured in documents as information. It is from the knowledge
174 management information base that knowledge that is stored, is shared between individuals, teams as well as the
175 whole organisation.

176 Knowledge management is not limited to information creation and storage, because information that is stored
177 needs to undergo certain processes before they can be shared or utilized. According to Ries and Trout, (1986),
178 the processes include:

179 These processes are all embedded in knowledge management perspectives as postulated by Ries and Trout,
180 (1986).

181 According to Marcus (2001) there are three roles in the reuse of knowledge.

182 Firstly, the originator of the knowledge, secondly, knowledge intermediate, that is the person that packages
183 the information for storage, sharing and into its usable form. It has to do with indexing, publishing, mapping
184 and standardization, and finally, the consumer of the knowledge, that is the person or persons that will use the
185 knowledge in question. ??emian and Fruchter (2000) identified two types of knowledge re-use, namely internal
186 and external. Internal has to do with a producer or originator of the message using his own knowledge at some
187 future time. External has to do with when the knowledge consumer uses someone else's knowledge.

188 6 V. Barriers to Knowledge Management

189 Technological barrier: There is often unavailability of software and hardware, coupled with inadequate IT
190 manpower to handle the software, even when it is available. Furthermore, a firm can be caught up in a
191 technological trap caught up by the difference between the time a technology is acquired and the time it is
192 utilized (Herrmann, 2011).

193 In Africa, for instance many people are comfortable working with mobile phones compared to laptop computers.
194 According to Kelly (2011) most Africans regard mobile phones as their personal computers.

195 Content barrier: A lot of innate skills and creativity is required to be able to transform tacit knowledge
196 into explicit knowledge. Some ICT apparatus and processes are not easy to explain. This therefore acts as
197 an impediment to knowledge sharing. Example could include unauthorized exchange of information through
198 software within the organisation (Herrmann, 2011).

199 Barriers in Routines and Procedures: Some processes and procedures are not practically applicable in all
200 situations, for instance regular sectional review. Furthermore, most other procedures, like HR manuals are not
201 rigidly followed because they are cumbersome and mostly prepared by external consultants. Some routines like
202 every midday joint coffee breaks among staff may not be recognized or strictly followed by all employees, which
203 makes them unreliable.

204 Barriers in Organisation: An organisation executive may create an organisational structure that is favourable
205 to him alone and which coincidentally facilitate the sharing of knowledge without having the interest of the
206 organisation at heart. This may hinder knowledge management because other employees are not carried along
207 in the design of such an organisational structure, but even at that, "structures are multi-layered, polyvalent, and
208 often contradictory and maybe invisible even to those who inhabit them" ??Ferguson, 1990, p. 17).

209 Barriers in Personnel: Individual behaviour characteristics account for most of the challenges encountered in
210 the course of managing human resources as a major organisational asset. For example, for effective management
211 of organisational intellectual resource, individuals in the organisation must view knowledge as crucial capability of
212 their organisation; otherwise it will be extremely difficult for organisation to develop the intellectual competencies
213 of the workers. Secondly, if the structure of the organisation is not innovation friendly, knowledge management
214 is bound to fail (Dalkir, 2005).

215 Inadequate skills in the use technology can be corrected through effective training and the provision of useable
216 technology. Furthermore, there should be all round discussions on the subject matter of knowledge management
217 in order to create awareness among organisational members. Also, organisational members must be encouraged
218 to share information with other

219 7 IV. Knowledge Re-use

220 Assimilation: This is the process of converting stored data into scientific knowledge through validation and
221 analysis.

222 Data Compaction: This is the process of refinement whereby information that appears irrelevant is discarded.

223 Data Substitution: This allows information users to systematically access large arrays of information through
224 the logical representation of developed formats that stands for the original documents.

225 Repackaging: This is the actual development of the material required for public utilization.
226 organisational members especially in areas of their core competencies by creating personnel incentives. Spiela,
227 and Kovac (2017) investigated the factors that promote organisational knowledge sharing and their findings
228 show that personal inclinations, technology and organizational variables are factors that help in predicting
229 an organisation's knowledge sharing orientations. It is very important to note that it is not the quantum of
230 intellectual assets that an organization has that matters, but what is paramount is how the knowledge is shared
231 to bring about optimum utilization of the knowledge (Argote & Ingram, 2000).

232 The process of knowledge sharing is very important when one considers the fact that knowledge sharing among
233 employees in the same department makes it possible for organisational members to meet their individual goals
234 and objectives faster and also make it easy for them to come up with solutions to their problems (Demartini, &
235 Paoloni, 2013).

236 In fact, a renowned author asserts that knowledge sharing is very important to organisations because of the
237 following reasons: reduction in cost of operation, speed in meeting production targets, increase in efficiency and
238 effectiveness, increase in innovation, and increase in organisational bottom-line (Hansen, 2002).

239 However, even with all the supports and encomiums given to knowledge management as a discipline, Barson,
240 Foster, Struck, Ratchev, Pawar, Weber, and Wunram, (2000) argues that knowledge sharing has its own weakness,
241 because according to them, some organizations do not have a culture that permits the distribution of knowledge.
242 For example, Hendriks (1999) note that most knowledge are designed specifically for a particular organisational
243 setting which make such knowledge valueless for other organisations, even when it is made available to them.

244 There are several other individual factors, for example, lack of interpersonal relationship, lack of organisational
245 trust, skills, and time inadequacy as well as organisational level factors that might hinder organisational members
246 from distributing or sharing knowledge (Lee, & Al-Hawamdeh, 2002).

247 More importantly, research has also shown that the type of leadership an organisation has, interpersonal
248 helping, and own self-efficacy increases the desire and/or intention to share knowledge (Lin, 2008). The
249 correlation between organisational culture and knowledge sharing is indeed an obvious one because an encouraging
250 environment with shared core norms and value orientation might be positively related to increased knowledge
251 sharing among employees in the sense that knowledge distribution practices more often than not, underlie an
252 organisation's cultural expectations ??Zheng, & Fai, 2013).

253 Another very important factor to consider in discussing organisation knowledge sharing is the concept of
254 organisational trust. Organisational trust represents more specific factor that explains the extent to which
255 an individual believes that sharing knowledge among his or her co-workers will be to the best interest of the
256 organization (Ismail & Yusof, 2008).

257 8 VI. Summary and Conclusion

258 Knowledge management has gained popularity as a management concept with a lot to benefit by organisations
259 that share and utilize knowledge as an intellectual resource. However, knowledge management ought to be
260 treated as the last component of organisational learning, since the goal of the two concepts are technically and
261 fundamentally the same.

262 The relationship among data, information, wisdom and knowledge was highlighted, with wisdom being at the
263 topmost of the pyramidal shaped interrelationship.

264 The four components of knowledge management: knowledge acquisition, knowledge storing, knowledge sharing
265 and knowledge utilization was discussed. The problems of sharing knowledge were also reviewed. Knowledge is
266 of two types: tacit and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is embodied in the minds of the individuals and it
267 comprises beliefs, mental models, values and norms of behaviour. Explicit knowledge is codified in the form of
268 document, processes, procedure and manual and is very easy to share.

269 Lack of interpersonal relationship, lack of organisational trust, skills, and time inadequacy as well as
270 organisational level are the factors that might hinder organisational members from distributing or sharing
271 knowledge.

272 However, knowledge sharing has its own weakness, because some organizations do not have a culture that
273 permits the distribution of knowledge and even the ones that have the sharing culture do not know how to share
274 knowledge in an effective manner. ¹

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