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KNOWLEDGE SHARING: A KEY ROLE IN THE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

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Abstract

Knowledge is and has remained a core competence of all thriving organizations and so, the management of knowledge will remain a key competitive strategy for any organization that wants to remain innovative, sustainable and profitable in this dynamic world of business volatility. The difference between one organization and another, in term of performance and skill utilization has been linked not only to the quality of their knowledge repositories, but also to how knowledge is shared among organizational members. This paper reviewed some extant literature and discovered that the most important of all knowledge management processes lies in knowledge sharing. Rather than keeping our stock of both tacit and explicit knowledge to ourselves, we should endeavour to share knowledge because our stock of knowledge does not deplete when we share it. Rather, knowledge sharing reinforces our knowledge base and makes knowledge to stick and become more permanent. As a matter of fact, the tacit knowledge which resides in the knower goes with the holder when he or she dies. This paper also supports the formulation of a conceptual framework that will establish a link between knowledge management and the organizational learning process.

Keywords: knowledge, information, data, knowledge sharing, organizational knowledge.

Introduction

Gonzalez and Martins (2014) were able to relate five organizational construct: human resources, organizational structure, organizational culture, work teams as well as development and absorption of knowledge to the four stages of knowledge management process. Bhojaraju (2005) wrote on the importance of knowledge management to corporate organisations. He was able to deduce that sustained strategic commitment and organizational culture are vital for knowledge management to succeed as a tool for sustained organizational improvement. Serenko and Bontis (2009) wrote on the global ranking and intellectual capital in academic journals and discovered that Journal of Knowledge Management and the Learning Organization were among the first five top academic journals in the world.

This goes to show the relevance of knowledge management to modern business process improvements in terms of innovation and creativity. Omatayo (2015) demonstrated the importance of knowledge management as a key driver, as well as a critical tool for organizational survival, competitiveness and profitability in business organizations. She therefore advises that organizations should be extensively involved in creating, managing, sharing and utilizing knowledge effectively. It is important to state at this point that knowledge sharing is the most important in the knowledge management process. Knowledge becomes useful only when it is shared to those that need the knowledge. Knowledge sharing aids further learning and understanding. It gives further insight to the creation of further knowledge and so, it keeps the chain of knowing

unbroken. Ling-hsing and Tung-Ching (2015) investigated the role played by culture in the management of knowledge process and concluded that job-oriented cultures relates positively on employee intention in knowledge creation, storage, transfer and application of knowledge. The implication therefore is that management has a direction to modify their organizational culture to improve the performance of knowledge management process. To date, few studies, that we know, have tried to elucidate on the importance of knowledge sharing as a knowledge management process. This paper will explore the extant literature to identify the importance of knowledge sharing to both individuals and organizations. It will also establish the link between organizational learning process and knowledge management.

Definition of Major Concepts

Data

Data do not come from the space, but from a systematic evaluation and reevaluation of information. For instance, data about sexually transmitted disease can only be derived from interview or survey and the response one gets from interview can as well be viewed as information. In that sense, data may be classified as information. Thierauf (1999) looks at data as figures and facts that are not in any way structured, that make no sense on its face value. A casual view of a set of data will ordinarily make no meaning to an ordinary person unless the data is specifically designed for your use. Furthermore, some data are structured but are personalized to the specific needs for which they are collected. That is why it becomes difficult to really distinguish in very clear terms, between data and information.

Information

Information tends to be more refined than data. In other words, what constitutes information to one person may not be information to another person. It is therefore, a matter of relevance. "Information provide answers to questions that begin with such words as who, what, where, when, and how many" (Ackoff 1999, p. 129). When data is explained in words it becomes information. In that case, some data can be described as both data and information. The practical transformation or conversion of data into information can be accomplished by humans with the assistance of information technology, especially when large amount of data is involved.

Knowledge

According to Kakabadse, Kakabadse and Kouzmin (2003), knowledge and "information" may be assumed to be synonyms; however, it is imperative to distinguish one from the other. Knowledge is often defined as a "justified personal belief." Knowledge can be defined as a collection or a body of information. In other words, "information is imbedded in the form of theories, processes, or systems"(Omotayo, 2015, p. 3). Epetimehin and Ekundayo (2011), state that knowledge is a non visible or physical asset, in which its acquisition involves complicated mental processes of perception, learning, communication, association and reasoning. According to King (2009), there is a grouping or classification of different forms of knowledge. The most fundamental distinction is between "tacit" and "explicit" knowledge (Noneka, 1994; Polanyi, 1967); Noneka, & Takeuchi, 1995).

According to Baloh, Desouza and Paquette (2011) tacit knowledge is rooted firmly in action, procedures and processes, commitments and values and can only be indirectly accessed. That is why tacit knowledge is said to be domiciled in the knower. Explicit knowledge on the other hand, is formalised and systematic. It is codified, collected, stored and easily transmitted from person to person. It is not personally bound and it has the characteristics of data (Omotayo, 2015). Gonzalez and Martins (2017) however argues that explicit knowledge generally should not be discussed in isolation because tacit knowledge is inherently contained in all the forms of knowledge. Knowledge is therefore activated and gained when information is utilized for a new understanding or doing something new. No wonder knowledge sharing is considered a very important component of the knowledge management process. For knowledge to be utilized, it must be disseminated to members of the organisation that need such knowledge. When only one employee, or a few members of an organisation, posses vital organisational knowledge, it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to make progress, in terms of production efficiency, innovativeness and process improvements.

The data, information and knowledge link is not so clear-cut, because going by the definition of knowledge management by Warier (2003), it therefore means that the full utilization of data and information constitute knowledge management. That implies that data can be used without first transforming it to information. The link does not always follow.

Dimensions of knowledge

According to Blackler (1995), there are five distinct forms of knowledge.

Embodied knowledge

is a form of knowledge that is gained through the training of the body to perform a specific task. Routines and job procedures facilitate learning among employees that go beyond their job descriptions (Omotayo, 2015). **Embrained** knowledge is the knowledge that is possessed by an individual which is difficult to express in words or which is difficult to share with another person. In other words, it is a form of knowledge that cannot be easily written down or talk about or discussed with others (Omotayo, 2015). **Embrained** knowledge is a kind of knowledge that is gained through experience and it is reflected through values and norms of behaviour. **Encultured** knowledge belongs to people who have something characteristically unique about them. It is similar to the kind of belief shared by a group of people with similar way of thinking and acting. **Encoded** knowledge can be easily shared between individuals and groups. A good example of encoded knowledge is procedure manual.

Knowledge management

“Knowledge management does not qualify to be classified as a discipline because it does not seem to possess the qualities of a discipline. If anything, knowledge management qualifies as an emerging field of study. Those involved in the emerging field of knowledge management are still vexed today by the lack of a single, comprehensive definition, an authoritative body of knowledge, proven theories, and a generalized conceptual framework” (Sutton, 2007, p. 1). However, the construct has emerged and it is being given a lot of attention since the early 1990’s. Knowledge management consists of organizational systems, strategies, processes, initiatives, and procedures that help to sustain and enhance the creation, refinement, storing, assessment, sharing and efficient use of organizational knowledge resources. In this way, it can be linked to organizational learning process, which has to do with the creation, storing and use of knowledge. Little wonder Bousa and Venkitachalam (2013) describe knowledge management as one of the key drivers of organizational innovativeness (as cited in Omotayo, 2015).

Davenport and Prusak (2000) state that knowledge management "is managing the corporation's knowledge base through a systematically and organizationally specified process for acquiring, organizing, sustaining, applying, sharing and renewing both the tacit and explicit knowledge of employees to enhance organizational performance and create value" (p. 129). According to Wellman (2009) the scope of knowledge management does not go beyond new insights, especially as it relates to the discovery of new techniques of operation. This paper argues that, the creation of knowledge, which is often viewed as a separate discipline falls under the concept of innovation management. Interestingly, knowledge creation has been seen to be the first step of organizational learning process. Lastres (2011) defines knowledge management as “the leveraging of the organizations’ collective wisdom (know-how) by creating systems and processes to support and facilitate the identification, capture, dissemination and use of the organization’s knowledge to meet its business objectives” (p. 23). The authors define KM as a process which comprises the search for and acquisition of knowledge; the dissemination of knowledge owned and acquired and the utilization of knowledge for the purpose of improving the capabilities of individuals and teams that work in organizations.

The technological capability of an organization is a function of the company’s ability to create and utilize valuable intellectual assets and be able to develop new techniques (Sears, 2017). No wonder the construct of knowledge management continues to remain a focal point for most organization theorist and academicians in their quest for creative and innovative solutions to the problems created by the external business environment. In organizations, recruitment and selection of employees should be based on consideration of only candidates who have the potential of contributing to the learning and the organizational knowledge base. In other words, consideration should be given to those that are open to knowledge. Furthermore, organizations should openly support those employees whose behavioural patterns are attuned to the culture of

knowledge sharing of organisational knowledge resources. This is because, organisational innovativeness, survival and growth depends to a large extent on how important members of the organisation consider the sharing of knowledge.

Organizational learning and knowledge management

According to Edward (2012) knowledge management and organisational learning are often used interchangeably mainly due to the ease of application but there is a little difference between the two concepts. Organizational learning tends to focus on individuals, teams, and organizations becoming more capable. Knowledge management, on the other hand, tends to emphasize on the substance that resides in the brains of employees; how to manage that substance and do something with it so as to enable them perform their job better. This sounds rather esoteric because when individuals, teams and the entire organization become more capable, there is every tendency that they will perform better in their jobs.

In other words, the goal of organizational learning and knowledge management tend to be the same, regardless of their conceptual definitions. The two concepts aim at improving organisational efficiency, innovativeness and enhancing the capabilities of individuals and groups that work in organisations. Generally speaking, organizational learning involves acquisition, sharing, and utilization of knowledge resources as well as achieving new successes (Gumusluoglu, & Ilsev, 2009), therefore learning cannot take place by means of merely theoretical thinking. It has to be achieved through experience and by action (Odor & Samuel, 2018). This definition is in tandem with the definition of knowledge management given by Gonzalez and Martins (2014) who define knowledge management as the management effort aimed at promoting and facilitating the distribution and use of knowledge resources by individuals and groups. In other words, organizational learning and knowledge management appear to be the same, since both construct involve the same process of knowledge creation, knowledge storage, knowledge sharing and knowledge utilization (King, 2009).

Organizational knowledge resources

Organizational knowledge resources, just like organizational learning, exist at different levels in the organisation.

Individual level

This knowledge exists at personal level and they are often imbedded in the individual. Although mainly of tacit in nature, it could be explicit in character, for example, personal notebook.

Group level

These are knowledge held by group members but not disclosed or shared to other members of the organization. **Many** times, the groups have some common characteristics that make them unique and distinct from other groups (Frost, 2010).

Organizational level

According to Amir Kabiri, when groups come together to share their knowledge they have acquired through the process of communication and interaction, these knowledge are now transformed into an acceptable instructions by means of organizational manual or procedures for all organizational members which will be made available to anyone that needs them (as cited in Odor & Samuel, 2018). In the development of organizational knowledge, organizations always evolve through their learning capabilities (Nelson & Winter, 1982). This is because “organizations learn to acquire knowledge through their routines and repositories, taking advantage of the power of cognition and articulation of knowledge by their individuals” (Serenko & Bontis, 2009, p. 134).

Importance of knowledge management

Knowledge management is useful for the following reasons (Frost, 2011)

- It helps us in appreciating what our organization knows
- It helps us in identifying the location of both tacit and explicit knowledge
- It helps us in identifying how best to disseminate, share or transfer knowledge to those that need the knowledge.
- It helps in knowledge need assessment by comparing actual knowledge requirement and knowledge repertoires.

Knowledge management process

Four key elements exist that make up the knowledge management process (Kayworth & Leidne, 2003)

Knowledge acquisition

This is one of the most important features of knowledge management (Dul, Ceylan, & Jasper, 2011) because knowledge creation assists an organization to survive and have a competitive advantage over its competitors. It involves formal training or sharing ideas with people who have the same interest, especially tacit knowledge which is difficult to codify. Knowledge creation is basically a human effort. Indeed, technology can be a major facilitator, but can never replace human effort (Omotayo, 2015). Knowledge creation has to do the creation of a new insight by discarding existing mundane content within the organization's knowledge base. The acquisition of knowledge has to do with organizational process that facilitates the creation of tacit and explicit knowledge from the individuals and integrating such knowledge at the organizational level (Serenko, & Bontis, 2009).

Knowledge storage

This refers to the process of organizational memory formation (Walsh, & Ungson, 1991) in which knowledge is formally stored in physical storage systems, informally stored as cultural values, beliefs and organizational norms which form the basis of the organizational culture. The physical memory system can be in the form of IT storage facilities or tools.

Knowledge transfer

This is the process by which new information is shared between and among organizational members. This new information can help in the acquisition of new knowledge (Lee, & Yang, 2000). This refers to the transfer of knowledge to locations where it is needed and can be used. This process happens to be the most important in the knowledge management process, because knowledge stored in organisational repositories (explicit knowledge) and those that reside in the knower (tacit knowledge) is not useful unless and until it is shared and utilized by those who need them. This stage of knowledge management makes use of ICT tools such as e-commerce, e-business and other digital platforms. This is to enable the development of a robust business model for good decision making. For example, e-commerce has become a preferred way of shopping because it is easier and more convenient than the physical shopping. Because of its ease and convenience, buyers can save their lots of time by searching their products easily and in the comfort of their homes or offices.

Knowledge application

It is the ability of the individual to locate knowledge, access knowledge and use knowledge that has been stored in the organizational memory (Rowley, 2001). The use of knowledge can be exploitative or exploratory. The process of knowledge acquisition and utilization requires the development of an organizational context that will help in information sourcing as a way of leveraging on social learning (Sorenko, & Bontis, 2009).

Summary and conclusion

Knowledge management is a new concept in the field of management even though it has gained popularity as one of the key drivers of innovativeness and a great source of competitive advantage among modern organizations. It is derived from the organisational learning process. The importance of knowledge management as a key driver organizational survival as well as a critical tool for competitiveness and profitability in business organizations cannot be over emphasized. It is on the basis of the above that organizations should be extensively involved in the effective dissemination and utilization of KM strategies for the progress and success of their organizations.

Furthermore, an organizational culture that is based on trust should be developed in every organization that aspires to remain innovative and competitive in the global village of technological transformation. Such culture will encourage individuals and groups in organization to share knowledge between and among them. Moreso, training and development of organizational members should be on continuous basis because of the rate at which our environment is changing. The use and application of information technology apparatus, which is the major influence on knowledge sharing, should be

encouraged among all organizational members. Training should not be particularized to only the IT department, but to all members of the organization who may have one form of knowledge or another to share or disseminate among his peers.

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