

Example of effect of culture in knowledge management literature review

[Business](#), [Management](#)



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Abstract

The growing accessibility of the global market opened up unlimited opportunities for multinational organizations. However, such expanding market requires more knowledge base that the organizations normally have access to, and yet hampered due to factors essentially within the organization (Ang & Massingham, 2007; Szulanski, 1996). Shared assumptions, values, and norms must be in place to provide a sustainable source of internal motivation towards KM execution (Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010). A growing number of scholars considered organizational culture as he critical factor that supports or hampers the effective and efficient transfer and sharing of knowledge between units in the organization (Koenig, 2012; Park, Ribiere, & Schulte, 2004). Park, Ribiere, and Schulte (2004) verified the correlation between cultural attributes and the successful implementation of

knowledge management (KM) technology and knowledge sharing.

Meanwhile, Hansen (1999) noted that weak ties efficiently facilitated the transfer of simple and novel knowledge between units; while strong ties failed in that area as it worked superbly with the sharing of complex knowledge.

Prioritizing the establishment of a knowledge management (KM) supportive culture supervened in importance over information technology and database management as an initial step towards KM development. Furthermore, Ang and Massingham (2007) proposed the creation of national culture standardization as the supportive environment for KM while keeping the culture adaptable to local market situations.

Introduction

However, KM continued to be a challenge for organizations to implement due to inherent impediments in its efficient utilization (Szulanski, 1996). While Koenig (2012) identified three stages of KM development, stage two apparently constitutes the most critical aspect in KM as it involved human action with which both stage one and stage three depends absolutely.

Failure in stage two, particularly the human impact on technology, can result in the failure of KM implementation. Perhaps, putting human resource and corporate culture as the essential first-stage in KM development makes better sense in ensuring a smoother developmental flow.

Nonetheless, this essay aims to understand the role of culture, both human and organizational, in the effective and efficient implementation of KM as a tool in enhancing organizational edge in its operations.

Knowledge management

Interest in KM had increased phenomenally. KM refers to the process used in the capture, development, sharing, and utilization of organizational knowledge base (Koenig, 2012). These information assets may include databases, documents, policies, procedures and the total and specific expertise and experience of all and individual workers in the organization. Stages of KM development include information technology, human resources and corporate culture, and taxonomy and content management. Information technology constitutes the driver of the first stage as it provides the infrastructure with which the organization acquires records, and stores knowledge. The human and cultural dimension in stage two provides the critical environment wherein knowledge sharing becomes possible, limited or largely hampered. The third stage ensures that efficient access and retrieval of knowledge becomes possible and available for utilization. However, the developmental flow of KM may run smoother when human resources and organizational culture is first established before the information technological infrastructure; as such system depends upon human resources, conditioned by its current culture, for design and implementation. Nonetheless, such infrastructure may still be established even in the absence of appropriate culture, which many organizations had been doing. Either way, the critical role of culture had been shown of widespread impact in KM. Varied impediments had been uncovered in the creation and transfer of knowledge. Knowledge creation follows four major conversion processes: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization (Nonaka et al., 1994). These processes, if not effectively guided and controlled, cause high

variance in the creation construct of organizational knowledge. The transfer, as well as the identification, of best practices from within and without the organization had been highly essential and widespread practical challenge in organizational management (Szulanski, 1996). Still knowledge transfer had not been effective within an organization as various impediments prevented successful implementation. These internal impediments had not been about confidentiality or legal obstacles unlike in external transfers. Otherwise, an organization will be ill-equipped in its overall market performance and competitiveness.

However, the transfer of these internal knowledge and capabilities had not been historically easy, especially when stage-two development impedes the process. For instance, both General Motors and IBM, organizational juggernauts they were in their industries, failed in this internal transfer of knowledge and capabilities, resulting to highly compromised market performance (Szulanski, 1996). Hansen (1999) noted that weak ties between subunits made it difficult to transfer complex knowledge from one subunit to another, often slowing down projects. Szulanski (1996) also pointed out such barriers as the recipient's lack of absorptive capacity, causal ambiguity, and an arduous relationship between source and recipient, constituting the most important impediments to knowledge transfer within organizations. Zander and Kogut (1995) pointed at the transfer and imitation capabilities of subunits as important factors in the effective transfer of knowledge. Moreover, these knowledge need to be codifiable, teachable, and develop in parallel between subunits to avoid hazards in the knowledge transfer.

Studies identified three major components in KM (Lee & Choi, 2000): KM

enablers, KM processes, and organizational performance. KM enablers (or influencing factors) represent the organizational mechanisms of knowledge development. This developmental process must be intentional and consistent internally. KM processes or activities involve such dynamics as creation, sharing, storage, and utilization. On the other hand, organizational performance, such as market share and profitability, is a diagnostic clue, pointing at the success or failure in the KM initiative. In fact, performance provides the needed proof that the KM initiative worked.

Cultural Effects

Simply deploying new information technology will not suffice to ensure efficient and effective information and knowledge sharing within the organization (Koenig, 2012). Shared assumptions, values, and norms must be in place to provide a sustainable source of internal motivation towards KM execution (Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010). Such involves the full utilization of the four dimensions of organizational culture: adaptability, consistency, involvement, and mission. Many scholars in organizational knowledge management (KM) had long believed that a supportive organizational culture acts critically in ensuring the successful implementation of KM technology programs (Park, Ribiere, & Schulte, 2004). A supportive culture provides a strong ground in encouraging and facilitating information and knowledge sharing, something that technology alone cannot effectively address no matter how user friendly.

Hansen (1999) noted that weak interunit ties, although helped a project team search for useful knowledge in other subunits, posed difficulty in the

transfer of complex knowledge. The transfer of non-complex knowledge appeared capable for speedier transfer amidst weak interunit ties. However, such interunit state slowed down projects when involving the transfer of complex knowledge. Some factors that impeded knowledge sharing include lack of direct relationships and extensive communication between people from different subunits. Weak ties had been more efficient in the transfer of simple or novel knowledge because the activity involved provides a bridge to otherwise disconnected subunits or individuals. Strong ties, conversely, provided a common ground for continuous information sharing so that redundant information sharing tends to occur among small groups wherein everyone knows what the rest knows. These conditions furthermore provide the bases for the effective and efficient transfer of more complex information that weak tied could not facilitate.

Conclusion

Park, Ribiere, and Schulte (2004) verified the correlation between cultural attributes and the successful implementation of knowledge management (KM) technology and knowledge sharing. They managed to identify and rank the most critical organizational culture attributes that promotes KM technology and its implementation success. It becomes clear, therefore, that the impact of culture is more profound than either information technology or database organization, although both remained important to certain extents in the development and implementation of KM. Culture needs to be change first before any KM initiative prosper and attain the level of performance, internally as well as in the market, that justifies its inherent costs. Moreover,

culture change takes a longer time to effect than either information technology installation or database management.

Being so, efforts to change the culture must first be in the forefront in KM development. Thus, instead of delegating it into the second stage of development, human resources and organizational culture change must be establish as the first stage in the KM developmental process. Thereafter, positive factors simple fall into their proper places.

In addition, Ang and Massingham (2007) proposed the creation of national culture standardization for KM while keeping it adaptable to local market situations. In this strategy, multinational organizations need to implement cultural change across regional boundaries as a preliminary stem in KM development. Such approach ensures that the values governing the principles of knowledge sharing and transfer move across the organization from its head office towards its regional units and vice versa. This strategy enables the organization to efficiently transfer information across geographical distance between its global units while keeping its market edge unhampered locally. Standardization and adaptability, it is the essence of KM.

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