

Two main dimensions of knowledge business essay

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Theoretical component

The nature and characteristics of the two main dimensions of knowledge (tacit and explicit knowledge)

The general definition of knowledge, as defined on the business dictionary website is as follows:" Human faculty resulting from interpreted information; understanding that germinates from combination of data, information, experience, and individual interpretation." According to Knowledge Management (KM) literature and in agreement to the general definition " Knowledge is what enables an individual to ask relevant questions. It refers to the capability of an individual to solve problems. Information only becomes knowledge if a person interprets that information correctly, connects that piece of information with his or her prior knowledge, and can apply it to problems or decisions (Alavi & Leidner, 2001)." (Bratianu & Dinca, 2010: 214)In agreement with Bratianu and Dinca' s (2010: 214) definition of knowledge, knowledge should reflect the significance of the human element in turning information that could be made available to any individual but with the application of their expertise it is turned to knowledge which may be transformed to a valuable asset, intangible or otherwise. The knowledge asset produced actually being as unique as that individual's prior experience. In Knowledge Management two major forms of knowledge are addressed: tacit and explicit, and are explained as follows:" Tacit Knowledge is difficult to articulate and difficult to put into words, or drawings. Explicit knowledge

represents content that has been captured in some tangible form such as words, audio recording, or images". Dalkir (2011: 9-10). According to O'Toole (2011: 12)," Tacit knowledge is not accompanied by any sense of awareness of remembering, while explicit memory is " accompanied by the subjective experience of remembering" (Banaji, 2001; Kelley & Lindsay, 1996, p. 54)." . Dalkir (2011: 10) carries on explaining how tacit knowledge tends to exist in people's minds while explicit knowledge is usually contained within tangible or concrete media. There is clearly a distinction between these two forms of knowledge, as O'Toole (2011: 12) further explains what one can do with each viz. explicit knowledge can be easily codified while tacit knowledge is not. The definition of tacit knowledge seemed to vary slightly in earlier literature, for instance Nonaka and Takeuchi (in Tsoukas, 2005: 154) believed that even if little but this type of knowledge is that which is awaiting conversion to explicit knowledge. The others however such as Tsoukas (2005: 158) and O'Toole (2011: 12), do maintain that tacit knowledge cannot be codified and this is the notion carried through in this discussion. Tsoukas (2005: 158) goes further in his argument and disputes the popular belief that tacit and explicit knowledge exist independently. He proposes that they should be treated as " two sides of the same coin: [as] even the most explicit kind of knowledge is underlain by tacit knowledge" Tsoukas (2005: 158). O'Dell and Hubert (2011: 2) define Knowledge Management " as a systematic effort to enable information and knowledge to grow, flow, and create value. The discipline is about creating and managing the processes to get the right knowledge to the right people at the right time and help people share and act on information in order to improve organizational performance.". As per this definition of Knowledge Management, knowledge adds value to an

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organization (Dalkir, 2011: 4), and can therefore be viewed as an asset to the organization (Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006: 86). Because of this, organizations need to engage in efforts to try and manage their intellectual assets and this is the core function of Knowledge Management. According to Callahan (2002: 7), Knowledge Management is made up of the processes of creating, finding and accessing, making sense of and sharing knowledge.

Strategy

Even though an organisation may embark on initiatives that will provide the infrastructure required to support its Knowledge Management (KM) processes that still " does not ensure that the organisation is making the best investment of its resources or that it is managing the right knowledge in the right way" (Zack, 1999: 126). The selection of the primary Knowledge Management (KM) strategy is dependent on the organisation's defined business strategy as this determines the kind of knowledge and capabilities needed to bring value to the organisation through added competitive advantage (Zack, 1999: 127). The KM strategy will outline how the " organisation intends to align its knowledge resource and capabilities to the intellectual requirement of its strategy" (Zack, 1999: 135). Because there are distinctions between tacit and explicit knowledge, ways of using them are as distinct, hence the need to address them differently which means different strategies need to be adopted. Sanchez (1997), Hansen et al. (1999) and Connell et al. (2003) (in Jasimuddin et al., 2005: 104-105) suggest the personalisation strategy for tacit knowledge and the codification strategy for explicit knowledge. Jasimuddin et al. (2005: 105) go on to discuss what each of these strategies offers and they also advise on the pros and cons for using

them on the different types of knowledge. The following are some of the pros and cons that the authors mention (Jasimuddin et al., 2005: 105): Using tacit knowledge has the following advantages; tacit knowledge is secure in that trying to imitate it is very difficult (Spender, 1995), and because tacit knowledge is immobile gives an organisation a sustainable advantage and the fact that it is ambiguous in its nature ensures that its duplication is close to impossible (Hall and Andriani, 2003) Some of the difficulties in using tacit knowledge being the difficulty in communication and digitisation (Ambrosini and Bowman, 2001; Johannessen et al., 2001; Boiral, 2002; Connell et al., 2003), and protection of such knowledge (Teece, 1986; Hall and Andriani, 2003) Easy communication, storage and accessibility (Grant, 1996; Hansen et al., 1999) as some the advantages in using explicit knowledge. Some of the cons in using explicit knowledge being the high expenditure in investment on information technology (Boiral, 2002) and the reduced competitive advantage due to vulnerability to competitors (Hall and Andriani, 2003)

The limitations of exclusively focusing on either approach

Tsoukas (2005: 158) disputes the popular belief that tacit and explicit knowledge exist independently. He proposes that they should be treated as "two sides of the same coin: [as] even the most explicit kind of knowledge is underlain by tacit knowledge" Tsoukas (2005: 158). Because of this view, it would not be ideal for an organisation to use one strategy for its knowledge management. Jasimuddin et al. (2005: 107) agree with Tsoukas (2005) and state that "Neither the personalisation strategy nor the codification strategy alone is sufficient to manage organisational knowledge.". To support this notion, Ribi re and Rom n (2011: 551-552) state the following " Hansen et

al. (1999) noted that effective organizations excel by primarily emphasizing one of the strategies and using the other in a supporting role. They postulate that companies trying to excel at both strategies risk failing at both. They refer to a 20-80 split between codification and personalization."

KM Processes, People/corporate culture, and Technology

The success of the KM strategy is dependent on the knowledge environment which comprises of a number of elements, and according to Callahan (2002: 11) they are as follows: its business strategy – how this affects each individual's deliverables its knowledge processes , organisation's people and culture and Technology

KM Processes

According to Callahan (2002: 7), the following are the four basic processes of Knowledge Management: " Creating knowledge; finding and accessing knowledge; sense-making; and sharing knowledge"

People/corporate culture

According to Callahan (2002: 11-12), the people and culture elements that will affect the success of KM processes are the following: Behaviour - the KM processes such as creating, finding and sharing knowledge, are dependent on their habit of wanting to know more and their drive looking for the knowledge, and also their habit of wanting to assist by sharing their knowledge. Attitude - similarly to behaviour, people's attitudes will have an effect on carrying out KM processes, hence there is a need to ensure that people with fitting attitudes are placed in the KM environment. Skills - to support KM processes certain skills are required, hence equipping individuals

with those skills, should they not possess them, is important. Culture - the culture of the organisation will affect the success of the KM strategy because it needs to be in support of the strategy objectives.

Technology

As mentioned in the discussion, technology is one of the enablers of the chosen KM strategy, and this is through providing the tools and technologies that assist the people in the Knowledge environment to perform the knowledge processes (Callahan, 2002: 13). According to Saito et al. (2007: 105), one should note that the tools are categorised according to the strategy and process they are meant to support, namely: " Collaboration technologies, supporting the creation of knowledge according to a personalization approach. Dissemination technologies, supporting the transfer of knowledge according to a personalization approach. Discovery technologies, supporting the creation of knowledge according to a codification approach. Repository technologies, supporting the transfer of knowledge according to a codification approach." (Saito et al., 2007: 105)

Practical component

The author is fortunate enough to be working; In a fairly young organization, to be referred to as Company X throughout the document, with a business strategy that recognises the importance of its knowledge assets with KM strategies already underway, and Within the knowledge environment as knowledge worker. Company X's Knowledge strategy is predominantly that of codification as they have immensely invested in their explicit knowledge being codified but for support it taps into the personalisation strategy too as it prides itself for its drive for innovation. The company's strategy is

supported and encouraged by the executive committee of the organisation ensuring that the support required to carry through the strategy is in place so as to ensure that they get the expected return on their investment.

Company X has ensured that a certain culture, conducive to the success of the strategy is created by making for certain that they invest in knowledge initiatives that provide the relevant architecture through the tools and technologies acquired and also in supportive talent management processes.

To support the strategies the following talent management processes have been put in place: Training programmes to ensure the required people's skills is in place The promotional processes that are influenced by the person's behaviour in support of the strategy. In this instance the person is measured on their willingness to assist therefore their participation in supporting their peers and other related business areas. The recruitment process that seeks only the people that have the people with the right attitudes through the stringent process they have to go through. The above mentioned processes also touch on the organisation's cultures as they shape the skills, behaviours and attitudes of the people in the organisation. To support the personalisation strategy, collaborative measures are in place, such as weekly functional groups meetings, mentorship programmes, buddy programmes and peer shadowing. Examples of the supportive tools and technologies that are employed in the organisation are as follows: Online social networking inside the organisation is being encouraged through the introduction of Yammer for the organisations' employees to connect with colleagues, participate in conversations about topics affecting the organization and getting to know what other people are up to in their areas of business. Information is stored in central repositories so that it is easily

accessible and the different departments are also making use of wikis to collaborate knowledge especially when working on projects that are cross departmental. Employees are allowed to choose between using laptops or desktops and iPads. With the introduction of the mobile device, and the installation of wifi infrastructure throughout the organisation, it has been made easier for the employee to access information whenever it is most needed, their most "teachable moment". The concept of E-learning is in place where there are online courses are made available to employees to use whenever required. Lastly knowledge management groups are in place at Company X. There are knowledge groups for the various functional groups, whose function is to construct guidelines and standards for the processes that are used within the organisation, ensuring the organisation is in par with global standards, and also ensuring these are being followed by conducting reviews. Examples of such groups are the business analyst, architecture, database administration, project management and human resources working groups.

Conclusion

In this paper the various elements, namely the business strategy, architecture, people and culture, and processes, which need to be considered by an organisation when attempting to implement a Knowledge Management Strategy have been visited. We had a look into a real life organisation and how these elements come into play in ensuring the success of that organisation's strategy. We can safely conclude that it is imperative that a holistic approach be taken by an organisation when carrying out a knowledge management implementation to ensure its success.