



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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Contributions to books

- Sharma T., Kwatra, G. (2008) Effectiveness of Social Advertising: A Study of Selected Campaigns, Corporate Social Responsibility, Edited by David Crowther & Nicholas Capaldi, Ashgate Research Companion to Corporate Social Responsibility, Chapter 15, pp 287-303.

Journal and other articles

- Schemenner, R.W., Huber, J.C. and Cook, R.L. (1987), "Geographic Differences and the Location of New Manufacturing Facilities," Journal of Urban Economics, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 83-104.

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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: A SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge is progressively being recognized as a key factor and source for competitive advantage in the modern knowledge based global economy furthered by the buoyant service sector, the growth in the number of 'knowledge workers', the increasingly rapid flow of global information, and the wider acceptability of the importance of intellectual capital and intellectual property rights. In lieu of the present shifts, this paper attempts to circumscribe the literature available justifying the relationship of HRM and KM, also it will throw light on conceptual, theoretical foundations and further ends with its managerial implications for organizations in knowledge economy. The paper holds importance as the studies establishing explicit relationship between people management and knowledge processes are seldom examined despite the fact that knowledge management is typically defined to be the holistic combination of people, processes and technology. The paper reiterates the need to develop a more critical and integrated view of KM and HRM issues for organisational performance improvements.

KEYWORDS

Knowledge Management, Human Resource Management.

INTRODUCTION

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge is increasingly being acknowledged as an organization's key strategic asset in present times (e.g. Grant, 1996; Spender, 1995; Stewart, 1997; Teece, 1998; Tissen et al., 2000; Von Krogh, 1998) and its creation, dissemination and application as a vital source of competitive advantage (e.g. Lester, 1996; Lloyd, 1996; Marshall, Prusak and Sphillberg, 1996; Aliaga, 2000; Sveiby, 1997). How, then, is human resource management (HRM) related to knowledge management? Scholars have argued recently that knowledge is dependent on people and that HRM issues, such as employee resourcing i.e. recruitment and selection; training, education and development; performance appraisal and management; pay and reward, as well as the creation of a learning culture are vital for managing knowledge within firms (Evans 2003; Carter and Scarbrough 2001; Currie and Kerrin 2003; Hunter et al 2002; Robertson and Hammersley 2000) Human Resource Management (HRM) deserves an explicit consideration in the people-centered KM debate. In leading organisations and industries, people management is assumed to be one of the top strategic priorities (e.g. Baron and Kreps, 1999; Mabey and Salomon, 1995; Mueller, 1996; Storey, 2001). It is worth mentioning the increase of research dealing with the relationship between human resource (HR) practices and organisational performance (e.g., Arthur, 1992, 1994; Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Delaney and Huselid, 1996; Delery and Doty, 1996; Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994). Although from different perspectives and with noticeable differences as to specific practices, empirical support for the positive impact of HRM on organisational performance can be assumed.

Certainly, both knowledge and human resources (HR) are being increasingly regarded as key levers of competitive advantage in today's global, dynamic and complex business environment. Importantly, in the context of knowledge work (e.g. Alvesson, 1993; Davenport et al., 1996; Davis and Botkin, 1994; Edvinsson and Sullivan, 1996; Starbuck, 1992; Tampoe, 1993; Ulrich, 1998; Winch and Schneider, 1993), people and knowledge are two concepts inextricably joined. Individual human beings are the ultimate knowledge creators and bearers (organisations do not think by themselves, although they may have "knowledge enabling" contexts and "memory" systems). Accordingly, great care has to be taken so as to increase their capability as organisational knowledge enhancers and, as a result, the rigorous and strategic management of people can act as a trigger toward effective knowledge-leveraging processes. In fact, both people and knowledge are to be regarded as having special potential as scarce and idiosyncratic resources, consistent with the premises of the resource-based approach to strategic management (e.g. Grant, 1991; Peteraf, 1993; Rumelt, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). Indeed, a number of rigorous works exist that, while (more loosely or closely) related to a resource-based view, also deal with KM (e.g. Grant, 1996; Kogut and Zander, 1992; Spender, 1996; Tsoukas, 1996; Zander and Kogut, 1995) or HRM (e.g. Kamoche, 1996; Lado and Wilson, 1994; Mueller, 1996).

Hansen et al.'s study makes several useful contributions to HRM. First, it links both KM and HRM to the competitive strategy of the firm, that is, it is not knowledge in itself but the way it is applied to strategic objectives that is the critical ingredient of competitiveness. Second, this account stresses the need for best fit between HRM practices such as reward systems and an organization's approach to manage knowledge work.

Despite the above arguments, and the fact that practitioners are – with the lead of global companies – increasingly aware of the importance of the fit between KM initiatives and cultural and people-related issues, such an integration is not always as successful in business practice as it would be desirable. In other words, although managers are usually keen to recognise the relevance of human and social issues for KM initiatives to succeed, a number of structural, organisation-embedded elements (e.g. rigid structures, "old-fashioned" cultural traditions, KM-unfriendly policies and routines, communication pitfalls) create obstacles to the KM efforts which are quite difficult to overcome – even despite initial managerial commitment to do so. Certainly, there is need for studies that help to advance toward shedding light on how to turn managerial concern into effective managerial ability to change the way of doing things.

Moreover, academics are not rigorously taking systematic steps toward comprehensive theory building linking KM and HRM. Certainly, sound academic studies do exist, both empirical (e.g. Arthur and Aiman-Smith, 2001; Bontis et al., 2002; Edmondson, 1999; Inkpen, 1996; Inkpen and Crossan, 1995; Kusunoki et al., 1998; Lynn, 1998; Scarbrough, 2003; Tampoe, 1993) and theoretical (e.g. Brown and Duguid, 1998; Hedlund, 1994; Hislop, 2003; Kamoche and Mueller, 1998; Nerdrum and Erikson, 2001; Ryan, 1995; Starbuck, 1992; Storey and Quintas, 2001). Even so, most of them are mainly linked to (specific aspects of) one of the two main areas of discussion (i.e. KM and HRM).

OBJECTIVES

1. This paper aims to analyse the link between HRM and KM through the various research studies.
2. This paper further intends to highlight the practical implications of KM for various HRM, HRD functions.
3. During the course of study this researcher also aims to advance the role and importance of KM initiatives in HR functions success or failure in knowledge economy

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A literature based framework has been adopted for establishing KM's significance and its implications for HR Practices of an organization in knowledge economy.

RATIONALE OF STUDY

This paper portrays the importance of KM and related issues through a research perspective and establishing their practical implications for HRM in knowledge economy. It helps to advance a better understanding of the reasons behind recognizing the importance of KM for HRM success or failure useful both to academics seeking theory building and to practitioner interested in insightful advice.

GROWING IMPORTANCE OF KM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HRM

The focal areas of discussion and subsequent research in the European countries are on issues pertaining to knowledge workers, knowledge-intensive firms and the critical role of organisational competencies. The demand for knowledge intensive services is growing rapidly as companies are increasingly involved in services rather than goods (Nijhof, 1999).

The growing importance of KM is often seen as a consequence of the move from an industrialised to an information based economy and the rise of 'knowledge workers' and 'symbolic analysts' in advanced (post) industrial societies, with knowledge and expertise focused to solve organizational problems. However, not only has insufficient attention been given to the role of HRM in KM (e.g. Scarbrough et al, 1999) but the implications of KM for HRM and the challenges it poses for its status, role identity and *raison d'être* have not been fully appreciated.

In India too because of the importance of knowledge and knowledge sharing, many firms have attempted to develop in-house knowledge management systems through which they can more effectively leverage their existing knowledge through knowledge transfer and reuse.

In the UK, Scarbrough (1999) and Scarbrough et al (1999), surveying HRM and KM for the IPD, identify knowledge formation and acquisition, knowledge absorption, and knowledge retention as key processes. They argue that technology alone cannot fully capture and manage innovative thinking in an organisation, and that HR needs greater attention in promoting information sharing. A technology-driven view, focusing on flows of information and groupware, intranets and IT tools, is becoming dominant, losing sight of people and sidelining HR. KM, however, is a process, not a technology, and is linked to changes in the ways people work. A supportive culture is seen as necessary, supported by for example performance management systems that link rewards to individual contribution to projects, creating an internal market for knowledge. Encouraging people to use their expertise, and making specific reference in appraisal and reward management to passing on skills and knowledge to others may also be necessary. There may also need to be appropriate HR mechanisms, such as good practice in selection, training and reward, and an appropriate HR role in managing change and overcoming resistance to sharing information. However, rewarding knowledge sharing may reinforce notions of individual property, undermining teamwork - opportunities to work on challenging projects or be innovative may be rewards in themselves, generating professional recognition or influence on future projects. Short-term financial incentives may also undermine longer-term learning. Basing KM on IT may therefore place too much emphasis on the supply of knowledge, and too little on how we use it.

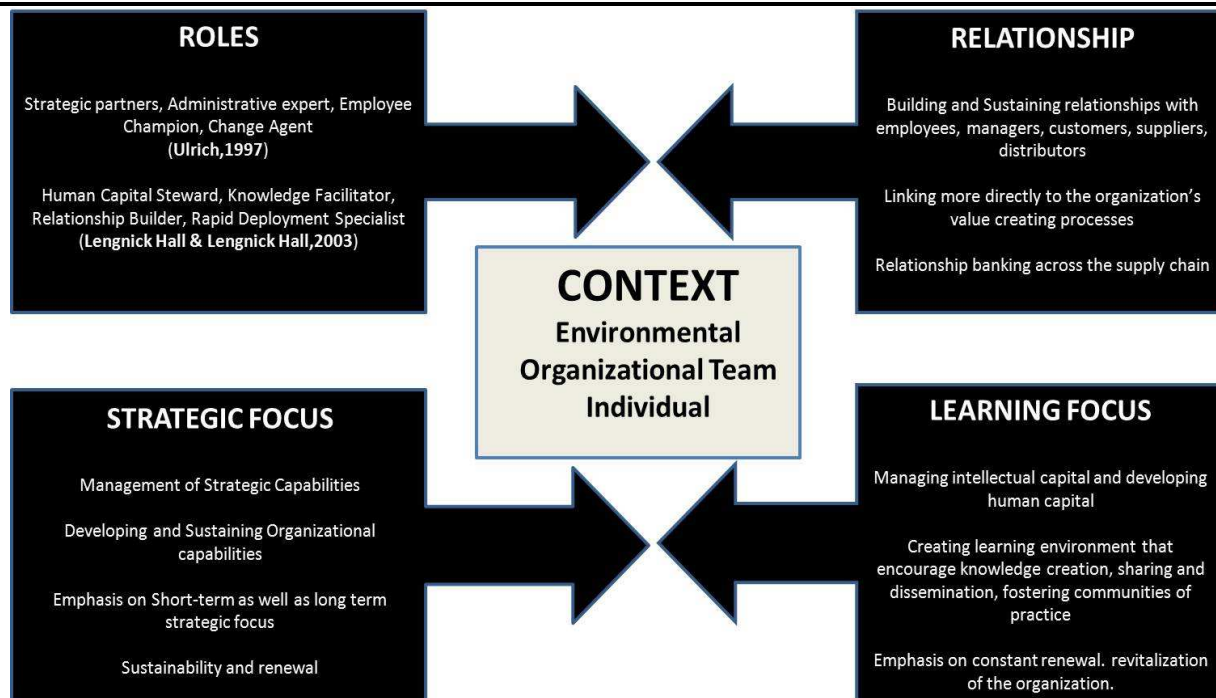
In terms of the HRM function, the rise of the so-called knowledge economy has had a major impact, with a considerable shift from HRM as a bureaucratic 'personnel management' operation to the development of discrete HRM functions over the past few decades. This has been accompanied by the integration of these functions to support competitive advantage and a more strategic thrust. Having said this, a considerable number of experts in the area warn that HRM faces extinction if it does not respond to changes brought about by the shift from a traditional to a knowledge based economy (Stewart, 1997; Ulrich, 1997, 1999; Saint-Onge, 2001; Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2003). Unable to add value under these conditions, the HRM function is perceived to be under extreme threat (Stewart, 1997; Stone, 2002). It has been suggested that one way for HRM to reinvent itself is through its contribution to effective linkages between human capital management and knowledge management within organizations (Saint-Onge, 2001; Fitz-enz in Chatzkel, 2002; Gloet, 2004).

The rapid growth of technology has led to an economy where competitive advantage is increasingly based on the successful application of knowledge (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2003). Knowledge, with its intangible aspects, is becoming a defining characteristic of economic activities, as opposed to tangibles such as goods, services or production processes. The rise of the knowledge economy has seen a proliferation of information and communication technologies, coupled with greater organizational complexity, the growth of virtual and global organizations and rapid change. This in turn requires drastic change within HRM to respond to changing demands of the knowledge economy. Traditional HRM functioned under narrow operational boundaries; in the knowledge economy the role of HRM needs to expand, looking both within and outside the organization. The traditional focus on managing people has been broadened to managing organizational capabilities, managing relationships and managing learning and knowledge (Ulrich, 1997; Saint-Onge, 2001; Coates, 2001; Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2003). The emphasis on discrete HRM practices is also broadening to a focus on developing themes and creating environments conducive to learning, as well as to the acquisition, sharing and dissemination of knowledge within organizations.

MODELS OF KM ACKNOWLEDGING IMPORTANCE OF HRM

There have been attempts to develop models of KM that acknowledge the importance of HRM. Following are some of research efforts:

- **Toracco (2000)** outlines a model of KM and HRD that identifies four basic units: creating a culture for KM; developing a model for codifying knowledge; addressing the accessibility of knowledge; and focussing on methods and systems for KM, with emphasis on individual knowledge. Drawing on theorising on expertise and tacit/explicit knowledge, Toracco (2000) refers to distinctions between knowledge scope (e.g. job role Vs sectoral knowledge), type (e.g. explicit Vs tacit knowledge), level (basic Vs expert) and specificity (domain generality). In terms of accessibility, Toracco (2000) refers to the availability of knowledge in terms of its source, its half life, and its degree of exposure; in terms of methods and systems for KM, to strategies and techniques for identifying knowledge and making it available to others. He distinguishes between depth (the extent knowledge is made explicit), time constraints, structure (e.g. methods for archiving quantitative and qualitative data) and roles (ways people are allocated to capturing and disseminating knowledge). Only KM initiatives grounded the organizational culture are likely to succeed; otherwise, users may be reluctant to share knowledge. KM needs to be integrated with HRM, IM and competitive strategy. KM is seen as involving three phases, learning, knowledge creation and knowledge use.
- **Gloet, 2004** developed model mapping the relationship between KM and HRM stated that there is greater need to revitalize the HRM function to respond to the demands of the knowledge economy and to develop linkages with KM requires major changes across four key areas: Roles, Responsibilities, Strategic Focus and Learning Focus (see Figure below)
- **Rossett and Marshall (1999)** reported that US HR professionals considered that organisational culture and policies, access to information, developing enabling technologies and the need to learn about KM were key KM issues for HR.
- **Davenport and Prusak, 1998** emphasised a need to encourage employees to put their knowledge products on shelves.
- **Stewart, 1997** Employees however may be reluctant to give away that which is seen as vital to their identity and job security. People will increasingly need to be connected to data, experts and expertise. HR staff themselves may also need training in terms of their roles in KM.



(Source: Gloet, 2004)

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF KM FOR HR FUNCTIONS

Knowledge Management poses certain challenges for specific dimensions of HRM such as Recruitment and Selection, Training and Development, Career Development, HRD, Performance Management System etc. This section discusses the implications of KM for HR Functions.

Recruitment & Selection

Given that knowledge management is often adopted by organizations in complex, unpredictable environments, traditional selecting and recruitment practices have more often than not to be modified. Thus, **Scarborough (2003)** points out that in innovative organisations the selection of individuals with both appropriate skills and appropriate attitudes has been identified as crucial to the project team's ability to integrate knowledge from diverse sources. He stresses that conventional approaches to selection may need to be revised in the light of the unpredictable knowledge flows involved in innovation projects. In such settings, it may simply be too difficult to specify the requisite knowledge and expertise in advance.

Currie and Kerrin (2003) argue that traditional recruitment and selection practices can even block knowledge sharing between groups or departments in firms organized according to the functional principle. In their study of a pharmaceutical company, they found that assessment centers through which graduates were selected were functionally focused, with sales assessment centers and marketing assessment centre's being run separately. This strengthens the sub-cultures of functions and made knowledge sharing between functions very difficult. Currie and Kerrin emphasize that in order to enhance knowledge sharing employees with an appreciation of others' perspectives have to be preferred, and they encourage the use of lateral career movement by employees in order to develop the necessary appreciation of others' perspectives.

Kristof 1996; Judge and Cable 1997 conducted research studies focusing on the importance of a fit between new recruits and the organisation's knowledge culture. These studies are, therefore, related to the person-organisational fit literature within HRM, stressing a fit between organisational culture and hiring of suitable personality, as well as the socialisation of individuals into the culture of the firm.

Robertson and Hammersley (2000) describe the selection process in a consulting firm where candidates were screened out in two interviews. These interviews involved several consultants from a number of disciplines as well as the HR manager. The overriding importance was on the candidate's ability to 'fit in' to the firm's distinctive way of working, which involved willingness and ability to work in groups and share knowledge. Moreover, psychometric tests were used but little weight was placed on their results.

Evans (2003) argues for revising the interview and selection processes so that they gather evidence about individuals' knowledge-building behaviours. New questions need to be asked, such as: How well networked is the individual? What role does he/she play in the networks they belong to? What types of communities of practice do they belong to? How have they helped develop their colleagues? How do they keep their own knowledge up-to-date?

Training & Development

Robertson and Hammesley (2000) point out that continuous professional development is considered to be essential to professional and knowledge workers. In order to stay at the forefront of their professional fields they must be constantly aware of developments within their specific disciplines and professions and they need to participate in activities that offer opportunities to further their own professional development.

Hansen et al. (1999) argue, as already noted, that codification and personalisation strategies require that organisations hire different kinds of people and train them differently. Codification firms tend to hire undergraduates and train them in groups to be implementers, that is, to use their analytical and creative skills on unique business problems. Once on board, their most important training comes from working with experienced consultants who act as mentors.

Performance Appraisal/Management System

Roberts 2001 stated that Performance management is a process that identifies who or what delivers the critical performance with respect to the business strategy and objectives, and ensures that performance is successfully carried out.

Evans (2003) points out that on the basis of what gets measured normally gets done it is important that firms consider the knowledge component in their performance management systems. Moreover, she recommends that a balance scorecard approach be adopted if employees are to realize that the firm is taking knowledge management seriously.

Schuler and Jackson (2003) argue that the general strategy of organisations tends to shape HRM practices. They noted vast differences between, among other things, performance management in organisations stressing innovation on one hand, and effectiveness on the other. In the former the performance management system tends to focus on long-term and group-based achievements, while in the latter, performance appraisals tend to be short-term and result-oriented.

Currie and Kerrin (2003) found out that the performance management system inhibited knowledge sharing, as much of the conflict between different functions was due to the divergent objectives set out for employees in the performance agreements.

Swart and Kinnie (2003) argue that a long-term developmental focus on performance management was one of the central factors in integrating knowledge within the organisation.

According to **Evans (2003)** Performance management needs to consider, the different ways in which individuals contribute knowledge. Managers need to consider:

- *Knowledge acquisition* – What knowledge has the individual brought into the organisation?
- *Knowledge sharing* – How has the individual applied their knowledge to help others to develop?
- *Knowledge re-use* – How frequently has the individual re-used existing knowledge and what has been the outcome?
- *Knowledge development* – Has the individual actively developed his/her own knowledge and skills? How well has the individual applied his/her learning?

Reward and Recognition

Reward systems indicate what the organisation values and shapes individuals' behaviour. **Evans (2003)** argues that there are mixed views as to whether organisations need to introduce separate rewards to encourage knowledge building and sharing. On the one hand, there is no need for separate rewards in theory, if organisations have introduced a competency framework that includes knowledge building and sharing behaviours, and which is linked to the performance management system. On the other hand, another school of thought argues that rewards for knowledge sharing and reuse should be more immediate and be of a public nature, as this type of behaviour is important to the organisation

Zárraga and Bonache (2003) write that traditional reward systems reward those who produce rather than those who share.

Studies by **Depres and Hiltrop 1995; Hertzberg 1997; Horwitz et al. 2003** on knowledge workers have found that they tend to have high need for autonomy, significant drives for achievement, stronger identity and affiliation with a profession than a company, and a greater sense of self-direction. These characteristics make them likely to resist the authoritarian imposition of views, rules and structures.

Evans 2003; Depres and Hiltrop 1995 found that for many knowledge workers it is as motivating to have free time to work on knowledge-building projects, going to conferences, or spending time on interesting projects, as monetary rewards

Horwitz et al. (2003) found that in 'terms of motivating strategies which may reduce knowledge worker turnover, it appears that non-financial strategies may have had a relationship with lower turnover. These included leadership, fulfilling work and participation in key decisions.'

Career Planning

Currie and Kerrin (2003) observed in their study of a pharmaceutical company that through different job placements during their training period, or more generally through their career, graduates and a limited number of senior staff built up an informal network of contacts that they trusted and who trusted them. This facilitated the sharing of knowledge.

Evans 2003; Scarbrough 2003; Swart and Kinnie 2003 have also noted how career systems are important in shaping the flow of employees over time and the way that this interacts with the acquisition and exchange of knowledge.

Human Resource Development

As KM involves recognising, documenting and distributing knowledge to improve organizational performance, it is of particular significance to HRD in training needs analysis and the planning of training to improve performance and deliver strategic results. KM challenges HR over intellectual property, professional identity and unit boundaries; KM perspectives move HRD's goal away from developing individual capacity to creating, nurturing and renewing organisational resources and interactions. Instead of devising training courses, HRD practitioners may need to identify organised elements that learners can reference as needed, depending on the particular challenges faced. Diverse experiences and examples may also need to be captured and rich commentaries and stories provided, as well as technical data in order to reflect different user concerns and learning styles. All these need to be embedded in KM system, not in a classroom (Rossett, 1999). Additional questions raised for HRD include how to encourage information sharing, counter resistance to publicising ideas, recognise individual contributions, provide security and status for individual contributors, and update skills and data. KM may well strengthen the view that training is a strategic investment, as a 'central objective of the human resource function of a firm is to enhance the firm's competitive position by creating superior 'human capital' resource (Koch and McGrath, 1996, p336). Many HRD practitioners are however insufficiently informed about the implications of KM for HRD, and may not appreciate how adopting a KM perspective will transform their role away from direct training towards a more consultant-like knowledge intermediary (or knowledge broker) role.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

India has in recent past proved that it has a definite competitive advantage in developing sophisticated and innovative systems, which have been appreciated worldwide. In order to be a strong and global player, India companies need to consolidate their human knowledge. In India KM practices have taken a leap in industry sectors like BPO, software, healthcare and pharmaceutical. For companies like TCS and Infosys that operate in dozens of countries, KM has given them an edge in the competitive software services market.

Although Indian companies have made breakthrough innovations there is still a need to improvise and overcome certain hurdles. These are creating (a) learning organization and (b) encouraging breakthrough innovation and collaboration across the organization at all levels. Hence, a key responsibility and challenge for corporate executives is to provide sustainable competitive edge. IT and information has become more easily accessible and affordable global commodities, thus the real competitive advantage is for those who can continuously devise and exploit knowledge-based advantages.

In India Professional service firms are leveraging their knowledge capital by forming project teams led by senior experienced professionals, knowledge experts, change agents and so on. This exercise helps in transfer of tacit knowledge to explicit for further usage. Knowledge management Systems has encouraged companies to manage and measure intellectual capital by creating networks and communities of practice

CONCLUSION

This paper has concentrated on how HRM practices can encourage knowledge sharing and re-use. Attention has been given to strategy, selection and recruitment processes, training, reward systems, performance management, career management and the creation of learning environments. Knowledge management and the role of human resource management in knowledge management are still in their infancy. Most of the research conducted so far is based on case studies and interviews, so generalisations of results are problematic. Former studies reveal that HRM strategies may differ depending on mediating variables such as industry type, ownership structure (multinational-domestic) and cross-cultural factors (Horwitz et al. 2003). Future research would thus benefit from longitudinal studies, cross-national comparisons, as well as industrial sectors differences. Also, basic concepts of the debate have to be defined and theories developed. Research in the future should address these shortcomings.

To leverage the knowledge production and benefits in the emerging economy, Indian organizations needs to foster collaboration among its employees to have insights in knowledge base repositories for self and organizations development and competitive advantage. Leading firms are considering their knowledge to be a strategic asset and actively and explicitly manage it by combining Knowledge management practices with information management and a culture of organizational learning. It is a management philosophy, which adds value, gives a competitive edge, create new opportunities and improve profit, organizations, teams and individuals to transform information and knowledge into actions.

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