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A STUDY ON EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING THROUGH KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Organizations are realizing that knowledge management (KM) is essential for them to remain agile in a dynamic business environment and are increasingly investing in various KM initiatives. Knowledge Management is an environment, a culture and a business ethic that enabled with an application of technology, people and business processes. The initiatives taken by organization on knowledge management should foot forth the quality of knowledge to create, acquire, share, utilize and retain their valuable resources for successful functioning of organization at all levels. By using knowledge management practices, organizations can increase the effectiveness and importance of Intellectual capital among top management and employees to sustain and enhance their potentials and organizational capability as a strategic advantage. This study discusses an integrated knowledge management framework for building major components of organizational learning such as individual and group learning, leadership, organizational culture, environment and structure. The purpose of this paper is to identify the interconnections between above components with knowledge management process to improve organizational learning. The development of integrated model should facilitate learning organization to achieve its management goals, activities, and relevant characteristics for improving their overall organizational performance.

KEYWORDS

knowledge management, organizational learning, leadership, structure, culture & environment, individual learning.

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating pace of changes in operational environments of business organizations has created increasing need to find adequate ways to adapt with continuously changing situations. Ability to learn is seen as a major source to stay competitive in changing environment. Learning and knowledge are two phase which enrich the capability of an organizational resource to excel in business environment. In learning-centric organization, knowledge management is the core to capture and share the knowledge among individuals and teams to build innovation, mission and objectives to improve organizational performance. Each individual is important to this process, for continuous flow of knowledge and learning among people that generates organizational learning. Knowledge management is a successful processes and practices that have its own value to respond for threats and opportunities rising from a turbulent environment.

FUNDAMENTALS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Knowledge management is the systematic process of creating, maintaining and nurturing an organization to make the best use of its individual and collective knowledge to achieve the corporate mission, broadly viewed as sustainable competitive advantage or achieving high performance. The goal is for an organization to become aware of its knowledge, individually and collectively, and to shape itself so that it makes the most effective and efficient use of its knowledge. Knowledge management elevates a culture and environment that stimulates workers to create, utilize and share their knowledge and that also empowers them to improve the qualities of leadership for organizational excellence.

Knowledge management process is the planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling of people, processes and systems in the organization to ensure that its knowledge-related assets are improved and effectively utilized. Knowledge-related assets include knowledge in the form of organizational knowledge such as patents, manuals and best practices, information related technologies such as internet / intranet, ERP, CRM, HRIS, database mining etc., knowledge about every jobs procedure, organizational product, processes and focused problems. The processes of knowledge management involve knowledge acquisition, creation, refinement, storage, transfer, sharing, and utilization. The knowledge management function in the organization operates these processes, develops methodologies and systems to support them, and motivates people to participate in them.

The term organizational learning may refer to individual learning within the organization, the entire organization learning as a collective body, or anywhere in between these extremes. However, most organizational learning refers to team or organizational level learning. Of course, individual learning, or learning in small or large groups or as an entire organization may be needed for the firm to possess the requisite knowledge to take effective action. From a knowledge management perspective, all levels of learning are important and all must be nurtured and made a natural part of culture. Today, most of the knowledge management emphasis has been put on locating, creating and sharing knowledge. For this reason, we consider organizational learning is the capacity of an organization to acquire the knowledge necessary to survive, sustain and compete in its environment. However, there is an important distinction between individual learning and team/organizational level learning.

Organizational learning requires a sharing of language, meaning, objectives and standards that are significantly different from individual learning. When the organization learns, it generates a social synergy that creates knowledge culture, adding value to the firm's knowledge workers and to its overall performance. When this knowledge culture followed, the organization may have better leadership, structure and environment which are called as an organizational core competency. These are usually unique to each organization and can rarely be replicated by other firms. The knowledge behind a core competency is built up over time through experiences and expertise in competitive and changing environment.

In today's rapidly changing, erratic and increasingly complex environment, knowledge creation, acquisition and application through continuous learning are likely to be the only solution to survival and excellence. Organizational learning is contingent upon a number of factors such as leadership, structure, strategy, environment, technology, and culture. Knowledge management hopes to create and nurture these same factors to make optimum use of the organization's knowledge for development of organizational performance and excellence.

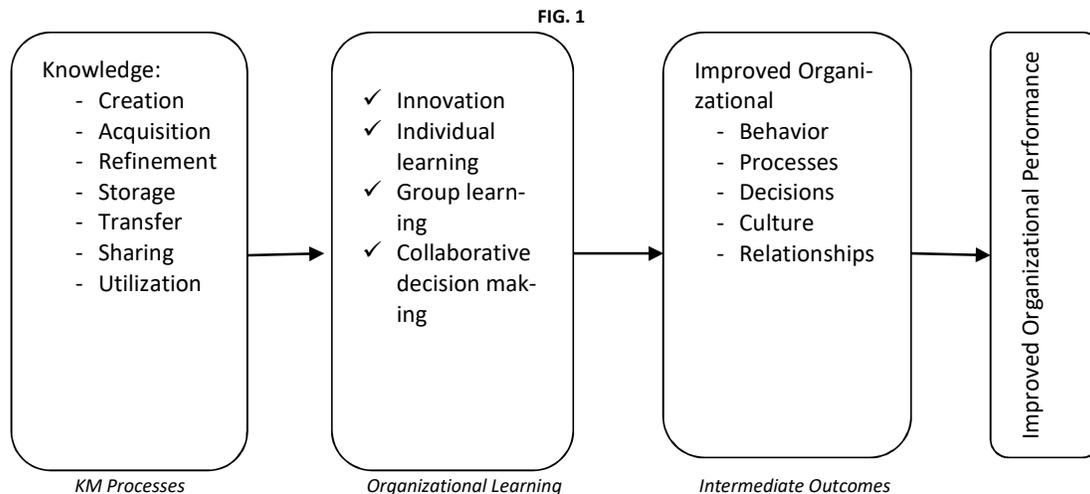
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The introduction of information systems flattens the structure of knowledge management process and promote greater dissemination of information to organizational learning process and all individuals through internet, intranet. The information technology opted for knowledge management should be low-cost, high speed, high storage capacity and support for knowledge transfer, sharing sand utilization must be flexible and friendly. Technology is moving beyond expert systems (which make logical inferences based on a fixed set of rules) that combine the use of embedded textual information with human cognition and inference

to maximize the decision-making and interpretation processes needed to understand and act according to changing situations. Information system should refine the necessary information needed for knowledge sharing to be stored in the form formal documents such as training manuals, employee handbooks, training material, etc., and informal experience such as tacit knowledge, expertise, education, stories, etc., often used as knowledge source in organizational learning process. The use of such information systems will support and enhance organizational learning by improving the precision, recall, completeness, accuracy, feedback and review of informal knowledge complements, and human contribution to decision making—creativity, rational thinking, intuition, emotion and social synergy. Organizational knowledge can be made of both hard data (such as numbers, facts, figures, rules, reports and other documents and rules) and soft information and knowledge (such as expertise, experiences, critical incidents, context information, details about strategic decisions, and tacit knowledge). Most organization have information systems such as CRM, ERP, HRIS, inventory control, budgetary, and administrative systems that store and retrieve hard data or facts to take future decisions. Knowledge management process provides a best practice of using a common platform for storing, sharing and transferring of organizational knowledge to all levels of learning organization.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS IN ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

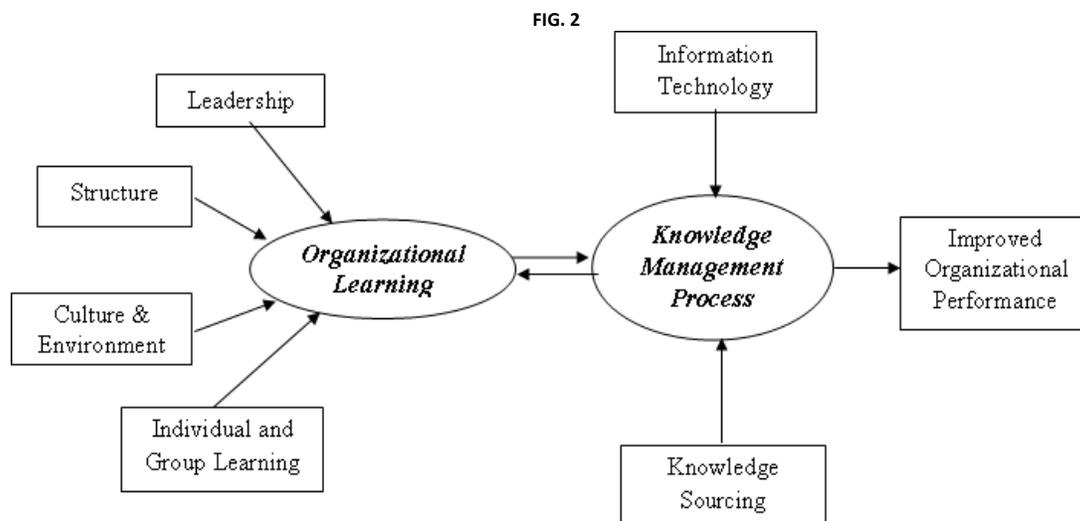
Firms are increasingly focusing on the concept of organizational learning to increase their competitive advantage, innovation, and effectiveness. Organizational learning is accelerated through knowledge management by creating a common knowledge repository, identifies and codifies competencies and routines, including acquiring, storing, interpreting, and manipulating information from within and external to the organization. Knowledge management, through knowledge sharing processes, leverages both individual and organizational learning. Organizational learning and knowledge management jointly increase the quality of decisions of the organization and the effectiveness of their implementation.



INTEGRATED MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

In an organization where understanding and ability to take effective actions are major challenges because of the organization’s environment or the nature of its work, both knowledge management and organizational learning become critical factors in its long-term survival. In fact, these two fields are so important that they must become embedded within the organizational environment and culture, so that they are found in the behavior, norms, policies and expectations of the workforce, managers and leaders of the organization. To understand this relationship, we explore a number of characteristics of organizational learning and knowledge management and see how they naturally complement and reinforce each other.

Organizations learn to increase their adaptability and efficiency during times of change. Learning is a dynamic process that manifests itself in the continually changing nature of organizations, as represent by innovation, collaboration, culture shifts and high morale, especially during times of uncertainty and external challenge. Both knowledge management and organizational learning use knowledge generation and knowledge sharing as foundation elements. To be successful, these capabilities require a high level of attention to human factors: roles and responsibilities, experience, motivation, self-image, respect and trust, honesty and integrity and the quality of interpersonal relationships throughout the firm. Since much of our knowledge is tacit, existing within our memories and unconscious mind and not easily articulated, its development and sharing is very much a social process.



Leadership: The essential function of leadership is to provide direction, build an organization's culture and shape its evolution. Leaders must shape the design of the organization's structure and policies to best fulfill its organizational mission and objectives. To do this, they must reproduce desired behavior, communicate the organization's vision and strategy and insist on effective implementation of requisite policies and procedures. Organizational learning also requires commitment from executives for a long-term process with adequate resources. Organizational culture (beliefs, ideologies, values and norms) and the amount of resources (money, facilities, people and ideas) heavily influence the quality and quantity of learning.

Structure: Structure represents the set of arrangements among the resources of the organization. The resources may be people, facilities, technological, financial, and how these resources are related to each other, and especially their influence on human culture and human relationships, influences organizational self-image, its beliefs about the external world and its ability to learn and change. Hierarchical, controlling structures by their very nature tend to prefer stability and minimize the learning and close collaboration needed to meet significant change or paradigm shifts. Flexible structures (even hierarchical) that have a culture of sharing and collaboration can often facilitate learning and allow the freedom to change. Organizational learning can occur for all the wrong reasons, but it may be incapable of providing value to the organization whereas knowledge management effort that creates and manages a structure to correlate the learning and focus the application of that learning to improve the performance.

KM can do this by integrating organizational strategy, vision and structure, using knowledge strategies as the common denominator and individual vision as the guidelines. However, too much limitation on knowledge focus can create an inability to respond to surprises and major environmental paradigm shifts. Unless deliberately provoked, most organizational structures tend to become rigid over time. To prevent this rigidity, organizational learning and knowledge management are needed to encourage and make use of flexible and changing structures, at the same time retaining the capacity to focus and correlate knowledge and activities for their personal and professional changes. Policies such as moving people around to broaden their experience and revitalize their challenges, continuously bringing new people into the organization at all levels and deliberately changing organizational relationships will catalyze and complete both individual and organizational learning. This will require a line of sight from the organization's policies, decisions and actions to its organizational learning and knowledge management efforts to its overall performance.

Culture & Environment: Learning organizations treat competition as a means of learning, since competition enables organizations to compare their own performance with others in the industry and learn from that culture. Through knowledge sharing, learning results as the organization culture interacts with its environment for effective performance. Knowledge management looks at the external environment as a source of knowledge and training ground for its understanding and interpretation of itself and the outside world. As part of a major feedback loop, the culture and environment changes present in an organization as a standard for measuring the organizations learning process; unfortunately, it acts as knowledge transfer tool for understanding the effectiveness of overall organizational performance with continuous growth and enhancement.

Strategic applications of information systems for knowledge acquisition from environment can take two forms: Capabilities for assimilating knowledge from the outside (such as competitive intelligence systems acquiring information about other companies in the same industry) and capabilities for creating new knowledge from the reinterpretation and reformulation of existing and newly acquired information (such as executive information systems or decision-support systems). Learning culture is stimulated by both environmental changes and complex internal factors for their survival, sustainability, maintain and develop the valuable resources in a competitive market. The organizational culture influences learning by providing a limit, or focus to decision-making and a framework for perceiving and interpreting the environment as knowledge source. The multiple changes throughout an environment is possible, but certain culture such as employee behavior, relationship, policy, job nature and technology utilization has to be retained properly through learning and knowledge management for sustainable organizational development.

Individual and Group Learning: Organizational learning is greatly dependent upon individual learning and the competency of the workforce. If the organization has a systematic culture, environment and leadership contribute to organization learning so that there was a definite chance to support individual and group learning. Individual learning is a cognitive or behavioral activity between an individual and their environment, whereas in teams and organizations learning is a collective process dependent upon relationships and interactions among individuals. While individual learning is achieved by study, observation, cognition, experience, practice and developing effective mental models in the mind. Organizational learning, being primarily a social versus a cognitive activity, occurs when groups learn to interact, share their knowledge and act collectively in a manner that maximizes their combined capacity and ability to understand and take effective action.

Individual style of learning will depend on demographic, education, experience and psychological aspects, but a group trait includes individual characteristics, relationship, structure, skills and role played in the group. From these individual and group learning characteristics, it seems that a successful knowledge management process could provide knowledge workers, better teamwork, good work culture and effective learning environment throughout the organization. Knowledge management is to support individual and group learning through the enhancement of leadership, structure, culture, environment and technology.

CONCLUSION

Knowledge management is a set of relatively new organizational activities that are aimed at improving knowledge, knowledge-related practices, organizational learning and decisions and organizational performance. Knowledge management focuses on knowledge processes – knowledge creation, acquisition, refinement, storage, transfer, sharing and utilization. These processes support organizational processes involving innovation, individual learning, collective learning and collaborative decisions. The intermediate outcomes of Knowledge management are improved organizational behaviors, decisions, processes and relationships that enable the organization to improve its overall performance. By combining the strengths of organizational learning and knowledge management, learning organizations will create cultures, structures, environment and leadership styles that enable them to scan, perceive, evaluate, anticipate and take effective action on uncertain, unexpected and complex threats and opportunities.

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