

The Impediments of Knowledge Management

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-----ABSTRACT-----

Knowledge management is much talked about concept in this era but there are some impediments in its management. Though there is much heat regarding knowledge management, there is less light. When some others hear the concepts information and knowledge management, what comes in their minds are computers yet computers are only enablers There is much confusion in information and knowledge management.. Confusion also exists on the differences between information and knowledge management. There are half life, threat to specialist and mobility as impediments in knowledge management.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Al little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle (Kahlil Gibran (18893-1931). Carnegie (2010:1) argues that “the only irreplaceable capital an organization possesses is the knowledge and ability of its people. The productivity of that capital depends on how effectively people share their competence with those who can use it”. Schlogl (2005:3) observes that “the terms information management and knowledge management are used very inconsistently in theory and in practice. This is due to ignorance and tactical reasons”. This article discusses the challenges in knowledge management. It gives the confusion and misunderstandings that exists between information and knowledge. Strategies on how to solve those challenges are given.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this article are to:

- Give the different challenges of knowledge management
- Indicate solutions to the challenges

III. WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

Knowledge is neither data nor information, although it is related to both. The terms are not interchangeable and knowing what is needed often determines organisational success or failure (Awad and Gwaziri, 2009 :56). Knowledge by its very nature depends on other knowledge to build on. Knowledge creation is, in fact, a process of value addition to previous knowledge through innovation (Duffy, 1999; Narayanan, 2001). Al-Hawamdeh (2002:2) adds that “this also implies that the more knowledge we already possess the more we will be in a position to create and transfer to others. Awad and Gwaziri, 2009:57) defines knowledge as understanding gained through experience or study”. Knowledge is the knowhow. It shows familiarity on how to do something hence leading to performance. There are tacit and explicit knowledge. The explicit knowledge should lead to performance if it does not then it is not knowledge but rather information.

IV. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Frappaolo (2002:8) is of the opinion that “defining knowledge management is not a simple issue. It is not a technology, although technology should be exploited as an enabler”. The most important issue today for organisations of almost any size is the knowledge in the organization and the organization’s ability to deal effectively with that knowledge” (Evernden and Evernden, 2003:1). Dalkir (2005) delineates that “knowledge management is the deliberate and systematic coordination of an organization’s people, technology, processes and organizational structure in order to add value through creating, sharing and applying knowledge as well as through feeding the valuable lessons learned and best practices into corporate memory in order to foster

continued organisational learning”. Firestone and McELROY (2004:60) note that some approaches to knowledge management seem to view any manipulation of knowledge as knowledge management for example knowledge sharing, knowledge production and knowledge transfer. Knowledge management involves the whole process of knowledge acquisition, creation, organising, storing, sharing, using, reusing and evaluation of knowledge. Firestone and McELROY (2004:61) assert that knowledge management is knowledge management process that involves the management of knowledge production, knowledge integration, the knowledge life cycle and the outcomes.

V. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IMPEDIMENTS

The following knowledge management impediments are given:

5.1 Confusion and misunderstanding of the Knowledge Management concepts

There is confusion and misunderstanding of the Knowledge Management concepts. This makes the management of knowledge a challenge. Some people think that Knowledge Management is Information and Communication Technology while some think that information and knowledge management is one and the same thing. Koulopoulos and Frappaolo (2009:3) argue that Knowledge Management is not a technology, although technology should be positioned to facilitate it. Jongwe (2010:15) observes that many organisations believe that they are knowledge driven simply because they have a massive databank or they capture a range of information on their competition, competitors and customers. Koulopoulos and Frappaolo (2009:37) assert that there is a difference between knowledge and its management, and information and its management. Too many organisations have gone off creating what they thought was a knowledge management application, only to be disappointed by the results. Their results were actually reasonable and admirable, but most misguided. Koulopoulos and Frappaolo (2009:37) give the following distinction between information and knowledge.

- Information management consists of pre-planned responses to anticipated stimuli.
- Knowledge management consists of unplanned (innovative) responses to surprise stimuli.

Widespread lack of understanding exists about how to implement knowledge management effectively, or even what it is. Indeed, one has merely to try to find a widely accepted definition for knowledge management to realise the extent of confusion that exists”. The way one defines knowledge management determines how one manage it. Frappaolo (2002:2) observes that “knowledge management has fallen victim to a mixture of bad implementation practices and software vendors eager to turn a complex process into a pure technology play”. He also argues that “we must move beyond the academic and focus on practical”. Thus if one is going to invest in knowledge management, there must be clear understanding on how it differs from information management and how it differs from information and Communication Technology.

5.2 Expanding tacit knowledge within the organisation

Koulopoulos and Frappaolo (2009:37) give the challenge of expanding the levels of tacit knowledge within an organisation. Since tacit knowledge exists in the mind, some organisations find it difficult to expand it.

5.3 Managing the volume of explicit knowledge

The primary challenge when facing explicit knowledge is to manage its volume and ensure its relevance. There is now information explosion which in turn has brought the challenge of choosing the relevant information. Mutongi and Chiwanza (2016) posit that we are now living in the information society and global village of which we are bombarded with huge sums of information which is not all relevant to us. A common malaise facing organisations is information overload, as the levels of explicit knowledge become so overwhelming that they cannot be appropriately filtered, and applied or connected at the right point and time.

5.4 Underutilisation of knowledge and not assigning adequate value to knowledge management

The information and knowledge that is there in organisations and communities if not fully utilised. This is evidenced by the underutilisation of knowledge workers. There is also lack of value assigned to Knowledge management. Mutongi (2016) proffers that it appears the City Fathers do not consider the management of knowledge as a priority of equal importance to water treatment, health and waste management. Even the citizens are generally bitter over the mismanagement of material assets but not of knowledge.

5.5 Top down knowledge flow

Top down knowledge flow has been witnessed in organisations which hinders initiation and innovation.

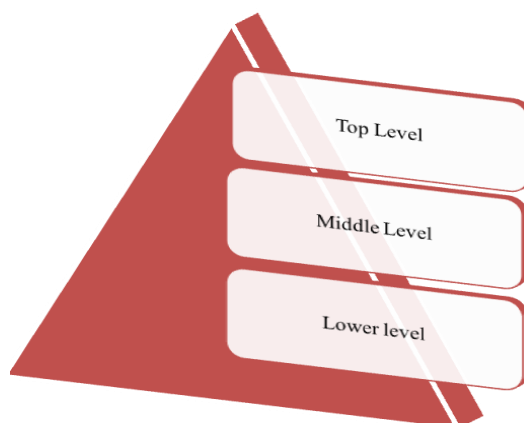


Figure 1: Organisational levels

Whittington (2001:26) argues that “especially in knowledge-intensive firms, such as professional services or new technology enterprises, strategy is as likely to emerge bottom-up as top-down. After all, it is at the bottom where the knowledge lies and is continuously recreated. Top managers ignore this source of value in their strategy process at their peril”.

5.6 Lack of awareness

There is lack of awareness of the existence and importance of information and Knowledge Management. Owens and Wilson (2003:114) in their research identify that “in general staff members are not aware of all the information and knowledge resources that are available to them. One reason for this is lack of training in general information and knowledge-seeking skills.

5.7 People knowing more than they say

People may know more than they say, for example, individuals may prefer to keep some knowledge in personal tacit form (Sanchez, 2002:12). What a person can say might not be what he/she all knows. Sometimes it becomes difficult explaining what one knows. On the other hand some people prefer to keep some of what they know to themselves.

5.8 People saying more than they know

People may say more than they know (Sanchez, 2002:12). Some people exaggerate what they know.

5.9 People hearing something not said

People may hear something other than what is said. This is due to different backgrounds and level of education. Sanchez (2001:73) notes that “difficulties related to the interpretation of what others are saying often resulted from the different terminologies and vocabulary used in different fields of technology. There is therefore need to standardise the language (symbols) and frameworks of employees. Gardner et al (2004) argues that “computer science covers the technological aspects and provides the software and hardware. In order to cover the field of knowledge management adequately, methods and concepts from psychology, economy, sociology, group therapy, philosophy, epistemology, cognitive science, artificial intelligence and so on are at least as important as the techniques and tools offered by computer science. Sanchez (2001:14) adds that the problems of knowledge sharing may arise because of the nature of the learning process itself, as well as for economic and social reasons. Knight and Silk observes that (1990:3) knowledge and information are intangible therefore cannot be counted therefore making the task of managing information and knowledge difficult.

Koulopoulos and Frappaolo (2009:51) discover that “far too many organisations focus their efforts on how to get knowledge out of their knowledge-management systems, and too little, if any, on getting knowledge into the system. They are noted that there are obstacles in capturing knowledge:

- Mobility
- Half-life
- Threat to specialists



Figure 2: Obstacles in capturing knowledge

5.10 Mobility

Especially in larger organisations and mature or maturing markets, mobility is the daunting challenge of capturing knowledge as employees and gray matter are constantly moving in and out of the organisation. Some people with the relevant knowledge may leave the organisation due to various reasons which include resignation, retirement, illness and death.

5.11 Half life

Knowledge has a limited life span, people who use it should constantly re-evaluate the validity of the knowledge on which they base decisions. The problem, though, is that knowledge is not always overt or easily accessible. Because it is below the surface, it is not examined often. Individuals may assume that a certain process or business method is correct because it has precedent, even if that precedent is based on out-dated premises. Davenport and Prusak (1998) avers that of course everyone has met experts whose knowledge seems to consist of stock responses and who offer the same old answer to any new question. We would argue that the expertise of these experts ceases to be real knowledge when it refuses to examine itself and evolve. It becomes opinion or dogma instead. This can be likened to lectures that year by year bring the same notes to the lecture room. Knowledge involves and the really knowledge worker initiates and innovates as well as brings in new ideas.

5.12 Threat to specialists

Many individuals who have become specialist in their areas of expertise are obviously reluctant to part with their knowledge for fear of making their skills less valuable. This depends on specifics of the industry. The accounting profession changes little in the course of five years, whereas the knowledge base for engineering and designing integrated circuits changes monthly.

5.13 Replacing knowledge

Koulopoulos and Frappaolo (2009:51) postulate that replacing knowledge is much more important-and more difficult-than its simple capture and this stumps most organisations. They realise too late that all their efforts to capture knowledge are nothing more than casual accumulation of information.

5.14 The dissemination and sharing of knowledge

One of the biggest challenges behind knowledge management is the dissemination and sharing of knowledge. People with the highest knowledge have the potential for high levels of value creation. But this knowledge can only create value if it is placed in the hands of those who must execute on it. Knowledge is usually difficult to access as it leaves when the knowledge professional resigns, dies and retires. The dissemination and sharing of knowledge is also affected by the silo attitude towards knowledge management.

VI. SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO CHALLENGES

Installation of systems that capture explicit and tacit knowledge in the organization;
Creation of a conducive environment fro knowledge sharing;

- Promotion of information literacy to deal with information overload;
- Centralisation of information and knowledge management activities to do away with the silo attitudes which affect the dissemination and sharing of information and knowledge;

- Clear explanations and understanding of information and knowledge management is called for such that there is no confusion between the two. This can be achieved through information and knowledge management training.
- Involvement and participation of everyone in the information and knowledge management;
- Greater value on information and knowledge management should be placed;
- Increase awareness through advertising, marketing and Just in Time Inventory systems (JIT);
- Total Quality Management;
- Knowledge replacement and addition;
- Having a knowledge and information policy;
- Knowledge leadership is called for in order to see to it that the 'gospel' of knowledge management is preached and mastered by everyone.

VII. CONCLUSION

This article discussed different impediments in knowledge management. They include confusion and misunderstanding of knowledge management, not valuing and underutilisation of knowledge management, lack of awareness, mobility, half life, threats to specialists, challenges in knowledge dissemination, sharing and knowledge replacement. Some strategies to address the challenges were recommended which include the facilitation of knowledge leadership, installation of systems to capture explicit and tacit knowledge and doing away with silo attitudes towards knowledge management.

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Profile of Authors and Photographs

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