

Chapter 9

Does a Knowledge Management Community Manage Knowledge?

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ABSTRACT

Applying knowledge management has been examined and researched within organizational systems, in which Chief Knowledge Officers (CKO) lead these processes. There is a significant lack of professional literature in Israel and elsewhere regarding the application of knowledge management processes within the community of knowledge managers (CKO's CoP). The question of whether or not processes of knowledge management exist among the community of leading KM professionals, and the quality of these processes, is important for gaining insight, both in the practice of knowledge management, as well as for researchers in the field. An analysis of a case study of the "Forum of Knowledge Management in Israeli Organizations" which is a CoP (community of practice) attempts to examine these issues; to define and clarify the current situation, and to propose additional directions for exploration, research, and application. This study may result in implementation of "best practices" which will be of significance in emerging economies, and will benefit vision and knowledge for companies and governmental organizations in executing CoP undertakings in an efficient and effective way. This will prevent "reinventing the wheel" and costly "first hand" experience.

BACKGROUND

"Knowledge Management" is a concept that has become equated with a perception of management that focuses on the most important organizational resource – intellectual capital. Financial organizations and computer and hi-tech companies have recognized the importance of intellectual capital and believe that developing it and investing in it are critical for an organization's success. As opposed to the traditional assets of an organization, the quality of intellectual capital bears on the ability to accrue prospective profits and survivability for the long term, features which distinguish a KM-oriented organization from

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0013-1.ch009

its competitors. Organizations that have recognized the importance of knowledge have learned to locate, map, cultivate, and preserve it. Knowledge management is unlike the management of other resources. It requires a different thought process; thinking about thinking (meta-cognition), and breaking out of standard management frameworks.

Emerging economies can benefit from this KM tool in many ways.

As a player in an international economy turns into a trans-economy or multinational economy, “the national barriers are reduced supported by liberal economic policies of developing nations.... Knowledge Management is the need of the hour to safeguard the organizations to give themselves the competitive edge” (Kalpana, & Premkumar, 2008, p. 1). In this respect, the challenges faced by emerging economies are very similar to those confronted by Western countries. As researchers explain, “Knowledge is evolving in the new economy as a distinctive competency and a main resource of wealth... managing knowledge as a non-deleting corporate resource can help in creation of sustainable competitive advantage” (Al-Shammari, 2012, p. 1).

As we can see in the literature, the review of issues in many developing countries are similar to those that concern the developed world (Al-Shammari, 2012). We need to acknowledge, however, that the newcomers benefit from the vast experience gained by the western world in relation to KM strategy and best practice tools and techniques. Researchers suggest that the newcomers have an advantage because they can adopt a variety of KM strategies in order to catch-up and acquire knowledge assets. “Poor latecomers firms in emerging economies catch-up with the multinational incumbents....firms choose emulation ... develop flexible routines...or choose blind imitation” (Li & Krishnan Kozhikode, 2008, p.1) and “an important means to achieve such catch-up is to acquire strategic assets overseas” (Cui, et al, 2014, p. 1).

Knowledge Managers (Chief Knowledge Manager- CKO)

Many organizations in Israel and throughout the world have understood the importance of knowledge, and promote comprehensive processes for knowledge management towards attaining business objectives and organizational goals. Many organizations have defined the role of knowledge management for this purpose. Defining the role of a knowledge manager, his areas of action, and his personality, are extensively discussed in professional literature. It is no exaggeration to say that the job description and expectations of a knowledge manager are comparable to those of *Superman* (Bontis, 2001). Responsible for cross-organizational, wide-ranging processes, a knowledge manager touches every area of an organization's activities, employees, clients, and competitors. The position is profoundly far-reaching, and includes the organization's activities – past, present, and future. The position of Chief Knowledge Officer is defined as “an organizational leader, responsible for ensuring that the organization maximizes the value it achieves through knowledge”. CKOs can help an organization maximize the returns on investment in knowledge (people, processes and intellectual capital), exploit their intangible assets (know-how, patents, customer relationships), repeat successes, share best practices, improve innovation, and avoid knowledge loss after organizational restructuring.

One of the central challenges for knowledge managers is the fact that the field is interdisciplinary, multi-dimensional (some claim, eclectic), and still lacks of satisfactory formal, academic or professional training and education framework. Most knowledge managers do not have a professional KM background, but attain their positions via professional development or positioning within the organization. Knowledge managers have been active in global public and business markets for the last decade; and in

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