Chapter 5
Knowledge Management as an Academic Discipline:
An Assessment

Jyotshna Sahoo
Sambalpur University, India

Bharati Pati
Sambalpur University, India

Basudev Mohanty
Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar, India

ABSTRACT

The very purpose of the paper is to explore, assess and to determine the elements of knowledge management as an academic discipline. At the beginning, the paper explains the concepts of knowledge, knowledge management and the characteristics of an academic discipline. A structured framework with six criteria suggested by Kuhn (1996) outlining an academic discipline has been applied to evaluate and to put forward a comprehensive understanding Knowledge Management (KM) as an academic discipline. In order to gather relevant data as per the criteria, many sources have been relied upon. Findings reveal that KM meets and supports all the laid down criteria as it has its own body of knowledge, specialized journals, academic curricula, professional societies and can be considered as a progressive academic discipline and scholarly field of study with its own tradition and history.

INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of human civilization, knowledge has been recognized as a prime resource for the advancement of the human society. There is no single and precise definition of knowledge which is universally acceptable to all, as a result of which scholars who are interested in the study of knowledge have given their own definitions to suit their lines of studies. In simple words, what is known to the society and is held in its collective memory is knowledge. In other words, the society is the preserver and conserver of knowledge. Daniel Bell, the Professor of Sociology of Harvard University who opined 'knowledge' as the moving force of the Post-industrial Society, has given a comprehensive definition of knowledge as: "… an organized set of statement of fact or ideas, presenting a reasoned judgment or an experimental result, which is transmitted to others through some communication medium in some systematic form. Knowledge consists of new judgments (Research and scholarship) or presentation of older judgments as exemplified in text books, teaching and learning and collected as library and archival material." Hence, it can be interpreted that, knowledge is a highly organized intellectual product of humans that includes personal experience, skills, understanding of the different contexts in which human beings operate their activities. In other words it can be conceptualized as meaningful and value added information which has been filtered by human minds. According to Grover and Davenport (2001), "When data, information and knowledge are arranged in a single continuum, knowledge has the highest value, the greatest relevance to decisions and actions, the greatest dependence on context, and requires maximum amount of human involvement". Knowledge is also typically classified as either tacit or explicit. (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Polanyi, 1997). Tacit knowledge is personal knowledge that may or may not be expressed by an individual. In contrast, explicit knowledge is that which has been articulated, codified and formalized in some electronic or physical form. Explicit knowledge is that which is expressed to others, orally or in a recorded form. However tacit knowledge is as important as explicit knowledge. In the new discipline of Knowledge Management, it is this tacit knowledge, which is valued very highly, constituting the real strength of an organization. It is this knowledge of individuals that need to be extracted by various means and methods, to build up the organizational strength. Whether tacit or explicit, knowledge emerges as a primary strategic resource for all kinds of societal development. Hence, it is imperative for the organizations to concentrate on maintaining and developing the knowledge capital that they possess in order to provide innovative service, to obtain competitive advantage and to achieve success. Managing this knowledge is a difficult task and knowledge management is all about managing organization's knowledge effectively.

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