Chapter 7
Managing Knowledge Towards Enabling Healthcare Service Delivery

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ABSTRACT

In every living being, health is essentially important, and as such, requires attention. Health related matters are at one point or the other embedded into humans' strategic, tactical and operational activities. However, due to human complexity, manifesting from factors such as food consumption and weather effect, healthcare services have increasingly become essential to individuals, groups and organisations in their daily life activities. As healthcare services increase in significance, the knowledge acquired and used in carrying out its services also becomes vital. The management of knowledge has increased in its relevance over the years. This could be attributed to the complexity in human activities. Thus, the management of knowledge has many challenges, which are never straight forward, and does not always produce positive result. Based on the challenges, it is critical to understand the enabling and constraint scenery of knowledge management. This article applied Structuration Theory to examine the different types of knowledge within the healthcare environment, using one of South African healthcare service providers as a case. This was done in order to gain better understanding on how certain knowledge are managed to give the result that they do. A better understanding of how knowledge is acquired and used within the healthcare environment would assist practitioners and managers, including Government and academic researchers in their roles and responsibilities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many organisations take cognizance and seriously the value of knowledge in enhancing their capacity to compete and adapt to change (Bevern, 2003). As a result, some organisations are attentive to management knowledge to make a difference.

According to Lee and Lee (2007), knowledge management (KM) is aimed to strengthen public service effectiveness, so as to serve the society better. The need for KM is based on a paradigm shift in the business environment, where knowledge is considered central to organisational performance.

In the last two decades, KM has received increasing attention in the field of healthcare. This could be attributed to the sensitive nature, and the increasing needs of healthcare services. Similar to other disciplines, healthcare operations depend, and are influenced by available data. Data within the healthcare environmental is often voluminous. This could be attributed to the high volume of information such as electronic medical records, clinical trial data, and hospital records that flows in the healthcare environment (Omary et al., (2009). The voluminous data require different types of knowledge for effective and efficient management.

Many research studies have been conducted on KM's benefits, implications, and effects on healthcare service delivery. The study by Khorasani et al (2012) emphasised that KM in healthcare is critical, particularly, in developing the necessary capacity amongst professionals, in order for them to be able to manage the required and available knowledge. In managing knowledge within the healthcare environment, there is need to understand the factors which impact, influences, as well as the drivers within the environment, which contribute to clinical, strategic and tactical decision-making.

The objective was to gain better understanding of how knowledge impact (enables and constrain) on healthcare service delivery within the healthcare environment, particularly in developing countries. The research question was what are the factors which influence the management of knowledge within the healthcare environment? The examination of enablement and constraint was possible through Structuration Theory (ST), mainly through its focus on production and reproduction of events and activities.

The ST also focus on double hermeneutic process, where people, upon reflection of day-to-day activities, are able to influence the structure within which they operate (Giddens, 1984). Giddens (1984) further argued that this is done by either reproducing current practices or by changing them. In structuration, structure are rules and resources (Iyamu & Roode, 2010). Based on knowledge, or through management of knowledge, rules and resources that stem within healthcare organisations are produced and reproduced overtime.

2. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

There is no accepted single definition of knowledge management (KM). However most of the definitions adopted by different scholars represent knowledge management as a social and learning process which facilitate organisational growth and competitiveness. KM is a process which could be used by individuals, organisations or communities facilitate improvement of events and activities in their environment (Weber, 2007). This includes leveraging data and information that are gathered, organised, managed, and shared. Hasanali (2002) describe knowledge management as a set of strategies and approaches which denotes a definite structure or a way of doing things that enables the flow of information to the right person at the right time.

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