

Chapter 17

Management of Tacit Knowledge and the Issue of Empowerment of Patients and Stakeholders in the Health Care Sector

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing literature on health and health care dedicated to empowerment of patients; but there is still a gap in the literature to conceptualize knowledge, to extend the discussion of the empowerment of the patients to the stakeholders. The discussion is at the level of managerial processes of empowerment and knowledge management related to health care. The present chapter starts with a review on empowerment, especially focused on the health sector. The following sections will develop a critical analysis of empowerment, mainly around the concept of tacit knowledge (Polanyi) and knowledge management. One key variable is the proximity of the actors involved in the empowerment process. This key variable is very much related to the tacitness issue of knowledge production and flows. The chapter extends the discussion of the empowerment of the patients to that of the stakeholders and the general debate about health literacy. A model is briefly described for the purpose of illustrating the learning process in a knowledge management implemented in health care.

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INTRODUCTION

The recent transformations in the economy and society are often referred to as the knowledge economy, the information society or even the knowledge society (Amin & Cohendet, 2004; Amin & Roberts, 2008; Antonelli, Foray, Hall, & Steinmueller, 2006; Carayannis, Pirzadeh, & Popescu, 2011; De la Mothe & Foray, 2001; Foray, 2010; Kahin & Foray, 2006; Lam, 2000). These transformations impact most sectors; and health care is no exception. It is a major provider of knowledge-intensive services that are going through a rather swift adoption of new information systems and knowledge management processes that parallel the concomitant emergence of new management models (J. Birkinshaw, 2010; Julian Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol, 2008; Julian Birkinshaw, Nobel, & Ridderstråle, 2002; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). Related to these issues –in public policies, social action and management– the notion of empowerment has spread widely. Now, as discussed here, it is affecting health care models, institutions, businesses and management as much as the structuration and the organization of the whole sector.

Concepts, Context, and Issues

There is a growing literature on health and health care dedicated to empowerment of patients. There is, however, no explicit research on the tacit dimension of the knowledge management of the empowerment process of patients, health care organizations and institutions. There is also a need to clarify the principles for good knowledge management applied in the health care sector; and this is especially true if it goes beyond the implementation of information systems solutions that are only part of the response necessary to tackle the problems of today. Our objective here is to tackle that gap in the literature and to extend the discussion of the empowerment of the patients to the stakeholders more or less concerned or involved with health care. The discussion is at the level of managerial processes of empowerment and the knowledge management aspects of health care provided and organized by professionals for the wellbeing of patients. The authors in this chapter relate empowerment to the issue of health literacy.

The issue of empowerment relates obviously to the notion of health promotion, used by the World Health Organization (WHO) (1986) of the United Nations and is implemented as a guiding principle for many countries around the world (Catford, 2011; Potvin & Jones, 2011). This is an important issue not just for knowledge management specialists and scholars but also for public health and policy makers (Baba, Kearns, McIntosh, Tannahill, & Lewsey, 2016; Banerjee & Duflo, 2008; Bowen & Lawler III, 1992; Brandstetter et al., 2015; Brandstetter, McCool, Wise, & Loss, 2014; Crawford Shearer, 2009; McLaughlin, 2003, 2016; Rappaport, 1985; Wiggins, 2012; Williams, 2016; Marc A. Zimmerman, 2000; Marc A Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988).

Empowerment can be seen as a way of managing knowledge in specific groups, organizations or sectors, such as the health sector – e.g., the national or regional health systems. Empowerment, broadly construed, is an ancient concept, not just in management but in community development, military organizations, public administration, public policies, and not to mention the associations and religious orders and congregations (McLaughlin, 2016; Rappaport, 1985; Marc A. Zimmerman, 2000; Marc A Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). It is, however, of a more recent nature in its modern sense. Although the concept is not new, its *emergence* and *widespread use*, in its modern form, is relatively recent, dating from the 1960s and the 1990s respectively (Carlisle, 2000; McLaughlin, 2016; Nutbeam, 2000, 2008).

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