

Chapter 4

Organisational Readiness for Knowledge Management: Bahrain Public Sector Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors that affect organisational readiness for Knowledge Management (KM). This chapter assesses the organisational readiness for KM at public sector organisations in Bahrain; furthermore, it utilises these findings to develop a guideline to enable the successful adoption and implementation of KM. A questionnaire survey was conducted at the public sector organisations in Bahrain. The research findings indicate that culture (collaboration, trust, and learning), structure (centralisation, formalization, and rewards systems), and IT infrastructure (IT support) all provide a sound basis for organisations to assess their readiness for KM. The results show that the public sector organisations in Bahrain vary in terms of readiness levels against the different variables. The findings are discussed and relevant recommendations are made with regards to KM adoption at the public sector organisations in Bahrain. The findings imply a need for intensified organisational and managerial commitment in order to promote collaboration, trust, learning, decentralisation, less formalisation, reward systems, and enhanced IT support at the public sector organisations in Bahrain. Implementation of these required changes in the public sector's culture and structure will help in preparing the public sector and their awareness and readiness to implement KM. This study is among the first empirical works assessing organisational readiness for adopting KM. Moreover, this chapter has extended knowledge in KM, especially concerning the need for the consideration of organisational readiness before embracing KM. The most significant contribution of this chapter is that it provides an instrument for assessing organisational readiness. It serves as a guideline for leaders and helps them to ensure that essential preliminary factors and variables are promoted and covered when they start KM implementation within their organisations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Management (KM) has become an agenda issue in various academic and professional journals. Davenport and Prusak (2000) argue that organisations using and implementing KM will create a significant competitive advantage. Drucker (1999) claimed that “The implementation of knowledge management is critical to the survival of businesses today.” As a result many organisations intend to adopt KM within their organisations.

Knowledge, as a subject area, has gained a great deal of attention from academia and other practitioners. However, KM as a discipline is still in its infancy, especially in public sector, as KM has not been a high priority within this sector. However, there is a growing recognition that KM could provide public sector with the ability to evolve more smoothly by providing a highly interactive and dynamic educational environment (Robson et al., 2003).

The existing literature on KM shows that the concept has been studied from various angles, focusing on: processes (Gold et al., 2001), enablers (Lee and Choi, 2003; Egbu et al., 2001) critical success factors (Wong, 2005), importance (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), infrastructures (Lee and Choi, 2003) and so forth. A comprehensive review of the KM literature however reveals that very limited information is available on organisational readiness for KM. The assessment of readiness for KM is emphasised in the literature (Siemieniuch and Sinclair, 2004; Holt et al., 2007, Jalaldeen et al., 2009), however, only one proposed conceptual model on organisational readiness and KM has been published in related literature by Jalaldeen et al. (2009); therefore, more attention should be given to organisational readiness studies. Organisational readiness for KM should be considered a critical precursor to the successful implementation of KM (Siemieniuch and Sinclair, 2004).

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the public sector organisations’ readiness for KM. For this purpose, the literature on organisational

readiness for KM and public sector will now be reviewed, organisational readiness factors and variables will then be extracted from the literature and a description of the research methodology will follow. The results of the analysis of the collected data will then be presented, which will then be followed by a discussion of the major findings and their implications on the public sector organisations. The chapter will conclude with several recommendations for improving the public sector organisations’ readiness for KM, any limitations and some suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Knowledge Management and Public Sector

The defining of KM is very complex because the identification of what knowledge actually is, is in itself challenging. O’Dell and Jackson (1998) believe that KM is a strategy that can be developed within a firm to ensure that knowledge reaches the right people at the right time; furthermore, these people should share and use information to improve organisational functions. For the purpose of this chapter, knowledge management as a term, from the KM process perspective, will be utilised and will include: the processes of knowledge creation, storage, transfer, sharing, application and protection.

Apparently, public organizations globally begin to acknowledge the importance of knowledge management. Studies on knowledge management in public organizations have been carried out by a number of researchers like Liebowitz and Chen (2003), Shields, Holden, and Schmidt (2000), Lee and Al-Hawamdeh (2003), and Wiig (2002). In public sector, knowledge sharing seems to be important to increase public sector performance and deliver better service to the public. Many public organizations in different countries and at different institutional levels have set up such extranet and intranet projects. For example, in 2003 the

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