Knowledge Management – A need or trend

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Abstract

Knowledge can refer to the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. Knowledge means empowering a person and honing his/her skill in a specific subject. It can be implicit (as with practical skill or expertise) or explicit (as with the theoretical understanding of a subject); and it can be more formal and systematic (Oxford Dictionary). According to the philosopher Plato, knowledge is defined as justified true belief. Management, in general, can be defined as the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling; one can define knowledge management as the justified true belief that is acquired in a planned way of collecting data, conceptualized and organized according to specific context. Knowledge management is like a building block for any further augmentation of that specific knowledge. However, managing knowledge is something intangible and very challenging. The real change has come from the necessity for less information and more knowledge. There has been a shift from information to knowledge. Shift from bureaucracies to networks. The traditional hierarchical designs that served the industrial era are not flexible enough to harness an organization’s full intellectual capability. The preview of the discussion in this paper will be knowledge management as a need of the day and not a trend of the society.

Index Words: knowledge culture, knowledge management, knowledge sharing, sustainable economy

I Introduction

Knowledge management is an old concept having vast dimensions but is playing very pivotal role in modern world. Most of our epics give the evidences of knowledge management. They provide knowledge about cultures, values, morals, ethics and many more aspects like economics, management, science, operations, medicine, music etc.

In antique days, the knowledge was mostly tacit, than explicit. The storage of knowledge used to be done by some eminent scholars as the education and the resources were very limited. The knowledge stored was distilled according to their perceptions and understanding. This has slowly evolved into patronizing the scholars by various kings for aggregating knowledge and showing their power and importance among competitors. For instance Akbar has patronized nine scholars (Navaratna), who are specialized in different areas, and tried to enhance the knowledge in his own way. This has aligned them along with the audience to trust and favor the king in all his activities. How ever, this useful and vital knowledge got lost with the passage of these people due to lack of their ability to store knowledge. The British demonstrated a strong urge to change the Indian education system and the sole purpose was to achieve a monopolistic trading position. This move evolved as systematic education system through which English evolved as a common language of communication in India. In 1980’s technology helped people to store more and more data (Maddison, 1971). These are classical testimonials of knowledge management where it was basically need based and not a trend.

In this paper the focus will be on the knowledge management procedure in traditional system vs present day scenario with the evolution of the technology. With the evolution of technology the paradigm of knowledge management has been polarized. Knowledge management as conceived generally is not restricted to a business process; it applies to an economy as a whole. We will discuss about the different aspects and importance of knowledge management, which helps in nurture of an economy through competitive advantages.

II Traditional and Modern Methods of Knowledge Management

Figure 1 explains about the traditional methods of knowledge management, wherein the patronized scholars use to store data in the form of manuscripts distilling the generated knowledge. These manuscripts were read/heard by the people and interpreted by the elders/ learned people based on their experiences, accordingly the perceptions were made.

Figure 2 explains about the collection and storage of data from various sources. Advances in information technology leveraged knowledge solutions and knowledge services by developing the powerful tools to store data in logical and easy retrievable formats. As we see in the above figure 2, the data collected from every source is stored in knowledge repositories which are also called as data ware houses in digital form. The technology helps to collect and connect knowledge more systematically so that it is not lost as tacit or in the minds of people. Science and Technology has brought a radical change in knowledge management. Storing as well as retrieving gigantic data in terms of megabytes, gigabytes or terabytes can be done with lots of ease. Many businesses now using digital asset management, to store, manage and retrieve information. The information stored is retrieved by the tool called as data mining. This tool will allow user to choose the data and retrieve which is specific to the context. This makes search more productive and easier. The cost of storage has become cheaper, which is encouraging business to store as much as data as possible. Improvements in the information technology systems can
support web-based communications with customers, and thus store and share their know-how. Knowledge management is not a subject of mere interest in business processes, it has influence in economy, science, literature, technology etc. For instance, historical evidences reveal that ‘Tantra’ was a great musician, but we cannot listen to his music today as it is not stored in digital format anywhere. From a different angle if we see that ‘Arthashastra’ speaks about the policy implications in the economy under Mauryan dynasty, but we don’t actually have any data, which gives clear picture of economy of that particular kingdom. The tacit ideas and thoughts of every concept behind those scriptures are not stored which is making the stored knowledge futile. In spite of these valuable sources very relevant in today’s economy, we are unable to use. However, in the present scenario, the entire data of economy along with the policies of the country are stored in the digital format which actually allows in retrieving context specific data, which in-turn improves efficiency for running the economy and useful for future reference.

Technology is like two faces of a single coin. One face being, facilitating communication and information exchange across geographical boundaries, and improves efficiency in retrieval of context specific data. On the other hand, because of advanced technology security is under great stake. For e.g. on line banking and credit card are vulnerable to get access by fraudulent. Wikileaks by Julian Assange purport it further. This adverse effect can be an obstacle than enabler.

III Knowledge in business process

In building tomorrow’s agile business, the significance of knowledge management is being recognized by most of the organizations. Knowledge is pre-eminent source for sustenance in the fast-moving and highly competitive world. It is important to achieve a strategic fit between organizational practices and knowledge management process. Every organization is now realizing that, rather than leaving the knowledge as tacit, the knowledge has to be codified and stored in the common data base, where it can be acquired, synthesized and deployed for the beneficial. Due to volatility of work force, falling educational standards, and radical changes in business environment, the individual can no longer be relied for their uniformity, and broad insights.

Knowledge exists in the experience of the employees, designs, process in goods and services, documents and plans of future activities. The knowledge comes from understanding the business environment, market, end user needs and last but not the least, employee– supplier relationship. A very important source of knowledge is product research and development in case of any business. The existing knowledge in any business process saves man hours and human efforts. This leads to the immense benefits like increase in business efficiency, employee productivity, quality of the product and customer satisfaction. Which result business ability to sell or license your knowledge to others through Intellectual Property Rights. In essence, credibility and embolden in the business get further boosting. In the business environment, the culture and ethic should be more towards creating, value, share and protect the knowledge.

In the present competitive business era, training and skilled workforce development issues are priority of every economic development agenda. People should be envisaged by elucidating the benefits of knowledge sharing in developing strong economy. Organizations should develop employees to be more self-reliant, self-motivated, self-controlled in order to accept challenges. States and local governments have long recognized the importance of training. The ability to utilize knowledge, both tacit and formal, is increasingly important. The governments are changing their policies, to take better advantage of people’s knowledge and information assets. This approach of knowledge sharing leads to the economic development.

IV Knowledge sharing

The important aspect of sharing of knowledge is about sharing intangible products, ideas, and processes. It is important to create “Knowledge sharing culture” as a knowledge management initiative. It is a key concept when it comes to today’s world. Knowledge sharing is a win-win scenario and is like give and take policy. For instance, if a particular group wants to develop a product through research and development in competitive world and if they want their developed product to get edge over other technology, it requires collective team efforts. Interdisciplinary R & D group can produce best product than specialized group, knowledge diversification is the best technique to achieve best milestone in terms of product performance. To get diversified knowledge we have to resort on knowledge sharing. Technology alone isn’t the answer to sharing knowledge - it has to be managed carefully so that information is channeled properly. The problem with every organization is that, they don’t know what they know and what they don’t know, or the gaps in the systems. Expertise learnt and applied in one part of the organization is not leveraged in another. Personal benefit is a key to knowledge sharing. Access to others knowledge improve the performance and sharing the knowledge enhances its value.

V Knowledge sharing challenges in knowledge market

Promoting knowledge sharing requires a holistic approach across both knowledge supply and knowledge demand. This holistic approach will lead to ease of searching context specific knowledge, improve knowledge quality and increase the effectiveness of knowledge transfer. The knowledge supply has certain bottle neck. Why someone is unwilling to share his/her knowledge/ expertise with other, we need to address the following concerns.

a. Not ‘capturing’ or ‘indexing’ knowledge or expertise which may be due to lack of time, incentives, process, skills or tools.

b. Concerns regarding confidentiality, due to underestimating the value of sharing and lack of trust.

c. Lack of willingness to help due to lack of time, incentive or lack of relationship with the ‘requestor’ or ‘demander’ of knowledge.
There are certain issues in knowledge demand also.

a. The people are not interested in borrowed knowledge due to sufficient availability of resources to reinvent that knowledge or certain political or emotional elements attached to that knowledge.

b. Previous experiences of irresponsible ‘supplier’, poor knowledge quality and inefficient infrastructure to borrow knowledge.

VI Developing Knowledge Management Sharing Culture

Research shows that a “willingness to share” is positively related to profitability and productivity and negatively to cost of production (Jarvenpaa&Stapels, 2000). Knowledge sharing leads to growth and innovation, bottom line savings, increase customer satisfaction. Knowledge sharing culture instigates people to share ideas openly, and teach and mentor others willingly. The ideas can be freely challenged and knowledge gained from other source is used when needed.

Organizational culture act as a barrier to knowledge sharing which needs a change to become more supportive (Gupta &Govindarajan, 2000). The importance of culture as the basis of knowledge sharing depends on (Delong & Fahey, 2000).

1. Culture designs presupposition of the people about the relevance of the knowledge.

2. Culture examines the relationship between level of knowledge, e.g., what knowledge belongs to the organization and what to an individual.

3. Culture creates a sensitivity of desirable interactions and collaborations, about the actions and behaviors that are rewarded or punished.

4. Culture shapes the creation and adoption of new knowledge.

As mentioned by Ex-President of India, A P J Abdul Kalam, “Creativity leads to thinking, thinking to provide knowledge and knowledge makes a person empower.” The culture in the society should be to provide right kind of education, which nurture the creativity and confidence within the youth, which can lead to self-reliant youth and with proper knowledge and skill set. India, an emerging economy of 21st century, having greatest strength of 600 million of youth force should have a proper educational system to prosper as a knowledge economy. This creates a competitive advantage for India, by turning intellectual assets into value through innovation. Survey, shows India has a shortage of skill labor compare to the Asian counter part like Japan, China etc. So, mere producing more educated youth will not generate more intellectual and skilled youth. The real catalyst of change can utilize their innovation and thus create value, leading to sustainable growth.

VII Knowledge Management strategies

Management strategies and structure are the key determinants to achieve sustainable development. To develop knowledge sharing culture in the society, firstly, hard and soft incentives are essential. Establishment of hard and soft incentives by aligning knowledge sharing to performance evaluations and career advancements and driving a comprehensive reward system by recognizing individual and team levels will develop a knowledge sharing culture. Secondly, creation of an environment of collaboration between cross units and right size of the people and resources makes people more receptive and sharing. Thirdly, management perspectives should be to connect people through creation of societies, associations and networks to encourage building relationships and knowledge sharing. Cycling of responsibilities can be the best way out to do this process. Lastly create leaders for communicating the success stories and encouraging the people as role models.

Emphasis on strategy of knowledge management being both macro and micro phenomenon, depends a lot on synchronization, which needs systematic review, evaluation, prioritization, sequencing and managing the strategic initiatives. Knowledge management strategy can be enhanced through

1. Sharpening the knowledge focus

2. Promoting and empowering the practice for knowledge capture and sharing

3. Strengthening external knowledge partnership to develop and disseminate knowledge

4. Improvising the staff development programs to improve their technical skills and manage knowledge.

Knowledge is the fastest depreciating resource, and thus it needs a continuous replenishment. Knowledge management can be enriched through, internal learning from business operations and external from long term strategic partnerships. Effective knowledge management is recognized to be the key driver of new knowledge and new ideas to the innovation process, to new innovative products, services and solutions.

VIII Sustaining competitive advantage

The sustainable competitive advantage can be interpreted as, to have superior position or condition over its competitor in a long term period by adjusting to endless changes around the world. (Mahdi, Almsafir, Yao, 2011). Wu (2010) described the competitive advantage as the value creation, value capture and value protect.

To attain sustainable competitive advantage an economy should protect it from being debased and assimilate new technologies, skills, and core competencies. Additionally, Seubert et al. (2001) and Halawi et al. (2005) pointed out that sustainable competitive advantage is no longer rooted in physical assets and capital, but in effective channeling of intellectual capital.

The subjects of sustaining competitive advantages are resources and skills. Resources here, refers to physical and skills refers to intellectual resources. The process of sustaining competitive advantages is to transform resources and skills into competencies or capabilities. The objective of
sustaining competitive advantages is to be better than or different from competitors or to enable competitors to imitate. Sustaining competitive advantage is a dynamic process that stands in a strategic point of view.

The generation and application of knowledge, underpins the effectiveness of developmental policies. According to Okunoye and Bertaux (2008), the benefit and strategic importance of knowledge management is in the ability of an organization to correctly identify which knowledge resources they can improve to gain sustainable competitive advantage.

IX Conclusion

Knowledge Management and knowledge sharing/dissipation are a frontier tools to keep sustainable growth in any arena like technology, business, economy etc. An economy, a society any organization, which foster knowledge management and knowledge sharing always prosper. To reap the benefit of knowledge management by any organization or a country, imbibing knowledge sharing culture is important. Proper addressing to the bottle neck for knowledge sharing will improve the culture which turn benefit the nation or organization as a whole. In the same time improve technology platform should be used to thwart wiki leak type of incidence. The purpose of knowledge management must not be to just become more knowledgeable, but to be able to create, transfer and apply knowledge with the purpose of better achieving objectives. Knowledge Management demands conducive corporate culture and the collection of intellectual assets. Knowledge management is an important step in the journey towards organizational effectiveness. This policy saves money right across the board and also the most valuable as money which is Time. Saving man hours means more work can be generated because people don’t have to reinvent the wheel every time a new project is taken on. Its deepest value is, not as destination but as a process, towards organizational learning, knowledge creation and performance. The drive for competitive advantage would ensure sustenance of e-learning in today’s knowledge environment. Further emphasizing this point, it has been said that "a firm's competitive advantage depends more than anything on its knowledge...what it knows -- how much it uses what it knows -- and how fast it can know something new" (Prusak 1997).

In corollary, one can say knowledge management is journey not a destination. We conclude that knowledge management is a need, not a trend.

References

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A NNEXURE
(Fig I & Fig II)

![Diagram of Scholar Knowledge Repository and User Interpretations]

**Figure 1**

![Diagram of Data Repository/Knowledge Bank with Data Mining and Context Specific Knowledge]

**ANNEXURE** (Fig I & Fig II)