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BMSK5006 - Knowledge and Information Management Skills for the Workplace

Why Knowledge is the Foundation of Organisational Development?

Abstract:

I explore knowledge management and the components that make up this part of business management. Exploring the relationship between individual knowledge and organisational knowledge as well as going in depth to explain tacit and explicit knowledge. Moreover, going through a deep analysis of knowledge assets and analyse the contribution that knowledge assets have on an organisation. The basis of this essay is to analyse and discuss how important knowledge is within an organisation and ways in which organisations can improve their knowledge management in order to improve their organisational productivity and efficiency. In addition to this, the benefits of implementing a knowledge management strategy is discussed in-depth as well as how to implement an effective knowledge management strategy. Also, I delve into the impact of intellectual property rights for an organisation. Ultimately, I discuss how an organisation can become successful due to knowledge management strategies and why knowledge is necessary for organisational development.

Introduction:

Knowledge is the foundation of organisational development as knowledge asset is essential to perform business process effectively and pragmatically. 'Many organizations are transforming business model into knowledge based core competence because they are aware of the benefits that are reaped. In order to gain a competitive advantage in the market It is important to have knowledge asset. As well as this, knowledge management systems can have a significant difference in terms of success. Furthermore, to guarantee the development of an organisation, there must be a detailed knowledge management program to ensure that they are able to sustain company value. Many organisations lack information which could potentially be their downfall, some organisations have suffered the consequences of inadequate knowledge management, an example of this is the downfall of the electrical retail chain Comet

Group which was established in 1933¹. Data, information and knowledge are all linked. Knowledge is a vast spectrum of concepts, ideas, experiences and a myriad of other things which are collated in the noun 'knowledge'. In business terms, knowledge comes as many forms such as intellectual property rights, assets and management programmes.

Data, information and knowledge - how are they linked?

Data, information and knowledge all sound like they mean the same thing, however they are not really synonyms of each other². Each one is somehow distinct yet they all share a relationship. Data, information and knowledge share inter-relationships as each one is defined with each other. Data is either numerical or factual information which is collected in order to be analysed, it is used to assist in decision making, it is also electronic information which can be stored on a computer. Data is also known as unprocessed information as it has no reference to time or space. Information is facts, it can be facts about people, events, situations and so on. It is also known as processed information, it is possible to derive a conclusion that is meaningful unlike data which cannot provide a meaningful conclusion on its own. Data can be observed and analysed in order to produce information. Data is initially a foundation, data is first collected by organisations which is then analysed and observed to produce useful information. Hard data refers to quantitative data which is numerical and statistical. Soft data refers to qualitative data which is focused on description; providing a detailed insight into people's beliefs, experiences and opinions. Knowledge is produced whereby judgement, experience or jurisdiction is applied to the information that has been generated. Knowledge is the "skill in, understanding of, or information about something, which a person gets by experience or study" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Knowledge is intangible and varies towards human cognition and awareness³. It is a combination of context sensing, personal memory and cognitive processes. To measure the Knowledge Asset also means to put a value on people, both as entities and their collective capability (Skyrme, 1999)

¹ "Four companies that failed spectacularly, and the lessons of" 17 Sep. 2015, <https://www.managers.org.uk/insights/news/2015/september/four-companies-that-failed-spectacularly-and-the-lessons-of-their-premature-demise>. Accessed 9 Jan. 2020.

² "Understanding Data, Information, Knowledge And Their Inter" <http://www.tlinc.com/article134.htm>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

³ "Development of Knowledge Assets Valuation Model." 15 Aug. 2014, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d099/af0ea97801594189e911b077357808854d5b.pdf>. Accessed 9 Jan. 2020.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) proposed a 'knowledge creation model'⁴. The knowledge creation model "describes the creation and dissemination of knowledge throughout an organisation" (Nonaka and Takeuchi). This process contains five steps which are; "sharing tacit knowledge, creating concepts, justifying concepts, building an archetype, and cross-leveling knowledge" (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).⁵

Types of Knowledge

The internalisation of data, information and experience is what makes up knowledge. There are two types of knowledge; explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge⁶. Explicit knowledge in an organisation refers to information incorporated in manuals, documents, procedures and reports. It can be stored as data and can be transmitted using IT tools. Explicit knowledge has to be intertwined with tacit knowledge using varied knowledge creation processes in order to boost a knowledge management program. Explicit knowledge without tacit insight has no meaning, this is like data without being analysed and observed to generate information - it is meaningless. In addition to this, explicit knowledge is much easier to share and communicate in comparison to tacit knowledge. Both tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge need to interact in order to create useful information, if either are used alone to create documents and such, it would be much less useful. "Knowledge is not a 'thing', or a system, but an ephemeral, active process of relating. If one takes this view then no one, let alone a corporation, can own knowledge. Knowledge itself cannot be stored, nor can intellectual capital be measured, and certainly neither of them can be managed". (Stacy 2001)⁷. Snowden (2000) also suggested several complex types of knowledge. He suggested five types: artefacts, heuristic techniques, experience knowledge, skills and natural talent. Artefacts consist of documents, processes and database, artefacts are created from knowledge which has been codified. Heuristic technique can sometimes be referred to as 'rule of thumb', it can be utilised as an asset for problem solving, discovery and learning which allows processes to be sped up. Experience knowledge is also referred to as 'hands-on experience', which is knowledge that is gained from previous tasks and situations, this enables learning from performances during tasks. Skills are required in order to

⁴ "The SECI Model & Knowledge Conversion."

<http://www.knowledge-management-tools.net/knowledge-conversion.html>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

⁵ ""knowledge creation"---the SECI model - ACM Interactions."

<https://interactions.acm.org/archive/view/january-february-2011/design-as-learning-or-knowledge-creation-the-seci-model1>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

⁶ "Tacit and Explicit Knowledge | Key Concepts in Information"

https://www.tlu.ee/~sirvir/Information%20and%20Knowledge%20Management/Key_Concepts_of_IKM/tacit_and_explicit_knowledge.html. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

⁷ "Snowden - ASIS&T Digital Library - Wiley." 31 Jan. 2005,

<https://asistdl.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/bult.284>. Accessed 9 Jan. 2020.

complete a task efficiently and smoothly by following a sequence of movements and processes, they can be acquired by going through training in order to improve capability and aptitude. Natural talent is a type of knowledge that is practically unmanageable, natural talent can sometimes be seen as 'God-gifted'. People should be provided with the opportunity to demonstrate and discover talents that they may acquire, this way they can develop and put their talents to best use.

Tacit Knowledge - What is it and why is it important?

So what is tacit knowledge and why is it important? Tacit knowledge is, in simple terms, the knowledge that resides in our brains, it is immeasurable and not easy to identify⁸. An example of tacit knowledge is a gut feeling which turns out to be right or an intuition. It is hard to communicate and share, just as a gut feeling is difficult to explain. Tacit knowledge is much more personal than explicit knowledge, this type of knowledge is often reflected in the character of a person, such as from the confidence that they display as well as the values and ideas they hold, actions and commitments. Therefore, people with tacit knowledge often tend to be intellectual individuals. However, an organisation cannot become an innovative or learning organisation by having a team of knowledgeable and intellectual employees. The collective knowledge of an organisation's employees must be facilitated by the organisation so that there is innovation brought within the organisation, due to the collective knowledge facilitated. Strong workplace culture is required as a platform for tacit knowledge such as trust amongst employees, social networking and high levels of motivation in order for support. The collective tacit knowledge that is in an organisation is one of the most valuable company assets, "It is the only competitive advantage of any organisation." (Peter Drucker, 2018). In every organisation, individuals retire and quit, when they leave they take the knowledge with them that was part of the collective knowledge of the organisation. The sole benefit of knowledge and the 'competitive advantage', they take with them. Although these individuals who have years of knowledge may train the new employees and pass along the knowledge that they have, it is too difficult to pass tacit knowledge on. This is because, tacit knowledge can be classed as 'natural' knowledge, a second nature, many people do not even know that they acquire tacit knowledge and it is too difficult to communicate tacit knowledge as well as teach it. Tacit knowledge can also be referred to as 'individual' knowledge. Tacit knowledge is crucial in creating a learning organisation, where 80% of organisation knowledge is tacit knowledge and 20% is explicit knowledge. Hence, this goes to show how important tacit knowledge is in

⁸ "Tacit, Explicit, and Implicit Knowledge: Definitions and Examples." 16 Jan. 2018, <https://bloomfire.com/blog/implicit-tacit-explicit-knowledge>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

a workplace, and when there are situations that lead to the organisation losing tacit knowledge, e.g. employees leaving the organisation, this can be a setback for the organisation and a major loss. There are many methods for knowledge sharing within an organisation. Tacit knowledge can be shared through experience and actions, whereas explicit knowledge can be shared through documents and books. Another way in which knowledge can be shared is through software. We live in a digital age where technology is constantly on the rise. All organisations use technology to store data and information. Therefore, organisations can also use software in order to expand their knowledge sharing process. It is essential for organisations to build a culture of knowledge sharing that is adapted to their type of organisation. In order for organisations to implement methods to share knowledge and improve workplace culture, they must have critical thinking skills to employ a knowledge management program that is well-fitted for their organisation.

Knowledge Management Systems

Knowledge management is any system that helps people in an organisation share, access and update business knowledge and information⁹. Knowledge is one of the most important assets of a company in the modern age. Knowledge is extremely important in organisations as it has been proved that an increase in knowledge leads to an increase in productivity as well as efficiency. Living in a knowledge economy, it is difficult to be successful without acquiring the proper knowledge. Many organisations can make losses due to lack of knowledge in certain areas. Furthermore, many organisations aspire to increase the knowledge base of their staff and every individual who works for the organisation. They do this through many techniques such as providing cross-training programmes, social networking tools, chatbots, document management systems (DMSs) and content management systems (CMSs). Knowledge management can come in many different forms. "To manage is to forecast and plan, to organise, to command, to coordinate and to control" (Henri Fayol). When managers need to make decisions, they must have a cognitive style. Although there are structured decisions - which are not complex and the decision is easy to make, there are also unstructured decisions whereby the rules governing the situation are complicated and unknown. Therefore managers must be intuitive and analytical.

In order to adapt to the knowledge economy, many organisations have adopted new structures and have engaged in the creation of new managerial roles. A knowledge

⁹ "Knowledge Management Systems: The Ultimate Guide."
<https://www.hubspot.com/knowledge-management-systems>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

engineer focuses on recording knowledge from experts and sharing this knowledge with the rest of the organisation. A knowledge worker focuses on creating, using, sharing and applying knowledge

There are many benefits of implementing knowledge management programs within organisations. A successful knowledge management program can have a great impact which can be seen through many aspects within the organisation such as higher customer satisfaction, increase in productivity, better product developments and reductions in input costs. These are only a few examples, many organisations may make improvements which are more specific to the industry they are based in. In addition to this, organisations which have a strong culture of sharing and innovation can achieve these aspects within their companies, without using the knowledge creation process or the SECI model.

The SECI Model

The SECI model refers to a process which stands for: socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation¹⁰. The process of socialisation focuses mainly on tacit knowledge. Tacit to tacit knowledge linking is crucial at this stage, it is one of the fundamental parts of the SECI model. Organisations gain a lot of new knowledge outside of their boundaries, for example; interacting with stakeholders, customers and suppliers. It is vital to seek information and knowledge from different individuals as this will put organisations at an advantage. Tacit knowledge is individual knowledge that cannot really be communicated, it does not come in the form of written knowledge- it is like second instinct. Tacit knowledge can only be created through the process of discussing, observing, interactions and analysing. This is where the term 'socialisation' comes from, as new knowledge is converted through shared experiences. Tacit knowledge is learnt through shared experiences rather than reading books.

The process of externalisation focuses on tacit and explicit knowledge. The main part is linking tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. Due to the fact that tacit knowledge is very hard to communicate, this process works to make tacit knowledge more comprehensible and to merge it so it can become collective group knowledge. There is so much primary focus on tacit knowledge as it makes up 80% of an organisation's knowledge base. Linking tacit to explicit knowledge can help create new knowledge as tacit knowledge comes out of it's boundary. Metaphors, analogies and models are what drive the process of externalisation. Knowledge is solidified in this part of the process. In

¹⁰ "The SECI Model & Knowledge Conversion."

<http://www.knowledge-management-tools.net/knowledge-conversion.html>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

addition to this, quality circles are used in organisations, this is where employees meet regularly in order to find ways of improving productivity in their organisation as well as ways to resolve problems. They do this by using their learning and experiences.

Combination is a process where explicit knowledge is collected from outside the organisation as well as inside the organisation. After the explicit knowledge is collected, it is “combined, edited, or processed to form more complex and systematic explicit knowledge.” (Ikujiro Nonaka). This newer and explicit knowledge can come in the form of business reports and is then dispersed amongst employees within the organisation. The aim of this is to expand knowledge within the organisation.

The last step of the SECI model is internalisation, this is where tacit knowledge is used to create explicit knowledge, explicit knowledge is much easier to comprehend, communicate, learn and teach. Therefore, as tacit knowledge can come as explicit knowledge after this ‘conversion’, people can read and learn the knowledge which can be shared across the organisation. The new knowledge that is learnt can be used practically and becomes the base for new routines. Organisations provide training and development programs for employees whereby employees gain new knowledge and internalise the tacit knowledge that they learn. Although tacit knowledge makes up most of the knowledge in an organisation, it is still essential to give equal weight to both tacit and explicit knowledge, as each are dependent on each other, according to the SECI process.

Intellectual Property Rights

Another significant part of knowledge management in organisations is being aware and protecting the organisation’s intellectual property rights. Intellectual property is something unique that you have physically created yourself, it can be a brand name, and you can also buy intellectual property rights from another creator¹¹. In any organisation, it is vital to protect intellectual property rights for several reasons, firstly, it allows you to set your business apart from competitors and provide a revenue stream. Protecting your intellectual property rights also allows you to offer customers new and unique products, as well as forming a crucial part of marketing for your business. More advantages include: enhanced company value, ability to have a competitive edge over other businesses and being able to obtain financing more easily. Organisations must ensure that they protect their intellectual property rights as this prevents competitors

¹¹ "What are intellectual property rights? - World Trade Organization."
https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/trips_e/intel1_e.htm. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

from stealing their work, as well as avoiding any misconceptions with the law. On the other hand, there are also disadvantages associated with intellectual property rights. One disadvantage is that protecting your intellectual property can be very costly as you may need to file several patent applications as well as hiring a lawyer to assist you in the application process¹². Moreover, when new highly sought-after innovations are created, it is difficult to stop consumers from taking intellectual property. A popular example of this is pirating movies, it is estimated that 40% of box office revenue of a typical movie is lost to piracy. In addition, a company's customer base may be reduced due to their attempt to enforce intellectual property rights. Subsequently, the advantages of intellectual property rights outweigh the disadvantages. Furthermore, if organisations neglect their intellectual property rights this can have many negative impacts.

Knowledge assets are the knowledge that has been accumulated by an organisation through many forms such as; learning, memory, understanding, technical and cognitive skills as well as information, capabilities and ideas. In addition to this, knowledge assets are paramount in ensuring organisational efficiency and productivity. The difference between physical assets and knowledge assets is that physical assets are finite and knowledge assets may last forever. For example, 'Sir George Cayley discovered and identified the four aerodynamic forces of flight- weight, lift, drag and thrust in the 18th century'¹³ this knowledge is still being used today. Furthermore, Thomas Edison invented the practical lightbulb and motion picture camera by applying the principles of organised science to his work, his inventions are still being used today and altered by new knowledge bringing about a change in technology through the years. These examples portray how knowledge is not quintessential but it will evolve throughout time and continue to grow by going through trial and error methods and experiments, bringing about the best solution.

In the contemporary societies, organisations are seeking more and more help to manage and maintain their rational management and cognitive resources to ensure a smooth running and to maintain marginal profits. Due to this fact, managers need to tackle ways in which they can foresee and manage these current knowledge assets, and in which strategic ways they need to go ahead in order to gain the advantage within the competition. Wiig (1997) the company's viability depends on: "the competitive

¹² "Advantages and Disadvantages of Intellectual Property"
<https://www.upcounsel.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-intellectual-property>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

¹³ "Development of Knowledge Assets Valuation Model." 15 Aug. 2014,
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d099/af0ea97801594189e911b077357808854d5b.pdf>. Accessed 9 Jan. 2020.

quality of its knowledge based intellectual capital and assets and the successful applications of these assets in its operational activities to realise their value to fulfil the company's two objectives", this implies that it is key for an organisation to manage their capital and assets including resources in an efficient way so it creates a positive surplus for the organisation, in order to do this they need to comprehend their intangible assets.

Ultimately, knowledge assets are those intellectual properties within those of the organisation, these are accumulated by the organisation and its workforce, these knowledge assets are things such as cognitive skills, communication between employees, ideas and comprehending scenarios and situations and coming together to use the information given to create an intellectual solution. Colleagues of this organisation need to be capable of handling and managing knowledge given to them, and in hand work together as a team, a collective, a group to ensure a smooth and efficient working solution to their problems, this collaboration of working together is a key strategy for organisations and can be seen as a core foundation of building a business. The contribution knowledge assets have on an organisation is major, it can be seen as a base of a company's success, if employees can use their intellect and come together as a team and use one another idea's and skills they will have a key advantage of those organisations who lack these knowledge assets. It comes back to the old saying "Two heads are better than one", this suggests that if the employees work as a collective and collaborate with each other they will gain insights into other perspectives that one alone cannot do, these insights will gain advantage as they will compare perspectives and come to a joint conclusion. By sharing ideas and skills the organisation can tackle anything, for example, someone may lack technical skills such as being technological however with the help of another employee who may excel in technology they can help that one who is less capable and with this collective effort, they will have an advantage as the one who was less capable is now able, meaning they can now work more efficiently.

Knowledge is a fundamental aspect in any organisation, therefore it is critical that knowledge management is carried out efficiently within organisations. A system which helps employees in learning, sharing, accessing and updating business information and knowledge is a form of knowledge management. Managers who are able to manage knowledge properly will ensure the success of the company. This is because employees will be able to gain access to information that is valuable and can correspondingly apply this knowledge to their jobs. Applying this information will enable employees to be more efficient and subsequently produce better results. Growth can be achieved a lot easier as organisations vitalise innovation, this is a benefit as customers admire companies which portray their expertise and knowledge. Ultimately, seeking and sharing

knowledge in an organisation leads to many positive outcomes which include; a better workplace culture, increased productivity and efficiency, increased collaboration, better decision making, and increased business resilience. These are only a few of the positive outcomes that come from knowledge management. However, although many organisations may carry out 'knowledge management', they may not always be successful. Knowledge management must be carried out properly, this means that the SECI process must be executed properly as the conversion from tacit to explicit knowledge is vital. Furthermore, it is essential that organisations are providing the right training and development programs for employees. This is so that employees are able to learn the information that will be beneficial to them and help them carry out their own jobs without any complications. In addition to this, employees must be at a stage where they are ready to undergo training and new learning. It is crucial that managers are organised and are good at decision making so that they can take on the whole knowledge management process.

A downfall in many organisations is that they do not understand the need for knowledge as well as the value of knowledge. Knowledge can make a big difference in organisations, as it is through knowledge that organisations deliver value and impact. In order to gain maximum business benefit, knowledge must be exploited and used to produce positive outcomes for an organisation. The leaders of an organisation must promote knowledge management and ensure that staff are participating in the knowledge management process, creating a culture where knowledge is valued is extremely significant as people need to feel the desire to "share and capture knowledge freely". It is imperative that organisations make it clear through their practices and values that knowledge is an asset that is vital to them as it is a great competitive advantage.

There are many benefits of knowledge management. These benefits can be seen in the examples I note down below. One main benefit of knowledge management is that it can help to solve business problems within the organisation and increases company benefits¹⁴. Managing knowledge actively helps companies as their chances of success are increased by facilitating decision-making as well as "stimulating cultural change and innovation" (Quast, 2012), furthermore by making a learning routine, a learning environment is established within the organisation. This means that employees would become adapted to seeking and sharing information within the organisation. Implementing a knowledge management strategy will help employees to serve

¹⁴ "Advantages and disadvantages of knowledge management"
<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/advantages-and-disadvantages-knowledge-management>.
Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

customers better and more efficiently, ensures that there is a guideline for progress measurement, tangible visual thinking and the efficient management of large masses of information. Moreover, there will be a reduction in cases of “reinventing the wheel” as well as improved business decisions due to the “facilitated access to expertise”, quality and ability will be enhanced in terms of standardising ways of working, there will be an increase in efficiency, productivity and intellectual decisions, improvement in innovative skills and ideas, client satisfaction will increase, goals will be reached faster due to training and accessible information as well as the capture of tacit and explicit knowledge.

GE's Knowledge Management Programme - why is it successful?

GE's Change Acceleration Process (CAP) programme was created to “convey the latest knowledge to up-and-coming managers” as well as “open up dialogue, instill corporate values, and stimulate cultural change” (Garvin, 2000, p.125). Cultural change and innovation can be stimulated through the encouragement of free flowing ideas. Knowledge management programmes such as the CAP program can help managers and business owners encourage insights and ideas that may lead to innovation as well as embracing change. This programme includes a lot of components such as business-unit leadership, focused workshops and management development. Yang's holistic theory suggests that learning is not only an individual pursuit but also a social phenomenon (Yang, 2003). As I mentioned before, data is meaningless unless it is processed into information, data can provide large amounts of information, however, processing large amounts of data can be difficult and overwhelming. Going through long and tedious bouts of processing data can affect how decisions are made and lead to poor decisions due to the lack of focus. In order to facilitate good decision making, share information and cut through noise, GE's Corporate Executive Council (CEC) put in place a knowledge management system to help executives carry out tasks. Due to the knowledge management system put in place, GE's organisation have been more successful¹⁵. The heads of GE's top businesses make up the CEC, where they have two-day sessions in order to discuss successes, failures, experiences, accelerating progress and sharing best practices (Garvin, 2000, p.195). When knowledge management systems are put in place, better and more informed decisions can be facilitated.

¹⁵ "Overview of GE's Change Acceleration Process (CAP) | Agility" 25 Jan. 2009, <https://bvonderlinn.wordpress.com/2009/01/25/overview-of-ge-s-change-acceleration-process-cap/>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2020.

In conclusion, knowledge is distinguishable from data and information where they do have a relationship. Knowledge is the internalisation of data, information and experience. In addition to this, knowledge is a valued asset within organisations as knowledge is a major competitive advantage. The success of organisations is dependent on knowledge - that is how important knowledge is. This is because knowledge is the basis of everything. It is a fundamental aspect in life, and in business it is what can make a lot of difference in terms of success and failure. Knowledge management programs being put in place can make a huge positive impact on organisations, following the SECI model can ensure that tacit knowledge as well as explicit knowledge will be shared throughout the organisation. Knowledge sharing within the organisation leads to many advantages, such as facilitated decision-making, employee efficiency and productivity, increase in customer satisfaction as well as an increased level of innovation and culture within the workplace environment. Furthermore, knowledge assets have great contributions to organisations and their framework. Knowledge management is a vital element that an organisation must employ in order to be successful and achieve its goals, it is the foundation of organisational development.

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