

## Knowledge management and its role in higher education

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### Abstract

Higher educational institutions access and use knowledge during their processes and activities. The growth in the number of higher educational institutions in India in the last decade has increased competition and the pressure to perform better. This in turn has forced the institutions to recognize the need for knowledge management (KM) initiatives in order to stay ahead in their sphere.

This paper discusses the concept of Knowledge management and its role in the new trends of education. It also explains about Knowledge management, the types of Knowledge management, their Educational trends and efforts made towards making study materials more learner- centred. In response to these trends, colleges and universities are offering new courses via distance and also formal traditional delivery. Efforts to share the most recent understandings of Knowledge management in education is changing roles and challenging higher educational institutions to adapt. The increased productivity required by faculties is one of the main driving forces in development of more diverse and effective teaching method.

### DEFINITION

"Knowledge management is the discipline of enabling individuals, team and entire organizations to collectively and systematically create, share and apply knowledge to better achieve their objectives"

Knowledge management education is the process of using constructively the information and knowledge that is inherent to any organisation – be it a school, university or multinational company in order to enhance its performance management and its operations. This ability to understand and know what we know is one that has brought great benefits.

### WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT?

"Knowledge Management is "a preposition that responsiveness and innovation can be improved through the leveraging of collective wisdom and experience."

"Knowledge Management (KM) is an effort to increase useful knowledge within the organization. Ways to do this include encouraging communication, offering opportunities to learn, and promoting the sharing of appropriate knowledge artefacts."

### FOCUS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

"The focus on knowledge management is on 'doing the right thing' as opposed to 'doing things right'. It provides a framework within which the organization views all its processes thus as knowledge processes and all business processes involve creation, dissemination and application of knowledge towards organizational sustenance and survival".

### NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Establishing knowledge management (KM) strategies is vital to organizational success today more than earlier days. As such, remaining intent on traditional methods of knowledge acquisition and transfer is a mistake. While valuing the intellectual capital of the organization sounds like the right thing to do, actually building strategies and systems that actualize the rhetoric takes real commitment.

For those organizations that choose to move forward on this front, it can lead to consistent best practice and can be a tremendous competitive weapon.

### TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

There has always been a debate about what are the different types of knowledge. This debate can last for centuries because knowledge is absolutely philosophical and everyone has a different opinion about what knowledge is. Read this article further and learn about the different types of knowledge existing out there.

- Explicit knowledge
- Tacit knowledge

## EXPLICIT KNOWLEDGE

- Objective, rational, technical
- Easily documented
- Easily transferred / taught / learned

## TACIT KNOWLEDGE

- Subjective, cognitive, experiential learning
- Hard to document
- Hard to transfer / teach / learn

### Explicit Knowledge

This type of knowledge is formalized and codified, and is sometimes referred to as know-what (Brown & Duguid 1998). It is therefore fairly easy to identify, store, and retrieve (Wellman 2009). This is the type of knowledge most easily handled by KMS, which are very effective at facilitating the storage, retrieval, and modification of documents and texts.

From a managerial perspective, the greatest challenge with explicit knowledge is similar to information. It involves ensuring that people have access to what they need; that important knowledge is stored; and that the knowledge is reviewed, updated, or discarded.

Many theoreticians regard explicit knowledge as being less important (e.g. Brown & Duguid 1991, Cook & Brown 1999, Bukowitz & Williams 1999, etc.). It is considered simpler in nature and cannot contain the rich experience-based know-how that can generate lasting competitive advantage.

Although this is changing to some limited degree, KM initiatives driven by technology have often had the flaw of focusing almost exclusively on this type of knowledge. As discussed previously, in fields such as IT there is often a lack of a more sophisticated definition. This has therefore created many products labelled as KM systems, which in actual fact are/were nothing more than information and explicit knowledge management software.

Explicit knowledge is found in: databases, memos, notes, documents, etc. (Botha et al. 2008)

### Tacit Knowledge

This type of knowledge was originally defined by Polanyi in 1966. It is sometimes referred to as know-how (Brown & Duguid 1998) and refers to intuitive,

hard to define knowledge that is largely experience based. Because of this, tacit knowledge is often context dependent and personal in nature. It is hard to communicate and deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement (Nonaka 1994).

Tacit knowledge is also regarded as being the most valuable source of knowledge, and the most likely to lead to breakthroughs in the organization (Wellman 2009). Gamble & Blackwell (2001) link the lack of focus on tacit knowledge directly to the reduced capability for innovation and sustained competitiveness.

KMS have a very hard time handling this type of knowledge. An IT system relies on codification, which is something that is difficult/impossible for the tacit knowledge holder.

Using a reference by Polanyi (1966), imagine trying to write an article that would accurately convey how one reads facial expressions. It should be quite apparent that it would be near impossible to convey our intuitive understanding gathered from years of experience and practice. Virtually all practitioners rely on this type of knowledge. An IT specialist for example will troubleshoot a problem based on his experience and intuition. It would be very difficult for him to codify his knowledge into a document that could convey his know-how to a beginner. This is one reason why experience in a particular field is so highly regarded in the job market.

The exact extent to which IT systems can aid in the transfer and enhancement of tacit knowledge is a rather complicated discussion. For now, suffice it to say that successful KM initiatives must place a very strong emphasis on the tacit dimension, focusing on the people and processes involved, and using IT in a supporting role.

Tacit knowledge is found in: the minds of human stakeholders. It includes cultural beliefs, values, attitudes, mental models, etc. as well as skills, capabilities and expertise (Botha et al 2008). On this site, I will generally limit tacit knowledge to knowledge embodied in people, and refer separately to embedded knowledge (as defined below), whenever making this distinction is relevant.

## **NEW TRENDS IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

Several trends will shape the field of knowledge management in the not-too distant future (even now):

- Emerging technology solutions
- The convergence of knowledge management with e-business
- The movement from limited knowledge management projects to more enterprise wide projects
- Increasing use of knowledge management to enhance innovation
- Increasing use of tacit knowledge (rather than explicit knowledge)

## **CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION**

- Education for Knowledge
- Education for Information
- Education for Skills
- Education for Employment
- Education for Livelihood
- Education for Empowerment
- Education for Social and National Development

## **Factors affecting knowledge management in Colleges**

To a great extent, culture and management issues affect the success of knowledge management initiatives in colleges. Studies have shown common factors for KM success. Below is a summary of those I think relevant to the higher education context.

- KM requires the integration and balancing of leadership, organization, learning and technology.
- An atmosphere or organizational culture of trust, fairness and innovation is necessary for KM.
- Factors are management related, such as culture, process, and organization, and also technology related.
- Information technology enables and facilitates knowledge sharing.

- Lead by example. More people will follow if "knowledge sharing champions" in workplace initiate the process of knowledge sharing.
- Acknowledge the efforts made by knowledge bearers who may feel their sharing is recognized and appreciated.
- Cultivation of a learning culture or concept of learning organization which encourages knowledge sharing.
- Cultural climate may influence the willingness to share, such as Asian societies stress more on conformity and humility.

## **Reasons for applying KM principles in higher education**

The main reasons for KM in higher Education is

- All higher educational institutes possess a state-of-the-art modern information infrastructure.
- Sharing knowledge among faculty, staff, students, course, programs, placements and administration is usually done in all colleges.
- The academic environment in general is considered trustful in the sense that no one is hesitating nor being afraid of publishing knowledge.
- Any higher educational institute will look forward for its position in their continuous ratings by newspapers and business magazines for competitive advantage.
- Each institute wants its internal documentation management and the level of information and knowledge sharing to improve.
- There is an increased demand for new strategies that help higher educational institutions meet external and internal demands.

An academic institution is made up of a number of components or levels consisting of faculty, students, administration, academics, research and training and placement. Each of these levels creates knowledge as well as consumes knowledge, though the nature of knowledge varies at each level. It is important to identify the knowledge that each level contributes to the system and the knowledge that each level requires to perform its functions, and find ways to apply this knowledge effectively at the points of use. A robust KM system must cater to the information needs of all the levels.

## **BENEFITS OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS**

### **1) Application and Benefits of KM for the Curriculum Development Process**

- \* Enhanced quality of curriculum and programs by identifying and leveraging best practices and monitoring outcomes.
- \* Improved speed of curriculum revision and updating.
- \* Enhanced faculty development efforts, especially for new faculty.
- \* Improved administrative services related to teaching and learning with technology.

### **2) Application and Benefits of KM for Student and Alumni**

- \* Improved services for students.
- \* Improved service capability of faculty and staff.
- \* Improved services for alumni and other external constituents.
- \* Improved effectiveness and efficiency of advising efforts (to integrate fragmented efforts currently undertaken by faculty, academic support staff, student services staff, and student affairs staff).

## **CONCLUSION**

Educational organizations are the main instruments of society for the constant pursuit of knowledge. The role of knowledge management (KM) in the educational institutions (EIs) is critical and important. So we can say the main function of educational organization is the KM. Through the application systematic thinking, KM in educational organization can be separately identified and studied at administrative, research, education (teaching and learning processes), student service and human resource subsystems.

The use of the KM systems and principles in EIs can lead to more flexibility in decision, promotion in teaching and learning processes, access to scientific resource, establishment of the effective internal and external communication network, synergy at the students and faculty

knowledge and improvement in quality and quantity of research activities in EIs, However, effective and efficient accomplishment of KM in education faces some challenges.

For developing strategic internal alliances, the colleges have to efficiently and effectively use their resources and infrastructure to reap increased benefits from their investments in both people and technology. The KM approach will enable educational institutions to quickly respond to the changing needs in education and in some cases pre-empt staff and faculty needs. To build and develop a robust and thriving knowledge environment in educational institutions, they need to look towards latest technologies and develop the overall culture of accessing, sharing and managing knowledge.

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