

Knowledge Management Practices in Academia: Lessons from Corporate

Lily Regina Arthi S.

Research Scholar, Dept. of Management & Research, A.V.S. College of Arts & Science, Salem, India & Assistant Professor, Dept. of Business Administration, St. Anne's Degree College for Women, Bengaluru, India

Dr. M. Hema Mary

Research Supervisor, Dept. of Management & Research, A.V.S. College of Arts & Science, Salem, India

Abstract

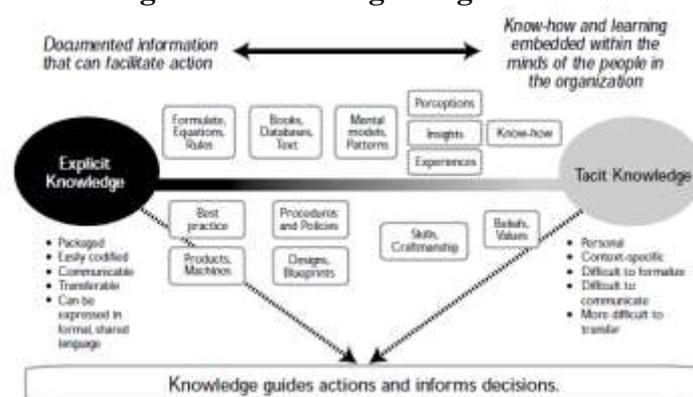
Higher educational institutions, especially those disseminating management / business administration courses, have a penchant to discuss case studies pertaining to organisations in the industrial and services sector. Students then try to decipher as to what were the circumstances that led to the success or failure of organisations. Sometimes, students extrapolate and suggest their strategies that can be emulated in such circumstances. Case studies, however, are not restricted to corporate alone. Case studies also deal with societal, environmental, individual and other issues. This paper explores how knowledge management practices in the corporate can stimulate good practices in academia with the purpose of fostering a wholesome teaching-learning process besides administrative effectiveness.

Keywords: Knowledge, Management, Practices, Corporate, Academia.

I. Introduction

Knowledge stems from information which in turn stems from data. Every organisation, whether corporate or academia, is powered by knowledge and its management (Githii, 2014). There are several practices connected with knowledge (Figure 1: Jones and Leonard, 2009).

Figure 1: Knowledge Progressions



Knowledge keeps transitioning between explicit and implicit knowledge through various channels that take the form of formulae, equations, rules, books, databases, texts, patterns, mental models, perceptions, insights, experiments, know-how, beliefs,

values, skills, craftsmanship, designs, blueprints, procedures, policies, products, machines, and best practices.

Corporate organisations typically possess knowledge assets like intellectual property, relationships with stakeholders; routines, norms and practices; human capital; philosophies, values, shared beliefs, culture and networks; and physical infrastructure (Bhojaraja, 2005).

II. Objective

The objective of this paper is to scrutinise knowledge management practices in corporate and to explore what lessons academia can learn and imbibe from such practices. The idea is to explore how corporate knowledge management practices can be tuned to the academic servicescape.

III. Methodology

Survey method was utilised by means of unstructured personal interviews with corporate executives as well as academicians. Purposive sampling was employed wherein only those corporate executives who were visiting academic institutions for guest lectures or as visiting faculty were considered. Academicians who had earlier served corporate were also considered. This was done specifically to ensure that survey participants had an exposure to both settings.

IV. Orientation, Operating Procedures, Statistics and Manuals

Corporate endeavours: Training in Corporate takes place continually. However, corporates endeavour to measure the effectiveness of training in terms of skill development and productivity. Corporate comprises many divisions / departments or project teams. They have to coordinate with each other to foster seamless activities. Corporate has intranets that hosts company and related information to guide employees either for their daily job or troubleshooting. Some of these intranets or portal are also being replaced by bots which expedite internal queries and provide information quickly to their employees. With machine learning and artificial intelligence there is a continuous endeavour to seamlessly integrate different functions within, for an efficient and effective organisation.

Corporate educate their employees about best practices, benchmarks to be achieved, techniques that facilitate smart work as well as mechanisms for personal and professional development. Corporate maintains records of employee's performance and use human resource dashboards to throw up different types of statistics. Human resource analytics has garnered a lot of buzz in recent times with the aim of ascertaining returns on human resource investments. Corporate has always been following the tradition of an induction programme. It has now been termed as orientation programme that employs blended learning about organisations' vision, mission, strategies, objectives, milestones, norms, culture and expected behaviour. Corporate always encourage their team leads to be aware of business trends, practices of competitors, survival and growth strategies besides nurturing talent and innovation.

Inspiration for Academia: Curriculum needs to be updated from time to time and it would be prudent to measure the effectiveness of changed curricula on students' knowledge capabilities and corporate placements / entrepreneurial ventures. Curriculum must be developed such that there is appropriate design that incorporates inter-disciplinary knowledge and experimentation. Academia should have portals that can only be accessed by faculty and students to encourage a repository of information, current trends and opportunities. Each department must have a repository that reveals best practices, faculty pedagogy, student evaluations, progress statistics and record of research. Students' evaluation of faculty as well as institution-related parameters must be uploaded for public viewing. Separate portals should be set up for new faculty and students that chronicles history, milestones, norms, goals, operating procedures and heads of committees as well as other administrative personnel. Academia must endeavour to establish a good relationship with corporate not just for career placements but also to seek their assistance in mentoring budding managers.

V. Research Endeavours

Corporate endeavours: Every organisation needs to thrive in a competitive market where cut-throat competition is being observed. Market research as well as research within the organisation in all functional areas is a critical activity that determines the graph of the organisation. Market research is not just about associated products and services. It needs to go beyond that. The environment in that geographical area needs to be scanned on a continual basis. There may be several market forces impacting the business. Customers' perceptions and anticipations may be dynamic and unpredicted. The economy of the nation and the conglomeration of nations also has a direct or indirect impact. Governance policies, market practices besides local traditions too have an influence. Research may take several forms when it comes to gathering information and knowledge from the external environment. Surveys may be popular but panel discussions, customer meets, mystery shopping, debates, conclaves, guest speakers as well as social media events try to engage the customers and channel members to elicit their views and suggestions. Internal research is also very critical for the functioning of the organisation. Employees' performance and other aspects needs to be traced. This could take the form of self-appraisals, 360 degrees appraisals, mii surveys on company-related matters, psychological profiling, besides development versus goals tracking. Research could also be undertaken apropos productivity-related issues, distribution channel issues, materials sourcing issues, assembly line issues and new product development issues. Continued innovation is the mantra in the twenty-first century whereby change is easily accepted and ideas are patented. This ensures that organisations increase their value.

Inspiration for Academia: Research can be undertaken in various disciplines including inter-disciplinary themes and there is a good probability of added-value if these are sponsored either internally or externally. A separate portal for research could address issues like funding opportunities, proposals, protocols, budgets, establishment and monitoring of accounts, negotiation parameters, methodology of research, resources required as well as implications of such research for organisations and the economy. Such research can take the form of review of literature, review of published data, statistical investigations, surveys, observations, interviews and social media tracking. Academicians should be inspired to constantly think differently, question status quo or bring out ideas, work on these via structured research processes thereby ensuring that

academia delivers productive candidates for the industry – a win-win for Academia and Corporate (Kaur and Suri, 2014).

VI. Administration and Functioning

Corporate endeavours: Administration of the organisation demands that certain basic things are in place at the very inception of the organisation. Hierarchy and personnel, vision, mission, objectives, strategies, operating norms, disciplinary norms, tactics, as well as code of conduct based on organisational values and shared beliefs need to be designed and documented. Policies regarding procurement of resources including human resources, usage of such resources, methodologies and processes, flow of resources, liaison with stakeholders, decision-making, empowerment, authority, responsibility and duties must be comprehensible and implementable. Manufacturing and service organisation employ flow charts and various kinds of graphics for better visual impact and to alleviate ambiguity. Corporates have board members that meet periodically to assess the situation of the company as well as to take decisions for the future. There is clear documentation of guidelines for each policy and procedure. These are periodically audited thereby assisting organisations to further improve on their administrative functioning and effectiveness.

Inspiration for Academia: Academia can learn a lot from the best practices of corporate when it comes to administration of the organisation. Academic institutions too need to have a robust hierarchy that comprises erudite persons who have a passion for the development of students, encouragement of knowledge acquisition, processing and dissemination as well as zeal for the development of society. Policies need to be framed for various aspects like recruitment of faculty at different levels, functioning of departments, procurement and utilisation of resources, infrastructural requirements, teaching aids, examination and evaluation procedures, disciplinary guidelines, as well as long-term and short-term goals of the institution. Institution will need to create a manual for faculty and a prospectus for students that outlines all required information as well as expectations. There must also be policies for students who may perform poorly in their courses and remedial measures must be outlined to improve their academic performance as well as holistic development. Academia must have an advisory council to mentor on activities, aspirations and corrective actions to ensure that the institution progresses in the right direction toward excellence and eminence.

VII. Social Responsibility

Corporate endeavours: Corporate social responsibility has been a central theme in the recent past (Preuss and Cordoba-Pachon, 2009). Corporates have realised that mere profit generation and growth of the company does not suffice. They have an obligation to give something back to society besides their products and services. They need to be aware and gather knowledge about various issues that are plaguing civil society whether it is education, environment, health and hygiene and other lacunae. Statutory obligations in India aside, corporate social responsibility has lifted the standard of living of many downtrodden communities and individuals. Corporates now are moving towards upliftment of social life, for example, green energy and better waste management. It is also a stress-reliever for employees who slog long hours even at the cost of the biological clock.

Inspiration for Academia: Academia was intended to be a noble profession. However, there has been a lot of debate on this issue considering the fact that many institutions are revenue-minded than actually concentrating on delivering quality education. The insistence on accreditation has stimulated the need for extension activities that are aimed at developing surrounding areas. Typically, most educational institutions prefer to adopt nearby schools like corporation schools and encourage company employees to conduct classes on personal and professional development including computer science and information technology. A section of employees also engage in green initiatives including planting of samplings, encouraging organic farming, cleaning of garbage and other waste. Employees also teach some vocational skills as well as popularising the concept of entrepreneurship as they feel that such thoughts need to be nurtured from a young age. Initiatives that are in alignment with local municipalities and Government programmes will accentuate the brand image of the institution as a nation builder.

VIII. Rewards and Recognition

Corporate endeavours: Employee motivation is best felt when they are recognised for the productive work done. Rewards, either monetary or otherwise, definitely boost morale and are an impetus for achieving higher goals and targets. Money is not always enticing. Employees nowadays prefer leadership roles, extra authority, as well as responsibilities that permit them to lead new projects and showcase their skills in multiple domains. Sometimes, employees are given a large geographical area under their control that may include several cities, several states, or even several countries. Company also keeps flashing best employees' photos on a monthly basis for all company employees to be informed as well as motivated.

Inspiration for Academia: Academia had a semblance of it in the part when awards were given for the best faculty based on students' voting. However, acrimonious debates ensued subsequently. Some institutions rewarded faculty for publishing papers in globally reputed journals but that has been more or less disbanded now. Academia needs to follow the corporate methodology wherein it has to develop benchmarks and must have a scientific method to arrive at faculty's performance in a semester or year. This should be based on weightage given to several areas that includes teaching, research, co-curricular and extra-curricular contributions, institutional development, patents, innovations, best practices and curriculum strengthening. Internal platform that facilitates faculty and students to publish their research or share ideas would in itself act as recognition. Faculty who are exclusively selected as experts in a particular area is a reward that symbolises diligence, perseverance and excellence (Rechberg and Syed, 2014).

IX. Technology

Corporate endeavours: With continuous improvements in technology, how an organisation functions is measured on its digital presence or utilisation of digital resources. Websites, erstwhile media, have now dwarfed into portals which cater to varied requirements of the organisation. Artificial intelligence, machine learning and data analytics along with secure integration like that of Google and Microsoft at the cloud level have helped organisations to be nimble when communicating or working with their employees. This has helped in faster change management, dissipation of information (to an extent where organisations now have to classify their documentation

to ensure right information is provided) and innovation at every layer of functioning. Cloud-based offering is the order of the day that has empowered corporate to be agile and globally functional albeit stimulating debates about privacy and regulatory strictures.

Inspiration to Academia: Majority of the institution continue to operate with either standalone servers or those that are hosted locally on domain which does not have ability to interact with different portals. Institutions need to harness cloud-based technology as this will help institutions to foster greater potential. There would be greater visibility of information about research / projects and achievements as well as collaboration with local and global educational institutions / corporate (Dhamdhare, 2015). Investment is required not just to establish technology-associated infrastructure but also to upgrade on a real-time basis. This is necessitated by the dynamic evolution and development of technologies. Academia can go a step further if students have access to technologies on par with corporate whereby the probability of career placement would be enhanced.

X. Social Collaboration

Corporate endeavours: Business organisations deploy video chat, video conferencing and online collaborations to connect with their globally-distributed teams. Offices today need not have physical branches across nations. There are myriad aggregators in multiple domains who do not possess any physical assets but still operate business around the world purely on collaborations. Prominent examples include Uber and Airbnb.

Inspiration to Academia: Academia can explore this model to create unique learning experiences. The alumni and corporate should be encouraged to connect with the students for discussion, knowledge transfer, mentorship and career guidance. Corporate executives could also mentor a few students at a time through out their period of study or wherever projects are feasible. Internship at the company premises fosters a realistic ambience that could be completely different from what books and faculty profess.

XI. Conclusion

Two significant endeavours that all educational institutions need to undertake are knowledge measuring and knowledge mapping. Measurement should be oriented toward assessing the intellectual capital of the organisation. This should ultimately result in establishment of indices and ratios including computing return on investment. Knowledge mapping aims at acquiring and preserving knowledge emanating from within or outside the organisation and ensuring that it is disseminated in the right direction with optimal use of information technology.

References

1. Bhojaraja, G. (2005). Knowledge Management: Why do we need it for Corporates. *Malaysian Journal of Library & Information Science*, 10(2), 37-50.
2. Dhamdhare, Sangeeta Namdev (2015). Educational Technology. *Elixir Edu. Tech.*, 80, 20824-30834.

3. Githii, Stephen Kagwathi (2014). Knowledge management practices and innovation performance: a literature review. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 16(2), 89-94.
4. Jones, Kiku and Leonard, Lori (2009). From tacit knowledge to organizational knowledge for successful KM. In W.R. Kind (ed.), *Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning* (pp: 27-39). Springer Science+Business Media, LLC.
5. Kaur, Sarabjeet and Suri, Gunamala (2014). Knowledge management practices in Research and Development (R & D) organizations. *Gian Jyoti E-Journal*, 4(1), 76-88.
6. Preuss, Lutz and Cordoba-Pachon, Jose-Rodrigo (2009). A knowledge management perspective of corporate social responsibility. *Corporate Governance*, 9(4), 517-527.
7. Rechberg, Isabel and Syed, Jawad (2014). Knowledge Management Practices and the focus on the individual. *International Journal of Knowledge Management*, 10(1), 25-41.