Chapter 11

Utilization of Indigenous Knowledge for Competitiveness among Curio Makers of Matobo National Park, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge-based creativity and competitiveness in the cultural industry is determined by the form of work organization and the knowledge enabling conditions prevailing in the operating environment of an organization. Against this background, a case study was conducted to assess the extent to which knowledge enabling conditions prevailing in the environment of curio makers that operated from Matobo National Park, supported competitiveness. Knowledge creation dimensions on intention, individual and group autonomy, fluctuation/creative chaos, information redundancy and requisite variety outlined in the Knowledge Creation Theory provided a perspective for understanding the study phenomena. Individual autonomy, fluctuation/creative chaos, requisite variety and intentional components on trust, collaboration, learning, and incentives and rewards were present. Information redundancy was absent. The curios showed creativity but lacked in uniqueness. The recommendations included development of structures that delineate and provide guidance on a knowledge vision.

INTRODUCTION

The predominance of knowledge in production during the twenty-first century has raised interest on how an organization can create and use new knowledge for competitive advantage. Such an ability is the basis for creativity, which is the “synthesis of new ideas and conceptions” (Bratianu & Orzea, 2010, p. 42) that is essential to develop innovations. According to Afuah (1998, as cited in Popadiuk & Choo, 2006) innovations are “new knowledge integrated into products, processes or services” (p. 303) that gives an organization a competitive edge over its competitors (Virtual Advisor Inc., 2013). However, for...
an organization to continuously produce innovations, the conditions in the environment within which the organization is operating under should be supportive of knowledge creation and sharing processes (Bratianu & Orzea, 2010, p. 42). The extent to which these conditions support knowledge creation and sharing is influenced by the nature of the knowledge assets used in knowledge creation and the mediation processes in the acquisition and use of the knowledge assets.

In cultural industries of developing countries, the knowledge assets for creativity are constituted from indigenous knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems. The acquisition and transmission of these knowledge assets in the production of cultural goods, that is, the innovations, is mediated through intermediaries, that relate to “different forms of work organization” (Chen, Wen, Lee, & Peng, 2009). The intermediaries include entrepreneurial organizations, communities of practice, and informal networks. The importance of such intermediaries in the creation, acquisition, and dissemination of knowledge that is based on indigenous knowledge systems was also observed by Lwoga, Ngulube, and Stilwell (2010) in their studies on indigenous knowledge systems in agriculture. Inspite of this importance attributed to intermediaries in the use of indigenous knowledge, and the dependence on innovations based on indigenous knowledge for competitiveness in the cultural sector of economies in developing countries (International Trade Centre [ITC], 2010, p. 3) like Zimbabwe, not much research has focussed on how knowledge creation and use dynamics in the sector are influenced by the nature of an intermediary type and its environmental conditions, especially communities of practice, which are the predominant work organization form in the production of contemporary arts in Zimbabwe. This is the thrust of this Chapter.

The presentation of the Chapter is as follows: first, is a conceptual description of the phenomenon of cultural industries. Second, is a presentation of issues in the context of the cultural industry in Zimbabwe. Third, is an outline of the theoretical framework that informs this Chapter. Forth, is the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. Fifth is the methodology section. Sixth, the results are presented and discussed; and lastly, the recommendations are made.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

Cultural industries are institutions in the creative knowledge sector (Thorsby, 2008). They act as “systems ... that mediate the flow of cultural goods between producers and consumers (Hirsch, 1972, as cited in Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2000, p. 265). Their environment provides a context for learning and knowledge sharing during knowledge creation and use in the production of goods and service.

Products from cultural industries, that include contemporary arts, have become important trade goods in Zimbabwe (Braedt & Standa-Gunda, 2000, p. 368), like in the rest of Africa (Smith, 2014). The products are targeted for the tourist market, and contribute significantly to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For example, in Zimbabwe, total contribution to the GDP by the travel and tourism sector in 2013 was 11.4%, and the forecast for 2024 is 14.2% (Turner, 2014). One of the product categories are the curios.

Curios as Cultural Goods

Curios are a type of symbolic cultural goods. They usually are small handmade artifacts that are prized for their rarity or distinctiveness (Urban Dictionary, 2008); characteristically, are “built on the emotional and fantasy aspects of one’s experience with the product (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p. 92, as cited