A PKM–Based Decision-Making Training Program for Personal Healthcare: An Action Learning Approach

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ABSTRACT
Making effective healthcare decisions is important. Despite the large volumes of information available, individuals often face limitations evaluating this information and making effective decisions. This article reports on the design, implementation and evaluation of a pilot training program based on action learning principles. The evaluation of the pilot program provided a clear understanding of what needed to be refined in terms of program structure, content and delivery. Participants’ experience of the PKM process was also gained. The results of the study are expected to contribute to knowledge management in three ways: 1) inform current and future researchers of PKM in individual healthcare decision-making; 2) provide a PKM training model for individual healthcare decision-making; 3) demonstrate how action learning can be linked with a training program for the purposes of collecting research data.

KEYWORDS
Action Learning, Healthcare Decision-Making, Personal Knowledge Management, PKM Training Model

INTRODUCTION
Making effective decisions is important, however there are limited methods available for helping patients to make informed health-related decisions and to evaluate this process. This article reports on the design, implementation and evaluation of a pilot training program to develop more effective decision-making when confronting personal health-related decisions. The pilot training program is based on methods developed from action learning. The focus of the training is to help individuals to more effectively deal with large amounts of information through the use of personal knowledge management (PKM) strategies.

Two factors were instrumental in determining the design and implementation of this pilot study. The first factor concerned the implementation of PKM in individual healthcare decision-making. With the rapid development of the Internet and social media, it can sometimes be difficult to locate health-related information that is both relevant and important. Often the information found can be contradictory. These factors may hinder decision-making, and individuals may not know how to proceed. PKM provides tools and techniques that help deal with overwhelming amounts of information (Jefferson, 2006).

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The second factor is the use of action learning itself, which allows participants and researchers to learn from their actions and experiences, and to implement changes to individual practices based on their learning (Popplewell & Hayman, 2012). Action learning has been suggested as an effective method to help participants apply learning to their decision-making (Rath, 2011). Action learning allows for improving a researcher’s understanding and future plans by being actively involved in the process (Cropper, Dick, Donaldson, & Patty, 2002). Action learning provides a promising method in which to gather data, to better understand how PKM can be understood and used within the individual decision-making process.

While PKM scholars have focused on education to help improve students’ learning abilities, little empirical research or significant conceptual development of PKM has been done in healthcare decision-making. To address this gap, this study is directed toward people who are dealing with locating information, evaluating overwhelming amounts information when making healthcare decisions. This paper reports the design, implementation and evaluation of a pilot training program of a larger ongoing study. The results of the study are expected to contribute to the Knowledge Management (KM) discipline in three ways: 1) by providing current and future researchers a conceptualization of PKM particularly as it applies to individual healthcare decision-making; 2) by developing a model for PKM training to help individuals improve their skills and abilities when confronting health-related decisions in an information-rich environment; 3) by demonstrating how action learning can be linked with a training program for the purposes of collecting research data.

This paper will explain in detail that action learning: 1) provides research participants a relevant learning opportunity, 2) allows for individuals to work on real healthcare decision-making issues, 3) allows for the researcher to be involved in the action learning set, 4) gives research participants valuable lifelong-learning skills in return for the data they provide. The paper is structured as follows: first, the literature associated with PKM, action learning, and decision-making are reviewed and critiqued. Second, the design of the training program based on action learning is provided. Third, an evaluation of the pilot program is provided. Finally, the study’s findings and implications are discussed and conclusions drawn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a review of PKM literature, the concept and principle of action learning, and decision-making.

Personal Knowledge Management (PKM)

The concept of PKM is central to this paper, yet there is still no agreed-upon definition of it. The literature points toward PKM being related to the management of individual learning, information, and knowledge. According to Frand and Hixon (1999), PKM is a process in which individuals organize and integrate the information they believe is necessary. The PKM processes help individuals to discover and value information that means something to them, which results in personal knowledge (Benitez & Pauleen, 2009). Frand and Hixon state that PKM attempts to utilize technology to help individuals manage information. For instance, Jennex (2013) reports that the Internet (technology) can help easily access information and knowledge, and is beneficial in distributing and receiving up-to-date information. Web 2.0 technologies such as social software and blogs in PKM enable a more effective way of creating, codifying, organizing and sharing knowledge, and creating new knowledge (Razmerita, Kirchner, & Sudzina, 2009).

Phelps and Jennex (2015) state that capturing knowledge can help people who need to make decisions. Developing an individual’s PKM skills might lead to more effective cognition, problem solving, creativity, and lifelong learning for decision-making. A number of authors (Avery, Brooks, Brown, Dorsey, & O’Conner, 2001; Grundspenkis, 2007; Hobbie, 2010; Jefferson, 2006; Tsui, 2002) argue that individuals must have personal skills to allow information to be processed, filtered,
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