Toward a Theoretical Model of Learning Organization and Knowledge Management Processes

Said Abdullah Al Saifi, Nizwa College of Applied Sciences, Oman

ABSTRACT

This article puts forward a conceptual model for understanding the influence of the learning organization’s five disciplines on knowledge management processes. It proposes that the learning process should be measured as a multi-disciplinary construct consisting of personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision, and systems thinking. Potential implications of learning organisation disciplines for the acquisition, sharing, and application of knowledge are illustrated. A number of possible relationships between learning organization disciplines, and knowledge management processes were employed to propose such relationships. This article develops a measure that shows the connection between the learning organization’s disciplines and knowledge management processes. Through a conceptualization of the relationships between the learning organization discipline and knowledge management processes the study provides practical guidance for practitioners during the implementation of knowledge management processes.

KEYWORDS

Knowledge Acquisition, Knowledge Application, Knowledge Sharing, Mental Models, Personal Mastery, Shared Vision, Systems Thinking, Team Learning

INTRODUCTION

The key objective of conducting this research is to theorize a relationship between learning organization and knowledge management processes. Knowledge is an asset that is in a constant state of flux and needs new systems and understanding of the way in which it can flow between diverse individuals, teams, and organizations (Nissen, 2006; Nissen, 2014). Knowledge management is viewed as a critical constituent of the global business process within organizations and as an important component for maximizing an organization’s competitive advantage in the business environment (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Khanna, 2010; Lee, Foo, Leong, & Ooi, 2016; Lloria, 2008; Martinez-Conesa, Soto-Acosta, & Carayannis, 2017, Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000; Oborn & Dawson, 2010). In addition, knowledge management can be seen as an asset that is optimized through innovations (Moteleb and Woodman, 2007). Moreover, knowledge management is also seen as the practice of selectively implementing knowledge with the express objective of improving the organization’s effectiveness (Jennex, 2005). It

DOI: 10.4018/IJKM.2019040104

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does so through rhythmic processes of search, selection, investigation, synthesis, divergent thinking, and decision-making (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998). These processes will enhance learning, cut down the risk of not recognizing and of repeating mistakes, and allow the preserving of knowledge assets (Dalkir, 2011). To achieve these ends and to be successful, organizations need a modern mentality that overcomes a data mindset and to replace it with a knowledge habit.

A review of the previous literature indicates that knowledge management is defined from two distinct perspectives. The first views knowledge management from a technical perspective. Here, knowledge management systems are seen as an advanced assembly of both software and hardware designed to facilitate knowledge management processes. In line with this technical viewpoint, Meso and Smith (2000) see knowledge management as comprising three components: technology, function, and knowledge. The main objective of this approach is to enhance access to information through enhanced ways of accessing and reusing documents via the use of technology such as databases, full-text search, and hypertext linking (Pauleen, Corbitt, & Yoong, 2007). Another school defines knowledge management from a sociotechnical perspective driven by the goal of getting the right information from the right people to the right people at the right time (Samad, 2005). This outcome can be made possible and facilitated by a range of social, organizational, and technical antecedents, which must be considered in any knowledge management policy or practice initiative (Carayannis, 1998).

Malhotra (1996) defines a learning organization as one that has an ingrained philosophy for anticipating, reacting, and responding to change, complexity, and uncertainty, while Garvin (1993) defines a learning organization as an organization that is skilled in creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (p. 80). It seems clear from the above definitions that the learning behavior of individuals, supported by learning strategies, creates learning organizations (Mumford, Antes, Caughron, & Friedrich, 2008) which, in turn, assists in the development, valuing, and management of individual employees.

Learning organizations have received extensive recognition because of their inherent capability to endure competition by turning “resources into competencies” through the development of knowledge (Curado, 2006), thereby establishing a competitive advantage (Khadra & Rawabdeh, 2006). Both business and academic sources argue that, by implementing knowledge management, an organization can maintain its long-term competitive advantage (Gonzalez-Padron, Chabowski, Hult, & Ketchen, 2010; Liu & Lai, 2011). Competitive advantage could be related to the innovation and development of new ways for developing the quality and functionality of products (He & Abdous, 2013), sustaining high performance (Pina, Romao, & Oliveira, 2013), reducing costs and, of course, answering the demands of increasingly sophisticated customers’ demands in order to survive in the competitive market, especially in the current business environment which is regarded as a knowledge-driven economy (Zhou & Fink, 2003). Thus, learning organization becomes a requirement for organizations if they are to survive in competitive marketplaces. Learning happens when knowledge is generated, shared, and implemented (Loermans, 2002).

Some authors even consider knowledge management as concerned with the development of capabilities through learning (Dosi, Nelson, & Winter, 2000). The knowledge management takes the output from the learning process, manages it, and ensures that an appropriate environment to maintain the creation and knowledge management capital is being appropriately perpetuated (Loermans, 2002).

Previous studies did not concentrate on the impact of learning organization on knowledge management processes. Rather, they have looked at learning organization and knowledge management in isolation. Furthermore, no attempt has been made to study the five disciplines of Senge and the three processes of knowledge management from a holistic perspective that focuses on variables such as learning organization disciplines and knowledge management processes. Thus, the goal of this research is to fill this gap in the literature by providing a study that concentrates on learning
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