Chapter 9

Best Practices of Knowledge Strategy in Hospitals: A Contextual Perspective Based on the Implementation of Medical Protocols

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses best practices of knowledge strategies in hospitals considering the implementation of medical protocols. Protocols are research products originated from the based-on-evidence medicine. Knowledge strategy depends on specific organizational context that can be expressed by its barriers and enablers. Eight hospitals were studied in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, involving multidisciplinary teams of the cardiology services which are acknowledged as the area of expertise with more implemented protocols. The same protocols are available in all investigated hospitals and are implemented by different practices in daily activities. A formal structure for the promotion of the organizational context is proposed in relation to the protocol implementation. The following factors were found as critical for the promotion of knowledge strategies’ best practices in hospitals: a common language for sharing information among different professionals; the knowledge gap as a corporate vision, and the particular hole of information technology.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to better understand how to explore best practices of knowledge strategies in the hospital organizations. Knowledge strategy depends on a favorable organizational context (Berwick, 1996; Blackler, 1995; Snowden, 2002). From a socio-cultural perspective, the creation of an adequate context is the crucial factor for the promotion of knowledge strategy, in accordance with the structure of the organization. In this perspective, the foundations for the knowledge management are the feasibility factors that are necessary to the creation and transferring of knowledge in the organizations.
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Ichijo at al., 1998; Hansen et al., 1999; Von Krogh et al., 2000; Nonaka et al., 2006).

This research explored barriers and enablers to the creation and transferring of knowledge by the implementation of medical protocols. It was investigated hospitals which work with clinical guidelines searching services standards of diagnosis and treatment according to scientific recommendations and medical bodies. In particular, it was studied the context for enabling knowledge through the identification of the critical elements that could promote original practices of knowledge strategy in hospitals by the issuing of the role of medical protocols’ implementation. The investigation also was concerned to the consideration of knowledge as a strategic asset in the strategic formulation of the hospital, expressed in the whole process of conception, creation, and implementation of protocols.

Medical protocols are a product of Based-Evidence-Medicine (BEM). Based-Evidence-Medicine is the integration of the best evidence gathered from scientifically oriented research with the clinical ability of the doctor in charge of the decision and the patient’s preference (Sacket, 2003). Eight hospitals were studied in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, involving multidisciplinary teams organized around cardiology services. This area of expertise is acknowledged as the one with more implemented protocols.

In this way it is first presented conceptual topics about knowledge strategy in relation to hospitals, making it clear that the meaning of the protocols is a deployment of clinical guidelines. Next, a socio-cultural perspective proposed for the analysis of the hospital context aiming at promoting knowledge strategies is described. In the ensuing sections methodological procedures are shown and a brief analysis of the study in the “organizational field”- cardiology through multiple cases studies. A general analysis for the promotion of the required organizational context is offered and it is suggested a managerial framework. Finally, is presented the concluding considerations on the research, highlighting as critical factors for promoting practices of knowledge strategy: a uniform language validated by the professionals; the lack of a strategic conception in the treatment of information and knowledge, and the lack of adequate support from the IT systems.

ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND COGNITIVE BARRIERS

Knowledge has been claimed as one of the most important sources of competitive advantage and sustained performance based on worker’s intelligence, as well as an important source of superior performance in turbulent environments (Prahalad & Hamell, 1990; Spender & Grant 1996; Nonaka et al., 2006).

Organizations are social ‘organisms’ and it is well known that organizational actions happen as the results of dynamic interactions between social and formal systems. The concept of organizational knowledge involving facts and values can, therefore, be explored in both logical constructions (formal and structured systems) and cognitive constructions (informal and unstructured systems).

The analytical life cycle of the organizational knowledge, shown in the Figure 1, involves two dimensions of knowledge: one based on formal systems and another based on cognitive systems. Knowledge based on formal systems includes all the required explicit knowledge for the implementation of any organizational process, such as: strategic planning, managerial model or information system. Knowledge based on cognitive systems mostly depends on people’s understanding on the application of the formal systems including for instance learning process, decision-making process or leadership characteristics. The cycle starts over again as soon as any experience creates new knowledge which will be incorporated in the formal structure.

The structured knowledge from the current protocols is easily accessible by hospitals. The implementation of protocols will be supported by