An Investigation into Critical Success Factors of Knowledge Management Implementation in TQM Organizations in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge Management (KM) is one of the hottest topics today in both the industrial and research world. In our daily life, the authors deal with huge amounts of data and information. Data and information are not knowledge until they know how to obtain the value out of it. This is the reason the authors need to practise KM. The objective of the research is to identify the relationship between the critical success factors (CSFs) and perceived benefits of KM. This study was accomplished through mail questionnaires to the organisations that are implementing Total Quality Management (TQM). Data gained from the questionnaires were analyzed by using SPSS software. The findings revealed that organisational culture, top management leadership and commitment, employee participation have a positive relationship among the perceived benefits of KM. These findings are useful for both practitioners and academicians.

Keywords: Critical Success Factors, Knowledge Management, Organisational Culture, Perceived Benefits, Total Quality Management.

INTRODUCTION

Many organizations are facing a dynamic and rapidly changing environment, globalization and high demand for new products and services. The nature of work has changed enormously with the shift from an industrial economy where commercial products were the main business focus to a knowledge-based economy where service and expertise are the main business production.

Drucker (1992) has described knowledge, rather than capital or labour as the only meaningful economic resource in the knowledge...
society and Senge (1991) has warned that many organizations are unable to function as knowledge-based organizations, because they suffer from learning disabilities. Companies must innovate or die, and their ability to learn, adapt and change becomes a core competency for survival. Therefore, knowledge management (KM) is needed in order to survive in the knowledge-based economy.

Many researchers such as Davenport and Volpel (2001), Yu et al. (2004), Wong (2005), Nkoyo et al. (2011) found that organizational culture, top management leadership, employee participation are the critical success factors (CSFs) of KM implementation. This will bring perceived benefits such as cost reduction, quality, creativity and innovation. However, no work is being done on CSFs of KM in organizations that are implementing Total Quality Management (TQM) in Malaysia. Furthermore, none of the frameworks can provide a complete and generalized frame for KM by defining fundamental attributes of KM and their inter-relationships. Hence, the objective of this study is to find out the relationship between the CSFs and the perceived benefits of KM.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following sections are a literature review which consists of KM definitions, critical success factors of KM and perceived benefits of KM.

DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE

According to Sayed Hossain and Cheng (2004), the word “knowledge” consists of two components:

- “know” and “ledge”
  - “Know” means understand, comprehend, realize, perceive or cognize;
  - “Ledge” means shelf, platform or a place to put things in general.

Defining data, information and knowledge is difficult. Only through external means or from a user’s perspective, can one distinguish between data, information and knowledge. In general, data are considered as raw facts, information is regarded as organized sets of data and knowledge is defined as meaningful information (Bhatt, 2001). Figure 1 shows the knowledge spectrum.

According to Sayed Hossain and Cheng (2004), data contain no definite meaning. After the data is collected, the second process is to organize, analyse and summarize it to obtain a certain pattern or trend or message from the data. Information is then formed. Information is organized data and contains messages. The third process is to use the information to make decisions for value creation, i.e. knowledge. Knowledge is the information that is comprehensible and contains value. According to Davenport and Prusak (1998), knowledge is information combined with experience, context, interpretation and reflection. It is a high value form of information that is ready to be applied to decisions and actions. KM involves setting an environment that allows organisations to create, capture, share and leverage knowledge to improve their performance in fulfilling organisations’ missions.

Figure 1. Knowledge spectrum (Bhatt, 2001)
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