

Configuring Knowledge Management for Social Enterprise: Detecting Antecedents and its Maneuvers to Social Improvements

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Abstract

This study tried to address the role of knowledge management unto social enterprise due to their unique-respective characteristics. The analysis began with proposing twofold of questions, namely how to bring-in the concept of knowledge management unto social enterprise and how KM shall maneuvers social enterprise to gain sustainable competitive advantage. Having combined two fields of studies: knowledge management and social entrepreneurship, the study found seven antecedents, ranging from strong vision-mission, technology infrastructure, organizational fitness, learning culture, employee capability, leaderships style and knowledge network. These antecedents are simultaneously providing basis for KM process in which appointing new knowledge re-juvenescence as the ultimate outcome. Furthermore, this is the triggered for continuous social improvement which then creating reverse flow as signaled from our human tremendous growth. Having more attention to the antecedents and proposed framework might help social enterprise to accomplish its ultimate goals, bringing society to higher quality of life.

Keywords: Knowledge Management; Culture; Social Enterprise; Sustainable Competitive Advantage

1. Introduction

More than decades since Peter Drucker was first introduced the terminology of ‘knowledge-worker’ knowledge management (KM) has become one of the most interesting fields of studies (Drucker, 1999). Former research had analyzed knowledge management from various angels, including technology (Venters, 2010; Malhotra, 2005; Odom & Starns, 2003; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Schultze & Boland, 2000; Wilson & Snyder, 1999), culture (Theo et al., 2011; Owen & Thompson, 2001; Von Krogh et al., 2000; Wolf, 2000; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), social (Teng & Song, 2011; Miller & cardy, 2000; Rastogi, 2000; Wenger, 1998) and also strategic management (Omotayo, 2015; Russ et al., 2007; Abell & Oxbrow, 2001; Donoghue et al., 1999; Hansen, et al., 1999; Zack, 1999; Wiig, 1997). Almost all of them agreed to one point in postulating knowledge management as pivotal state of mind for sustainable organization.

Though it seems straightforward from theoretical perspective, but underpinning the concept on practical term requires more challenges. Some research signaled the importance of: (1) having firmly-vision in diminishing sense of individualistic and self-centered point – the two systemic factors which caused ineffectiveness in KM (Chandran & Raman, 2009), (2) having proper KM investment (Akhavan et al., 2010), (3) organizational structure-fitness (Weber, 2007; Abecker et al., 2000), (4) supportive-leadership style (Ryan et al., 2012; Disterer, 2001) and (5) social knowledge-awareness level (Ferreira & Neto, 2005; von Krough et al., 2000). Acknowledging those five factors into consideration, as strategic pinpoint, knowledge management claimed more resource to achieve better performance. Upon monetary-support, this viewpoint should be easily solved by pure-profit companies but not for non-profit units (Smith & Lumba, 2008). In many cases, insufficient of fund touted as significant factor which caused systematical problems such as inability to attract high-skilled worker led to slow-knowledge circulation and ended up with low productivity and firm performance. Hence, without firmly framework, social-aimed organization will never discharge from that never-ending symptom.

However, study on how knowledge management must ideally performed by social-aimed organization is still limited and thus, inclusive. This study tried to fill-in the gap by propounding two major contributions: (1) finding clear linkage in accommodating knowledge management unto social enterprise and (2) proposing comprehensive framework which covered antecedents, possible signs of relationship and ideal measurement for its effectiveness. Therefore, we focused on two folds questions: (1) how to bring-in the concept of knowledge management unto social enterprise and (2) how KM shall maneuvers social enterprise to gain sustainable competitive advantage.

The rest of the paper will be organized as follows: following this section we will pose our analysis from related literature as basis for further framework development. Section three will describe our tautological theory as supportive argument to identify the most possible linkage between KM and sustainable competitive advantage

for social enterprise. Section four will discuss practical implications and future agenda while section five enclosed with conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Revisiting knowledge management

As one field of study from management sciences, analyzing KM should began with seminal work done by Gold et al., (2001). Without prior justification to the previous research, the paper succeeded in propounding possible relations between knowledge management and competitive advantage. It is clearly defined that the outcome of effective KM system would be rare-inimitable idea which turned into primary competitive factors. The conclusion was then become basis for further research from 2001 to 2015 (Omotayo, 2015; Meihami & Meihami, 2014; Yang, 2010; Zheng et al., 2010; Wu & Lin, 2009; Danskin et al., 2005).

Recalling to series of research from the previous section, it is widely acceptable that as a system, knowledge management consists of two important parts, namely (1) knowledge infrastructure capability and (2) knowledge process capability. The most important point from this conception is the use of ‘capability’ to representing firmly-outcome from knowledge. Unconsciously, the opinion underlined the difference between KM concept before and after Gold (2001) proposition. More research has been developed towards the direction established by the paper.

At detailed analysis, knowledge infrastructure capability consists of technology infrastructure, organizational structure and culture. This is where the actual investment took place. Integrated system among software-hardware, network and human aspect might produce the most productive knowledge (Coakes et al., 2010; Cruz et al., 2009; Hislop, 2003; Quintas et al., 1997). This is the reason why large-scale companies – in most cases – perceived with productive KM. Strong capital support has provide more opportunity to acquire the best system integrator as well as opening wider access to elevate its human resource capability. At any reasons, this would create strong-inimitable competitive factors, even when we take employee turnover ratio into consideration. Purveying access to any kind of educational system which aiming for human-quality improvement will be highly appreciated among employee, which further become wellhead of loyalty, trust, and commitment (Afacan-Findik & Rofcanin, 2015; Zhang et al., 2012; Chen & Huang, 2009; Chivu & Popescu, 2008).

Moreover, contrasting the stated concept between pure-profit seeking organizations with social-aiming organization - which later defined as social enterprise in this study – would be the best reflections. Since both of them shared different characteristics. For example, the first type of organization tend to rely on sufficient capital while social enterprise must relied more on the strength of network, human commitment and loyalty, leadership and great support from the society. If that holds true, then configuring knowledge management special for social enterprise would be a great contribution to the theory.

One unique snapshot is that for the second term – knowledge process capability – both type of organization seems to share more similarities. Retrieving from Gold et al., (2001), the second capability covered four major steps such as acquisition, conversion, application and protection. Yet, when we deployed the term ‘capability’ social enterprise do actually have chance to equalizing its competitive power through systematic skill-leverage mechanism. This is the interstice which will be explored more in this paper.

2.2. Key determinants of social enterprise performance

Presenting knowledge management concept into social enterprise must fit-in with its special characteristics. Our analysis began with the basic spirit of social enterprise. As one form of entrepreneurship, social enterprise shared a unique value. This type of business entity must underpinning social problem as the estuary for their respective mission while ended-up with effective solution to the problems (Prasetyo & Khiew, 2016; Popoviciu & Popoviciu, 2011). On contrary, pure-profit organizations always began with market demand and positioned profit as the ultimate goals. The two values could be seen clearly upon each decision. For pure-profit forms, as far as shareholder can oversee the linkage between investment – especially on KM – and expected annual profit, then the decision will be revealed.

For social enterprise, the critical linkage would be on how organization might convinced the society that their strategy will plausibly become the best solution which in turned elevating their quality of life. Therefore at the context of knowledge management, one pivotal point need to be analyzed further is whether its mechanism might guarantee the effectiveness of the solution. The argument is straightly appointed the importance of social-awareness level among stakeholder (Prasetyo & Khiew, 2016). Thus the main mission of KM on social

enterprise most-probably must serve two headed: (1) internal organization and (2) developing knowledge upon society as the final reviewer.

Relating points from the origin up to the downstream, social enterprise underlined its performance on the ability to absorb, transform, storing and recalling related-information derived from the society (Boyer et al., 2008). This is the point where everyone must acknowledge the importance of having proper KM system within the enterprise.

Deriving the concept of performance for social enterprise down to practical terms, it is important – as the startup stage - to addressed independencies unto financial dimension. To this point, knowledge management must support the company to achieve better performance by providing ready-to use information related to operation process such as efficiencies and productivity, social impact to the beneficiaries and conformity with all regulations such as environmental protection and ethics (Bagnoli & Megali, 2011; Meadows & Matthew, 2010; McAdams et al., 2005).

For developmental-stage, the most appropriate key performance would be the social-impact (Bornstein, 2004; Clark et al., 2004). Upon the stage, enterprise must be able to achieve the backword: (1) heading to industrial rivalry – since social enterprise also need to compete with pure-profit players and (2) aiming to increase its influence to the other parties, such as inspiring new entrants to join the noble movement. The use of adequate KM system should be able to ensure the effectiveness of the two previous stated performances.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1. Explicating the potential linkage

Our theoretical review succeeded in devising twelve potential antecedents for bring-in knowledge management unto social enterprise. The nine elements of antecedents are: (1) appropriate vision-mission, (2) KM technology infrastructure, (3) organizational fitness, (4) leadership style, (5) learning culture, (6) employee capability, (7) learning-network, (8) acquiring mechanism, (9) processing, (10) storing, (11) retrieving and (12) disseminating. The first six refers to KM infrastructure while the rest is heading to KM process capability.

In order to identify the possible linkage, we need to define the best outcomes from knowledge management system. Gold et al., (2001) confirmed that for all organization, sustainable competitive advantage must be the ultimate target. The conclusion had drawn from Barney (1991) and the famous-competitive advantage by Porter (1980). Due to resource-limitation, companies must competes one another in order to get survived, since for some reasons, sometimes they will trade-off current losses to maximum profit over middle and long term. This concept was then extended by Omotayo (2015) and Meihami and Meihami (2014) by including knowledge management unto strategic management perspective.

Furthermore, the concept of sustainable competitive advantage also fit-in with social enterprises (Prasetyo & Khiew, 2016). The conclusion derived from the facts that almost in every country, social-enterprise must compete face to face with pure-capitalist companies. This is not easy since pure-capitalist companies had equipped with more than sufficient-capital. Therefore social enterprises need to figure out unique-inimitable competitiveness to deal with existing challenges.

Using the firm definition offered by Heinecke et al., (2014), Grassl (2012), Martin and Osberg (2007), Shaw (2004) and Stokes (2002), the most adequate operational definition for sustainable competitive advantage would be continuing social improvement – as concluded by Prasetyo and Khiew (2016). Moreover, at measurement level, the terminology can be defined as economically-independence as shown by return on investment and also social impact – referred to social impact assessment proposed by Vanclay et al., (2015). Thus in short, knowledge management system must show clear and justifiable linkage to increase independencies at economical terms and enhancing the social impact of the organization. We will explain each possible linkage further.

Let us now recall to the first opinion shared at the beginning of this section. Our first-identified antecedents would be strong vision-mission. In order to fully utilized knowledge management system – having considered limitations from financial perspective – social enterprise need to extrapolates twofold of spirits: (1) learning organization – for enterprise level (Roper & Pettit, 2002) and (2) independent learner – for individual level (McKendry & Boyd, 2012). Strong organizational intuition to become the center of learning within industry might make social enterprise to be an investment center. This strong intuition will then be derived on the vital activity namely social research and development. Up to this point, intimacy between enterprise and the

community might be the best catalyst for its future performance. Strong intimacy can be fully reflected to a more concrete outcome as solutions to social problem, thus enhancing the social impact index.

Second antecedents would be KM technology infrastructure. Most of former research had appointed good combination between software-hardware-network as basis for this variable (Lopez et al., 2009; Robey et al., 2000), but our proposition tried to complementing the thoughts by addressing the role of technological-know how. The idea came from Lee and Choi (2003) which implicitly declared technological know-how as one of KM enabler. Instead of being the least component, technological know-how, on our opinion, stands for compulsory factors that might enhance all performance of infrastructure. This is due to consideration of investment-benefit analysis concerned by social enterprise. Therefore, having strong knowledge to control the infrastructure might result on high competitive advantage.

The third antecedents would be organizational fitness. One of our case-study using Credit Union in emerging market showed that organizational fitness tend to create conducive atmosphere in cultivating knowledge management. The term fitness refers to the extent which bureaucratic platform should performed effectively in order to make the flow of information and all tacit knowledge could be happened at its best circulations (Prasetyo et al., 2016a). A complex – rigid bureaucratic platform might create a lot of probing, thus ineffective for knowledge dissemination process.

The fourth antecedents would be leadership style. Our study stepped over the footprints of Singh (2008), Johnson (2002), Lang (2001) which addressed that knowledge management needs more-to transformational leadership. Strong-clear envisioned for the future of enterprise might lead to the openness for the organization to exchange their core expertise and perceived the learning-network as important means to elevate their quality of knowledge. Having considered that one of the true characters of transformational leadership is its readiness to change, therefore, absorption, processing and dissemination of degenerate knowledge become the strong engine of the organization.

The fifth antecedents would be learning culture. If technological know-how refers to infrastructure point of view, learning culture is more to human habits. It is the extent to which all employee from every managerial level within social enterprise must fully aware the importance of making learning as a good habit. We emphasized the term learning unto culture since its dimension can be extended to several perspectives such as commitment to productivity, loyalty and discipline. Thus, our theoretical framework supports Bates and Khasawneh (2005).

The sixth antecedents would be employee capability. This dimension must be the outcome from a process of continuous improvement around the circle of learning mechanism. Though we cannot despise potential employee turn-over phenomenon, but firmly KM system must ensure that all respectable knowledge can be managed properly. This would be the best way in using knowledge management to prolong company's competitiveness. For social enterprise, achieving the best fitness between capability and KM system might serve as the precise documentation for any tacit knowledge within the enterprise.

The seventh potential antecedents would be learning network. Due to all defined-limitation which social enterprise must face, collaborating with all strategic partners within network might guarantee some vital achievement such as efficiency – which leads to cost leadership strategy and innovation productivity – which leads to new competitive product or services. Our proposed tautology was based on (Wall, 2006; Wenger & Snyder, 2000) which clearly appointed the importance of community of practice as the initial learning network for social enterprise. Using this thought as a basis, our study propose unstructured network platform to be deployed on problem identification as well as at the process of social development.

The eight to twelfth antecedents would refer to KM true-process. As already proofed by several former research such as McNerney and Koenig (2011), Zaim and Zelim (2007), Zhao and Xie (2002), the proposed idea of Gold et al., (2001) regarding KM process had been fully disseminated. Similar opinion also profound on this study, but we notice the important role of the last part – dissemination. For pure-profit business units, dissemination process must be enabled internally. Meanwhile social enterprise should disseminate the new knowledge to both internally and externally – since their ultimate goal is continuing social improvement.

3.2. Proposing comprehensive framework

After carefully defined each possible linkage, we will propose the general framework regarding the ideal used of knowledge management system for social enterprise (as seen on figure 1).

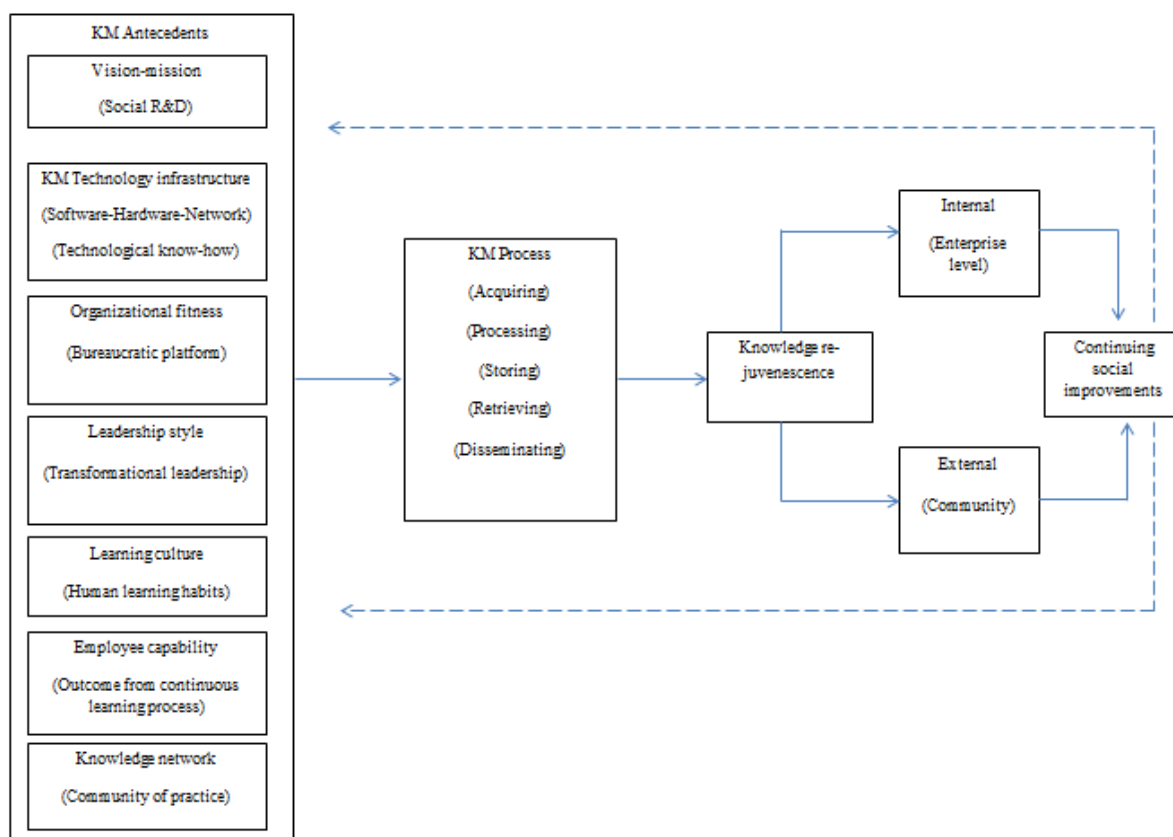


Figure 1. Proposed framework for KM at social enterprise
 Source: developed for the study

Our framework began with the seventh-identified antecedents (parentheses representing possible operational definition for each variable). As mentioned from the previous section, the seven-antecedents are simultaneously developed strong fundamental basis for knowledge management. Referring to Gold et al., (2001), these elements might properly be called KM infrastructure. The final conjunctions from antecedents led to best support for KM process which consists of acquiring mechanism, processing, storing, retrieving and disseminating. Social enterprise must pay more attention to the seven-antecedents before trying to improve the process gradually. We do believe that strong influenced from collaborative antecedents tend to provide clear path for further process.

As the process goes on, new knowledge will be produced as the inputs for further internal and external re-juvenescences. From internal perspective, new knowledge can be used to identify social problem accurately in accordance with providing better solutions. Meanwhile, externally, it could be used to improve knowledge-quality from the society. Thus, the two of them might act as engine to circling continuous social improvement – the ultimate goals of social enterprise.

Considering tremendous shifting on our civilization, one-newly defined knowledge must be easily falsified over the short term. Therefore, maintaining social improvement must triggered by the reverse flow. While the process of improvement begins, each antecedent must also be updated. At any reasons, this makes social enterprise become more dynamic compare to the pure-profit organization. As the civilization developed, social enterprise will kept on searching new ways in elevating the society.

4. Conclusion and Future Research

The study began with twofold of questions: (1) how to bring-in the concept of knowledge management unto social enterprise and (2) how KM shall maneuvers social enterprise to gain sustainable competitive advantage. Our theoretical review as well as analysis had come into conclusion that pointing social problem as the origin of social enterprise has open a new ways of developing the knowledge. This is due to the reality faced by most social enterprise in which they have to compete with the pure-profit oriented organizations. Therefore, in acknowledging efficiency strategy and also innovation strategy, company needs strong-productive knowledge management mechanism.

Our findings had succeed in identifying seven possible antecedents ranging from vision-mission, technological infrastructure, organizational fitness, leadership style, learning culture, employee capability, and learning-network. Proper collaboration from these seven elements might support the implementation phase, where knowledge management was deployed to produce new-unique and inimitable knowledge in sustaining company's competitive advantage. This study underpinned the importance to see internal and external knowledge re-juvenescence as way to improve the quality of the society.

The proposed framework should be the greatest contribution from this study which needed to be explored further. Unique finding regarding our proposed framework is that we found some special maneuvers in which social enterprise do have chance in sustaining its competitive advantage in serving the society. The turning point can be easily identified on the reverse direction of the arrow. Reverse-flow unto the framework representing the extent to which continuous social improvement do have influenced to the seven-antecedents, since both of them are being operated by human. Unconsciously the reverse-flow tends to make social enterprise become self-rejuvenated organism as a strong signaled from our civilization.

For practical terms, our framework should be workable as benchmark to all types of social enterprise. Due to limited publication regarding the topics, our framework must be useful for the start-up company as well as for the growing enterprise – though it may share different perspective. Start-up companies should focus more on the identification stage while growing company might emphasize the re-juvenescence stage.

Future study must test the concept on empirical basis in order to have generalization for the topics. Our main concern is on the role of each antecedent. This study has limited the discussion on identifying the component without considering any possible contribution which might happen between one another. Therefore further analysis – on case study basis - should deal with the problem effectively.

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