

Knowledge Management in Universities in Uganda: A Social Perspective

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Abstract

The study aimed at assessing the extent society been transformed using a cross sectional co-relational survey design and non standardized and adopted questionnaires administered to two private universities and students offering IT courses in third year (320); hence stratification. A construct validity index of 0.81 and a Cronbach alpha co-efficient of 0.75 deemed the instrument of quality. Results show that there was a significant effect of psychological attachment on knowledge management and an averagely negative relationship between knowledge management and society transformation (-0.53). Conclusively, universities should mingle with society to create room for graduates to acquaint themselves with problem solving approaches than leaving them as moving objects full of concepts and content with little or no application. The researcher thus recommends as follows: i) Institute knowledge workers in every faculty; ii) Arrange knowledge sharing forum for both students and lecturers; iii) Arrange for exchange programs with sister institutions; iv) Put awards for active knowledge workers; and v) The teaching paradigm should orient students towards problem based learning.

Keyword: Knowledge management, Society

1. Introduction

Knowledge management is an emerging discipline which touches several disciplines that include academic, society and management among others. On a scale between academic and pragmatic one might see various subjects as being academic, with the application of ICT being more towards the pragmatic end. Approaches to learning and the encouragement of sharing and co-operative working sit in between. This is an indication of the problem of knowledge transfer. The academic groups have denied lack of clear definition of knowledge; while the pragmatists might be unfairly characterized as information systems experts looking for new ways to promote their field. The bottom line of knowledge management insinuates understanding of learning processes for individuals, groups and organizations (Jason & Walter, 2001. It also advocates for innovation and creativity, from which the protection of intellectual property originates.

In modern organizations, in the era of Internet and Web-based scenarios, people have started to experience networked collaboration. Through information and knowledge sharing practices, people in organizations can achieve a number of aims: to improve business processes; to extend business knowledge; to collaborate with potential partners; and to develop, share and access huge quantities of available resources. Knowledge companies and knowledge workers are increasing. In these organizations knowledge is managed in new ways. In the 21st Century there are multiple communication channels - word of mouth, writing, audio visual, and electronic. Meta channels, e.g. meta media of virtual reality (VR) and controlled reality environments (environments that we manipulate and manage in VR) are increasingly applied. The dotted line around the three circles illustrates the embedded, (pervasive, ubiquitous) technology.

There is some indication of the role of knowledge management from its incorporation into other performance models, and the way those organizations with a commitment to knowledge management have tried to define the skills and competences needed by knowledge management experts. The European Foundation of Quality Management, in their revision of the business excellence model, have aligned knowledge management with people management, suggesting an human resource management ownership and skills base. However many recruitment advertisements for knowledge management experts emphasize information technology and systems knowledge, which might include expert systems, artificial intelligence and net-based communications. Both of these suggest skills bases and ownership outside the traditional operations domain.

Motivation

In Uganda, universities are expected to exploit their proximity to their competitive management and learning

advantage in as far as collaborating and solving societal problems is concerned. Some universities who have made collaborations with outside universities seem to maintain this relationship on paper (e.g. Association of African Universities, E. African University Council, etc), to the effect that even when invited for conferences or any other sharing forum, they never participate. More so, their graduates have been reported non innovative in regards to creating new ideas and applying some basic skills; those who have participated in these forums also seem to impact less in organisational, academic and society perspectives: clear indications that knowledge may be insufficiently collected, processed and transferred. The researcher thus asks: to what extent has society been transformed?

2. Background

Knowledge management is discussed in a number of ways, including the economic level which predicts a knowledge age to follow, and an industrial age where knowledge becomes the limiting resource, rather than financial capital. The level of the firm with a knowledge based view proposes a shift from a focus on resources. The latter perspective focused at a strategic level on the notion of core competences which might give the firm sustained advantage over its competitors through their use in processes. The meanings of knowledge and of organisational learning are aired and measurement of knowledge as intellectual property or assets is advocated as an important component of management control systems for future organisations. The process and the sub-process level develop (Gordon, 2002) in more detail the notion of knowledge within and around processes. It includes discussion about the role of technology and people. It raises issues of differences between a knowledge process and the use of knowledge in business processes. It defines by description those business processes which seem to depend more on knowledge, (i.e. knowledge-rich processes). The role of people within processes and where they will, and are able to, share knowledge with others is associated with the prevalent concept of the team (Roos and von Grogh, 1996). Finally, the focus of attention becomes the individual and group, searching for understanding about how individuals learn and share their learning. The contexts for these activities are suggested to be increasingly dispersed in time and space and involve individuals from many cultures as groups are formed across multinational organisations and with partner organisations, arising through mergers, joint ventures, and supplier or customer arrangements.

Aceitera General Deheza (AGD) transformed itself from a small oil-processing factory into the biggest indigenous firm in the industry (Andres, 2011). The root of AGD's success was significantly attributed to an understanding of the process of business transformation: type and pace of change. The study of the transformation process of a firm can be complemented conceptually with the understanding of the adaptation process characterized by uncertainty and organisational flexibility. Other organisations like ATIC invest with a dual bottom line mandate- besides the financial objective they must contribute to socio-economic objectives. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in Uganda stipulated among university mandates, community development. Universities thus should include programs that cater for social transformation. ATIC developed a unique approach looking at the Ecosystem perspective among key areas were destination development as an advanced technology hub and human capital development or "Emiratization". This is paramount because university graduate later work and live within societies and so should be accustomed to transforming them (Melodena & Immanuel, 2011; Nik, Filzah & Siti, 2011).

Most universities in Uganda have an international facet because all the neighboring countries have been represented on student and staff enrolment. The prescriptions for managers from these discussions might be summarized as being a framework for exploration as much as a prescription for improving practice and, hence, performance. For example, seven key success factors were suggested by Skyrme and Amidon (1997) in their study of knowledge management in a range of organisations: (1) a strong link to a business imperative; (2) a compelling vision and architecture; (3) knowledge leadership; (4) a knowledge-creating and sharing culture; (5) continuous learning; (6) a well developed technology infrastructure; and (7) a systematic organisational learning processes. Within the knowledge management field it is accepted that processes, people and technology tend to come together to increase organisational effectiveness through learning. One can regard processes and knowledge as being incorporated into existing business processes or forming new processes. These are processes by which knowledge is created, captured and codified, shared and transferred, embedded and used, measured and valued. The knowledge management processes which have the greatest effect on operational processes are those for the creation of knowledge, transfer and sharing of knowledge and the embedding and use of knowledge. Society perspective regards consolidation of class work into reality. Students go school and are taught concepts: their meanings and where they can apply but this practice seems virtual. Time comes after graduation that this student goes out to practice and apply those concepts. The most immediate place of practice is society. This study thus considers students' ability to identify and solve such problems with the help of knowledge sharing.

3. Related Literature

Social Transformation

Many students who go out of their home countries never want to return which significantly affects development because the sharpened minds are used elsewhere; a reason why some countries are more developed than others. For example, the People's Republic of China has introduced policies to encourage Chinese who have worked or studied abroad to return and bring back the knowledge and skills they have gained (Ariane & Eva-Maria, 2011). They used the exploratory qualitative study and it was observed that despite expecting returners to contribute to organisational learning, management does not organise the process. It depends on the individuals themselves, who develop various strategies for sharing their knowledge with local colleagues. Much as knowledge sharing is solely based on the individual, the organisation can as well contribute towards realization of the importance of knowledge sharing with others. Organisational learning is a cross-cultural process and requires bridging a gap between the kinds of knowledge the local employees are interested in gaining and what the returners feel the organisation needs. It was further noted that organisational learning is more likely when the returners recognize their own need to learn rather than just to teach.

Knowledge is such a vital asset that can turn over anything on earth. For integrated societies like the E. African community understand this better the sense that as member states team up to develop the region, knowledge must be shared evenly. The member states form a lot of diversity which require a proper knowledge creation, processing and dissemination framework to harmonize them. Tracy & Paul (2011) looked at knowledge transfer across countries and culture and the implications of the findings for human resource practitioners. Using a qualitative case study methodology he found that the inherent difficulty of knowledge transfer and the broad range of factors that influence the knowledge transfer process and which are connected together in a complex and non-linear manner. In this regard Uganda is not an exception; as the East African Community rocks these barriers must be broken for smooth transition because bring diverse cultures to share one item is significantly hard. This can be effected through creating forums and exchange programs for universities so that ideas can be pooled together for a common good of the community.

The underpinnings of knowledge management theories is that finding, keeping and leveraging an organization's information assets are critical to productivity, efficiency of operation and successful competition (Michel & Jessica, 2004). More particularly, one may submit that appreciative inquiry can motivate organizational-wide adoption and it can provide language-based mechanisms that facilitate effective knowledge exchange. The development of an appreciative inquiry based mode of knowledge management as an alternative to the prevailing approaches opens new horizons and uncovers previously overlooked possibilities, which eventually can contribute to the overall organizational well-being.

George, (1997) described how an institution in Canada attempted to broaden staff understanding of two telecommunications media, video teleconferencing and tele-course delivery, by establishing provisional systems or opportunities to trial new ideas based on the temporary educational systems (TES) typology and the Concerns-Based Adoption model (CBAM). He deduced implications for implementing future projects and identified factors to consider in the development of communications and information technology (C&IT) strategies for learning and teaching, among which was knowledge embedment.

Karma, Methsika & Chhavi, (2012) developed and tested a theoretical framework that examined the capacity of electronic open networks and closed interpersonal networks in building social capital and creating new knowledge. Electronic networks today play a big role in collaboration and transfer of knowledge. They developed a model that hypothesizes that open networks can impact the structural and cognitive dimension of social capital but have less than a moderate effect on the relational dimension. The model was tested in the academic community using a sample of 22 research faculties from ten different research institutions within the Management Information System (MIS) departments and five from Marketing. Findings posit that electronic open networks have a significantly higher impact on the structural and cognitive dimension of social capital and a less than moderate impact on the relational dimension. Most universities have established electronic networks but little use seem to be made of them in knowledge management, which leaves a pity to parents who pay huge sums of money for computer use expecting well groomed graduates but to their dismay. This adversely affects institutional image and rank among competing institutions.

4. Methodology

The study used both quantitative and qualitative paradigms with a cross sectional co-relational survey design. Non standardized and adopted questionnaires were administered and interview guide used, where university academic administrators were asked for their opinions. A sample of two private universities was used. Students offering IT courses in third year (320) from Cavendish University Uganda (CUU), Kampala International University (KIU)

and St. Lawrence University (SLAU) were used. Due to varying population sizes each university formed a stratum from which respondents were purposively and randomly sampled. Both an adopted (social influence processes) and research devised instruments aligned with the knowledge process constructs were used rated at a 4-Likert's scale from strongly positive to strongly negative. A construct validity index of 0.81 deemed the instrument valid and a Cronbach alpha co-efficient of 0.75 marked it reliable.

5. Findings

Generally, results indicate that respondents disagreed with some doubt about knowledge management having contributed to society transformation (Total Mean= 2.34) and views were scattered (Std. Dev=1.02). It is further revealed that they agreed with doubt that individuals being encouraged to continue learning new things, has contributed to development of society (mean=3.00) and Society needs inquiry based mode of knowledge management should be applicable at school (mean=2.94); while they disagreed with doubt that technology applied aligns well with and supports societal values (mean=1.28) and lessons learnt in knowledge sharing having assisted in transforming their society (mean=1.32). Despite these levels of doubt most views widely varied about opinion on client performance having helped in steering their society to development (mean=2.23) and Knowledge brokers in the university having helped in solving society problems (mean=1.90).

Psychological Attachment

Generally, respondents agreed, with no doubt, that internationalization is key in knowledge management (mean=3.63). Results further show that most of them like participating in the process (mean=3.77) while majority would participate in compliance with school values (mean=3.56) though their view varied quite widely on this aspect (mean=0.17). They also indicate that respondents agreed, with some doubt, that identification is vital in knowledge management (mean=3.40). More so, they seem to be proud of their participation in the process (mean=3.45) although their opinions widely varied (Std. Dev=0.46) as compared to the rest of the responses. Furthermore, it is revealed that respondents anonymously agreed with no doubt at all that compliance is paramount in knowledge management (mean=3.76) with a close range variation (Std. Dev=0.06). Results further reveal that in order for one to get rewarded in his/her job, it is necessary to participate in the knowledge management process (mean=3.81) while how hard one works in knowledge management process is directly linked to how much one is rewarded (mean=3.63) trailed.

Testing Hypotheses

Table 1
 Knowledge Management and Society Transformation

Pearson's Correlations	-0.53
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.12
N	320

Table 1 insinuates that there was an averagely negative relationship between knowledge management and society transformation (-0.53). This further asserts that the null hypothesis was accepted to the effect that there is no significant relationship between knowledge management and society transformation; since the computed sig value (0.12) was greater than the popular sig of 0.05, implying the computed statistic was small (-0.53). The negative direction implies that as knowledge management occurs society transformation regresses. This position is in agreement with Ariane & Eva-Maria (2011) who observed that many university graduates want to remain in urban places where they are limited room to apply the knowledge attained. Very few go back to their home areas to serve there. Therefore the urban society is the one transformed though in a negative sense in that there will be population explosion, unemployment, theft and related vices.

Table 2
 Psychological Attachment and knowledge management

Psychological Attachment	F	Computed Sig. Value
Internalization	12.86	0.02
Compliance		
Identification		

Table 2 insinuates that there was a significant effect of psychological attachment on knowledge management (12.86) since the computed sig value (0.02) was smaller than the popular sig of 0.05, implying the computed statistic was large (12.86). This position is in agreement with Kelman (1958) and Ariane & Eva-Maria (2011) who observed that people are instigated to do certain things because they fear being implicated (compliance) attach

value (internalization) and wish to identify themselves with others (identification).

Table 3
 Psychological attachment and society transformation

Psychological Attachment	F	Computed Sig. Value
Internalization	9.86	0.34
Compliance		
Identification		

Table 3 suggests that there is no significant effect of psychological attachment on society transformation. This has been implied in the computed statistic (9.86) being small since the computed sig value is greater than the popular critical value of 0.05. This seems to disagree with Kelman's topology because the IT students have not been oriented towards provision of solutions to the real world situations. This position is in line with Ariane & Eva-Maria (2011) and Mubaraka (2010) who discovered and postulated that to effectively deliver a practical module to students they should be exposed and engaged in critical thinking than reproduction of lecture concepts. He was inspired by the experience he faced while delivering practical lesson. It was further observed that such cases may not apply to IT alone but other disciplines equally need critical analyses. Corroborated with Ariane & Eva-Maria (2011) it is observed that many university graduates want to remain in urban places where they are limited room to apply the knowledge attained. Very few go back to their home areas to serve there. Therefore the urban society is the one transformed though in a negative sense in that there will be population explosion, unemployment, theft and related vices. In the context of organisational effectiveness the knowledge creation process should be purposeful, (i.e. with a client for the outputs). The underpinnings of knowledge management theories is that finding, keeping and leveraging an organization's information assets are critical to productivity, efficiency of operation and successful competition (Michel & Jessica, 2004). This implies that Universities have not yet made any significant effect on society transformations. Table 8 suggests that there is no significant effect of psychological attachment on society transformation. This seems to disagree with Kelman's topology because the IT students have not been oriented towards provision of solutions to the real world situations. This position is in line with Ariane & Eva-Maria (2011) and Mubaraka (2010) who discovered and postulated that to effectively deliver a practical module to students they should be exposed and engaged in critical thinking than reproduction of lecture concepts. He was inspired by the experience he faced while delivering practical lesson. It was further observed that such cases may not apply to IT alone but other disciplines equally need critical analyses.

6. Conclusion

Universities should mingle with society to create room for graduates to acquaint themselves with problem solving approaches than leaving them as moving objects full of concepts and content with little or no application. The researcher thus recommends as follows: i) Institute knowledge workers in every faculty; ii) Arrange knowledge sharing forum for both students and lecturers; iii) Arrange for exchange programs with sister institutions; iv) Put awards for active knowledge workers; and v) The teaching paradigm should orient students towards problem based learning

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