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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Abstract
This paper examines the relationship between Knowledge management practices and organizational performance. Knowledge management is about getting from those who have it and giving to those who need it, to improve organizational effectiveness and performance. Knowledge management allows organizations to capture, apply and generate value from their employees' creativity and expertise. With the advancement in information and technology overtime, knowledge has become a vital resource for organizations to gain a competitive advantage and improve their performance. Today, the major source of wealth and prosperity are in the production and distribution of information and knowledge by organizations for employees and businesses to thrive. However, it has been observed that the frequent upsurge in employers' turnover in recent times in different organizations has led to loss of knowledge sources and experiences of employees including outright retrenchment of permanent staff and being replaced with contract staff, sudden dismissals, restructuring, temporary or contract employment, job transfer and other alternative work arrangements. Beyond that, management actions have often reflected in lack of system upgrade, lack of good work structure, complex restructuring, information decay, banks' ineptitude, lack of organizational commitment and poor security information. This position has made good quality service to dwindle and customers' switching organizations was not in doubt. The combination of these observations has provided an inn road for poor performance. At some point, organizations struggle with knowledge loss in their operations. This makes it necessary for all members in the organization to generate and share knowledge such that knowledge sharing becomes a personal issue that requires personal commitment. This will not only increase profit but also improve quality, quantity, innovations, efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness.
Keywords*: Knowledge management, Organizational performance, Nexus, Competitive advantage*
JEL Classification: M12, M15, M50

Introduction

Knowledge is the full utilization of information and data, coupled with the potential of people's skills, competencies, ideas, intuitions, commitments and motivations. Knowledge management which is the practice of creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing and using knowledge wherever it resides, to enhance learning and performance in complex organizations has assumed an important dimension in organizations today due to the fact that the major competitive advantage of these organizations lies on attracting and retaining corporate knowledge (Lee & Choi, 2006). This invariably presupposes that for organizations to prosper, they have to treat knowledge well since it contributes to their core competencies, just as they would do to any other strategic, irreplaceable assets. Therefore, managing knowledge involves the leveraging of intellectual assets to enhance organizational performance (Stankosky, 2008, Ahmed & Mohammed, 2017, Felix & Guillermo, 2017, Akram & Hilman, 2018, Hayfa & Abdullah, 2018). Therefore, knowledge management is largely concerned with developing, depositing, extracting and sharing knowledge for subsequent retrieval which is needed to ensure smart decision for organizational growth and development (Bamgboje, Ayodele& Ellis, 2015). According to Hislop (2013), knowledge management is an umbrella term which refers to any deliberate effort made to manage the knowledge of organizational workforce, which can be achieved via a wide range of methods including the direct use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) or more indirectly through the management of social processes, structuring of organization in a particular way or via the use of particular culture and people management practices. Knowledge provides superior offerings which are given to customers by way of value. Value cannot be offered without some competencies by organizations. Competencies are brought about by organization's knowledge. Only employees in organizations can provide value to customers. This can only happen if they are motivated through training, workshops, seminars, career part development, short courses, medical care, company vehicles and the creation of a good work-life balance. When these are done their skills in work activities will go up. The knowledge in an organization gives a competitive advantage if properly managed by the organization. In a sense, competitive advantage is a single key element that gives an edge to a business beyond what the competitor has and does. Competitive advantage represents a threat to competitors and weakens them if readily available such that the holder can easily rely on it.

Organization's strategy of achieving excellent performance includes actions that engage positive emotions through employees. Examples of such are setting challenging goals and allowing failure as a natural part of attaining high performance. These banks can only have good results if they are doing the right things at the right time. Beyond that, there is the need to provide conditions in which the organization feels the right amount of safety. In all of this, health and safety at work should be the watch word. Armstrong (2006) defined performance as accumulated end results of the organization's works processes and activities. It is about how effectively an organization transforms inputs into outputs and comprises the actual outputs or results as measured against its intended outputs. According to Richard (2009), organizational performance covers three specific areas of the organization; financial performance, product market performance and shareholder return. Liptons (2005) posits that the firm's performance is the ability of the firm to prevail under certain circumstance and be able to achieve positive results. As the depth and breadth of knowledge increases, skills and abilities to set goals increases and these results in improved productivity as the increase in breadth and depth of application provide for effectiveness, identity and motivation of work activities. Individuals develop more sense of who they are as professionals in organizations to develop their essence. When productivity is high, the goal achievement is not far away. From the above, it is expected that knowledge management will be able to improve growth, innovation, productivity as efficiency is reflected in cost saving, customer relationships and decision making. Others will include corporate image building, development of new product line, employee learning, satisfaction and retention. When put together, this gives the organization a competitive advantage which results in outstanding performance. This paper therefore, examines the nexus of knowledge management and organizational performance.

The Concept of Knowledge Management

Over the years, knowledge has been stored in traditional ways: such as oral traditions, clay tablets, scrolls, books and manuals. To a very large extent today managers in organizations now use the know-how of people they have hired, with skill and experience processes for effective management. The loss of intellectual assets due to downsizing of organization's workforce has resulted to a decrease in productivity, teamwork, innovation and talent. These trends can only be reversed if organizations are able to explore ways of capturing and managing knowledge of their employees effectively for result. This means that implementing an efficient knowledge practice allows for competitive advantage edge. Others will be reduction in intellectual capital, lowering costs and a decrease in redundancy in knowledge based activities. As a discipline, knowledge management encourages organizations to focus on determining its knowledge to explain it, so that it can be shared formally for its reuse. By definition, knowledge management is a process that helps organizations find, select, organize, disseminate and transfer important information and expertise required for activities for problem solving, dynamic learning, strategic planning and decision making (Gupta, lyer & Aronson, 1996). Even though knowledge management is dependent primarily on organization culture (due to its being shared), motivation, and policies, it requires the right technologies for its implementation to reach the goal of the firm. The creation of knowledge depends largely on the data base, active process management, knowledge centers, collaborative technologies and knowledge websites.

Knowledge management in organizations must be considered from three perspectives with different horizons and purposes:

1. **Business Perspective**: focusing on why, where and to what extent the organization must invest in or exploit knowledge. Strategies, products and services, alliances, acquisitions, or divestments should be considered from knowledge related point of view.
2. **Management Perspective**: focusing on determining, organizing, directing, facilitating and monitoring knowledge related practices and activities required to achieve the desire business strategies and objectives.
3. **Hands-on Operational Perspective**: focusing on applying the expertise to conduct explicit knowledge related work and tasks.

Types/Classifications of Knowledge

According to Fleck and Tierney (1991) in Odiri (2014), knowledge is plural. It comprises of seven types, ranging from instrumentalities embodied in tools or tacit rooted in practice and experience to formal knowledge available in textbooks. Each form of this knowledge has its own method of development and transmission, as well as its socially accepted value varying enormously from one form to another, with a premium going to formal knowledge transmitted by books and taught in the initial institutional educational set-up. With this they identified these types of knowledge: as Meta knowledge, milieu knowledge, contingent knowledge, tacit knowledge, informal knowledge, formal knowledge, instrumentalities.

Meta knowledge is said to involve traditional cultural and philosophical assumptions while Milieu knowledge is simply that knowledge about the local environment, relation to peer groups, management and other staff as well as the general organization of work. Contingent knowledge is that type of knowledge that is distributed and apparently trivial information that is specific to a particular environment, similar to on-the-spot learning. Tacit knowledge, according to them, is that knowledge that is rooted in practice and experience and it is traditionally transmitted by apprenticeship and training. Such knowledge as found in a number of training programmes, especially those that permit peer exchange about ways of working or by stimulating working processes. Thomas and Bizer (2013) argue that informal knowledge is made up of such things as rules of thumb, or tricks of the trade and they are generally verbal in nature and can be transmitted in written form as guidebooks or manuals. The formal knowledge is generally considered as the traditional form of knowledge. This knowledge involves theories and formulae that are usually made available in written forms such as textbooks and handbooks.

Finally, Fleck & Tierney see instrumentalities knowledge as that type of knowledge that is concerned and embedded in tools and instruments and as such they require other types of knowledge; informal, tacit and contingent to be mobilized. Instrumentalities are tied up in all those training programmes aimed at developing the use of new technology. Instrumentalities are also implicitly present in those programmes which require lecturers to use learning technologies even when the use is not the principal aim of learning (Fleck & Tierney, 1991). Although philosophies may differ on how many different types of knowledge that exists, they all agree that we have different types of knowledge, all claiming to have knowledge of different thinking. Despite their differences in opinion, what they may have in common that made them knowledgeable then becomes the issue hence we can again say that we have the following as types of knowledge, viz:

i. Logical knowledge;
ii. Semantic knowledge;
iii. Systemic knowledge; and
iv. Empirical knowledge.

Akinyemi (2007) posited that knowledge can be and has been classified into three major forms. These are:

i. Tacit and Explicit knowledge,
ii. Know how, Know What, Know Why, Know When, and Know Who, and
iii. Embodied, en-cultured, en-brained and encoded Knowledge (Polanyi, 1967; Wikston & Norman, 1994)

The need for Knowledge Management in Organizations

The last few years have witnessed a rapidly growing interest in the area of knowledge management. Leveraging knowledge for sustainable advantage was the title of one of the first conferences in 1995 that brought knowledge management into the management agenda. From 1997 onwards, a surge of books, articles, magazines, have come into the scene. Most large organizations now have some form of knowledge management initiatives and many others have a well created knowledge team and have appointed Chief Knowledge Officers (CKOs) thereby putting knowledge management firmly on their strategic agenda.

The level of interest has been building up steadily over the past years. Many innovative companies have long appreciated the value of knowledge to enhance their products and customer service (Wang, Noe& Wang, 2014). Judging from the increasing awareness and general concern, the following under-mentioned reasons could be advanced for the increasing level of interest in the area of knowledge management among corporate organizations.

1. **Globalization and Competition:** As a result of globalization, many organizations have come to understand that they need to rely on knowledge in order to create their strategic fit (Zhaoy, Lu & Wang 2013).This is because with available knowledge widely dispersed and fragmented, organization often wastes valuable time and resources in reinventing the wheel or failing to access the highest quality knowledge and expertise that is available to them.
2. **Knowledge Commands a Premium Price in the Market:** There appears to be a general agreement among individuals and even corporate organizations that "Applied Know-How" can enhance the value and hence the price of products and services. Examples could be found in the "Smart Drill" that learned how to extract more oil from an oil field and the hotel chain that knows your personal preferences and so can give you a more personalized service.
3. **Restructuring and Downsizing:** Today's business environment is so competitive that every organization is striving for dominance and survival over its competitors (Kim & Chun, 2014). As a result of this dynamic environment, organizations are constantly re-structuring and downsizing as well due to technology. It has been observed therefore that without effective mechanism in place to capture the knowledge of experienced employees, organizations could make costly mistakes or have to pay much higher again for knowledge they once had at their disposal.
4. **Sharing of Best Practices:** Corporate organizations have saved millions of dollars by taking the knowledge from their best performers and applying it in similar situation elsewhere. This is evidenced from successes recorded by companies/organizations abroad that have applied knowledge management as part of their strategic management.
5. **Successful Innovation:** Also it has been observed that companies applying knowledge management methods have found that through knowledge networking, they can create new products and services faster and even better (Skyrme, 2003).

All these and other benefits such as improved customer service, faster problem solving and more rapid adaptation to market changes have resulted from an explicit focus on corporate knowledge as a strategic resource. This is why the question posed by researchers on "why do we need knowledge management" now got the genuine response of Macintosh (1997) when he discussed some of the identified specific business factors that have contributed to the increasing demand and need for knowledge management in organizations. They are:

i. Market places are increasingly becoming competitive and the rate of innovation steadily rising as well.
ii. Reduction in staffing now creates the need to replace informal knowledge with formal methods.
iii. Competitive pressures reduce the size of the work force that holds valuable business knowledge.
iv. The amount of time available to experience and acquire knowledge has diminished.
v. Early retirement and increasing mobility of the work force leading to loss of knowledge.
vi. There is the need to manage increasing complexity as small operating companies are engaged in transnational sourcing operations.
vii. Changes in strategic direction may result in the loss of knowledge in specific areas.
viii. There is a general notion in most organizations that most of their work tends to be more information based.

ix. Organizations compete on the basis of knowledge.
x. Products and services are increasingly complex, endowing them with a significant information component.
xi. The need for life-long learning is an inescapable reality.

The summary of the above is that knowledge and information have become the medium in which business problems occur. As a result, managing knowledge represents the primary opportunities for achieving substantial savings, significant improvements in human performance and competitive advantage (Barclay & Murray, 2003).

The Concept of Organizational Performance

Performance in itself is the end result of activities. This includes the actual outcome of the strategic process (Alrubaiee, 2012). Benzaied, Lout and Affes (2015) posited that organizational performance is represented by the success in achieving goals. Organizational performance represents the mirror that reflects the organization's ability in achieving high productivity. This happens only if it is combined with the customers' satisfaction. In addition, it represents the market share of an organization that can provide sustainable financial returns. Beyond that, there is social and ethical responsibility towards the environment and society where the organization works (Tubigi&Alshawi, 2015). Organizational performance can be seen as the achieved results of the interaction between the activities of communication and other units in the organization, their resources or the difference between their financial and non financial goalswithin a specific period of time (Rajeesh&Kamar, 2014).Darroch (2005) concluded that the financial performance will remain the variable that determines the extent of the organization's success. But the inability of an organization to achieve the basic level of the financial performance represents a defect in the system. Its existence will be in danger only if the performance does not include non-financial scales. Here, the background image of performance will show up what the financial indicators fail to do (Zainol&Ayadurai, 2011;Nofal, Surachman, Ubudsalim&Djumahir, 2014) argued that relying only on the financial ratios in evaluating the performance gives an incomplete assessment about an organization.

This method of evaluation should be enhanced and supported by operational performance scale. When in place, it will help to build measurement system for effective performance in the organization. This will be in the areas of market share and customer retention. To this end, Noruzy, Dalfard, Azhdari, Nazari-Shirkouchi and Reyazadeh (2013) argued that if a manager cares for the total performance of the organization, he will be able to create a balance between the operational and financial interests. As a result, previous research studies in looking into performance related issues used self-reported financial and non-financial performance measures (Alrubaiee, 2012). However, Tseng and Lee (2014) pointed out that some scholars have continually discussed the organizational performance measurement index. Tippins and Sohi (2005) suggested profitability, rate of return on investment, customer retention and sales growth rate as organization performance measurement indexes on the one hand while on the other hand, Lee, Choi and Prusak (2006) suggested market share rate, comparisons of success with other companies growth rate, profitability and ability to innovate as the organizational performance measurement indexes.

Organizational performance has been the most important issue for every organization. It covers both profit and non-profit areas (Ismael, Yusof&Davound, 2010). Defining, conceptualizing and measuring performance have not been an easy task (Ismael et al., 2010). Lebans and Euske (2006) defined performance as a set of financial and non financial indicators which offers information on the degree of achievement of objectives and results. Organizational performance encompasses three specific areas of a firm's outcomes namely:

1. Financial performance (profits, return on assets, return on investment).
2. Market performance (sales, market share)
3. Shareholders return (Pierre, Timothy, George & Gerry, 2010).

Organizational performance involves the activities embarked upon to reach organizational goals, to monitor progress towards the goals, make adjustment where necessary to achieve those goals more effectively and efficiently (Richard, Davinny, George & Johnson, 2009).

Knowledge management Practices and Organizational Performance

Knowledge is perceived as an important success factor for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage of organizations (Lee & Lan, 2011; Lin & Dang, 2015). Notwithstanding, knowledge can easily be obsolete and useless if not properly managed within the organization (Karimi & Javanmand, 2014). Therefore, it is very crucial for an organization to develop a series of processes or procedures in order to better manage their knowledge assets (Ou-Yang, 2014). Evaluating the programme or strategy can inform leader's decisions about planning capability and resource allocation. Performance indicators at all levels in the programme logic model must be re-evaluated over time. This should be against the criteria set to ensure that performance indicators are still relevant to measuring the programme's progress towards achieving the overall outcome. Performance measurement showing positive changes to outcomes or inputs or impacts may indicate that the programme or strategy is performing well. This means that there is no need to make any modification to the programme. On the other hand, performance measurement may indicate that there are no positive changes on outcomes suggesting that the programme's strategy or its implementation is not performing as expected. If this is the case, modify it to improve the effectiveness or re-clarify the programme or strategy. Valmohammadi and Ahmadi (2015) examined the impact of knowledge management practices on organizational performance. They presented a holistic approach regarding evaluation of knowledge management practices on organizational performance in the framework of four perspectives of balanced Scorecard (BSC). Research findings revealed that KM activities positively and meaningfully impact on overall organizational performance. Nnabufe, Onwuka and Ojukwu (2015) carried out a study on selected commercial banks in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria on knowledge management and organizational performance. 35 respondents were involved; Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze the data generated. The findings revealed that knowledge identification attributes to organizational performance and that knowledge acquisition has a significant effect on organizational performance.

Akpotu and Lebari (2014) examined the relationship between knowledge acquisition practices and performance of administrative employees in educational institutions in Nigeria. The findings revealed a significant relationship between knowledge acquisition and administrative employees' performance. Popov and Vlasov (2014) studied knowledge generation at universities in Kuwait and compared research output of universities with transaction costs. The study results revealed that transaction cost determines research performance in terms of published research and obtaining patents. Others are participation in conference and exhibitions which are directly proportional to the number of economic units established at the universities for promoting the application of research achievements. Adbsel, Gawater and Mohamad (2012) investigated the role of knowledge management in enhancing organization performance. Some Egyptian organizations formed the population. Questionnaire was used to collect the required information. The result showed that all elements of knowledge management capabilities have a positive significant relationship with all measures of the performance at 1% level of significance. Odiri (2014) study on knowledge management and organizational performance in selected oil companies in Nigeria showed that tacit knowledge actually predicts organizational performance. The study further showed that motivational incentives and participative leadership contribute negatively to the relationship of tacit knowledge and organizational performance while workers competence, interpersonal relationship and organizational philosophy contribute positively to the relationship of tacit knowledge and organizational performance.

Similarly, Chuang (2005) found significant relationship between knowledge management resources (technical and social) and the organization's competitive advantage and organizational performance. In addition, many studies mentioned that organizational performance (OP) is an important aspect to be considered in the knowledge management literature and approach, especially founded on resource-based theory by considering organizations' internal resources (Lee & Choi, 2006; Chuang, 2005; Tanriverdi 2005; Pee & Kankanhalli, 2009; Fugate *et al.*, 2009; Albers, 2009; Kuo & Ye, 2010). This suggests that although the literature on knowledge management has evolved slowly over the recent years and new in the Nigerian business environment has made significant contributions to management theory and practices. Again, recent studies have devoted efforts to the understanding of the underlying mechanisms through which knowledge management influence organizational performance (OP), based on the concept of knowledge management capability in different contexts (Pee & Kankanhalli, 2009; Fugate *et al.*, 2009; Albers, 2009; Kuo& Ye, 2010). Holsapple and Wu (2011) mentioned this aspect as the missing link of knowledge management; they concluded that financial performance is associated with excellence in knowledge management practices. Knowledge management has also contributed to better decisions substantially (Poston & Speier, 2008, Lenljund & Persson, 2008, Holsapple, 2011; Lekhanath & Santosh, 2017; Onyango, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

While there are several theories which might prove appropriate for a discourse of this nature, the knowledge based theory present us with a heuristic tool for interrogating the central issue if this paper. The theory was developed by Grant (2006), which the researchers have adopted for use. Grant (2006) argued that the source of competitive advantage in dynamic business environment is not the knowledge that is depository in the organization. This is because the value of such knowledge erodes quickly due to obsolescence and imitation. But rather, it is the sustained competitive advantage which is determined by non-proprietary knowledge in the form of tacit individual knowledge. Tacit knowledge can form the basis of competitive advantage. It is both unique and relatively immobile. As these are in the individuals and not the organization, a crucial element of competitive advantage emerges. This is the ability to integrate the specialized and tacit knowledge of individuals. In addition, knowledge inert to individuals in the organization is critical ingredient for competitive advantage.

The main idea of the knowledge based theory is that organizations exist in the way they do. This is as a result of their ability to manage knowledge more efficiently than is possible under other types of organizational structures. Organizations are social entities that use and store internal knowledge, competencies and capabilities. These are vital for the organizations' survival, growth and success (Hankanson, 2010). The theory assumes that organizations are heterogeneous and knowledge bearing entities. In them, they apply knowledge to the production of their goods and services (Foss, 2006). From this perspective, organizations are able to organize the way they do because they are depositories of productive knowledge in business operations. The theory is of the view that the ability of the organizations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage when resources are managed such that their outcomes cannot be imitated by competitors increase organizational performance.

Knowledge based theory assumes that an organization's sustainable competitive advantage is reached by unique resources which are rare, valuable, non-imitable and sustainable as well as a organization specific (Makadok, 2005). The theory argues that an organization may reach a sustainable competitive advantage through unique resources which it holds. The theory notes that these resources cannot be easily bought, transferred or copied as all of this add value to the organization. The ability of an organization to mobilize and deploy knowledge management based resources in combination with other resources and replace capabilities is described as knowledge management capabilities (Chuang, 2005). Also, according to Tiwoma (2003) for organizations to be extra successful and go on in a competitive market, they have to involve knowledge management practices in their adaptive and intelligent strategies. When viewed from this dimension, Gold (2005) affirmed that technological, structural and cultural resources are therefore likely to serve as sources of organizational capability. In another vein, Lee and Choi (2005) pointed out that a relationship exists between knowledge enablers (Culture, structure, people and technology) and organizational performance. In fostering research agenda of knowledge management, Grover and Davenport (2004) and Okunoye and Kersten (2005) described strategy, structure, culture and knowledge as the primary sources of an organization's growth and improved competitiveness. In the final analysis, the relevance of the knowledge based theory is based on its ability to justify how knowledge management practices play a great and significant role in an organization's sustainable competitive advantage and performance

Conclusion

Renewed attention has been drawn in recent times to the concept of knowledge management because of the increasing global competitiveness and the need for organizations to respond rapidly to constant changes in their environment. After careful analysis, we conclude that there is substance to the contention that knowledge management practices impact positively on organizational performance. Therefore, organizations that are using their knowledge in the right way, and managing it effectively to their gain in terms of strategy that is significant to the organization could be more successful. Identifying and leveraging the individual and collective knowledge in an organization to support the organization in becoming more competitive is the essence of knowledge management. This is because employees in the workplace are drivers; their knowledge should be managed and pooled together so that the organization can use it to build unique knowledge to enhance the organization's performance. Knowledge management has assumed an important dimension in organizations today because the major competitive advantage for an organization lies in the corporate knowledge. This implies that for organizations to prosper, they have to treat knowledge well since it contributes to their core competencies, just as they would do to any other strategic, irreplaceable assets. The central theme of knowledge management is that it is an essential ingredient of organizational performance and effectiveness.

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