

PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This paper presents and analyses the outcomes of a study which attempted to look into the dynamics of educational processes prevailing in some of the private universities of the National Capital Region (NCR) of India and their Knowledge Management (KM) practices. The assumption that led to conceptualising and embarking on the present study is that the knowledge management practices assume a pivotal place in an institution if the institution has to succeed in its endeavours. The societies across the world today thrive in terms of science, technology and economy on the basis of how well its education system flourishes to boost its various dimensions of development, how well its knowledge management system grows in tune with its paradigmatic transformation processes. The phenomenon of knowledge management practice is not new in the context of the academic peripheries of educational institutions. The educational and institutional reforms have been a perpetual practice in our history of educational system, the root of which can be traced back to eighteenth century or even earlier. However, the last century of the pre-independence era and post independent India has witnessed some of the most important educational reforms at policy and implementation level. All such policy interventions have had meticulously structured knowledge management practices as their inbuilt mechanism to achieve the envisioned educational goals. However the attention that the concept of knowledge management practices has been able to draw from all corners of knowledge community now-a-days is relatively new. The social and human activities across the globe have become more knowledge centred. Therefore the organizations lagging behind in terms of identifying, valuing, creating and evolving their knowledge assets are more likely to become obsolete in comparison to their counterparts that are actively engaged in the process of churning out the nuances of knowledge management practices. The paper contends that for institutions, to keep in pace with the fast changing dynamics of the knowledge based society and economy, knowledge management practices are the most important strategies that the institutions need to adopt as soon as possible. Otherwise it would be very difficult to remain relevant in terms of a higher seat of learning in society.

Keywords: KM Strategy, Organisational Culture, Organisational Processes, Knowledge Management



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Introduction

The societies across the world today thrive in terms of science, technology and economy on the basis of how well its education system flourishes to boost its various dimensions of development, how well its knowledge management system grows in tune with its paradigmatic transformation processes. The phenomenon of knowledge management practice is not new in the context of the academic peripheries of educational institutions. The
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educational and institutional reforms have been a perpetual practice in our history of educational system, the root of which can be traced back to eighteenth century or even earlier. However, the last century of the pre-independence era and post independent India has witnessed some of the most important educational reforms at policy and implementation level. All such policy interventions have had meticulously structured knowledge management practices as their inbuilt mechanism to achieve the envisioned educational goals. In today's world, with the advent of information technology, there has been knowledge explosion for the human race in all walks of life. The human activities across the globe have become more knowledge oriented. Therefore the institutions lagging behind in terms of identifying, valuing, creating and evolving their knowledge assets are more likely to become obsolete in comparison to their counterparts that are actively engaged in the process of churning out the nuances of knowledge management practices. Knowledge in a present day's organization is an imperative because it is the backbone of the economy of the present time. Those organizations which are not yet able to adapt to the increased demand of knowledge based endeavours are on the verge of getting irrelevant and extinguished.

For an organization, it genuinely requires a meticulously designed and sustainably executed planning to imbibe the essence and core values of knowledge management (KM) in its true sense. It is also interesting to see that despite lots of efforts at the policy levels, the KM is not something that is universally accepted across organizations or institutions. However, in general connotations, KM is about making the right knowledge available to the right people. It is about making sure that an organization can learn, and that it will be able to retrieve and use its knowledge assets in current applications as they are needed. In the words of Peter Drucker, it is "the coordination and exploitation of organizational knowledge resources, in order to create benefit and competitive advantage" (Drucker 1999).

In essence, knowledge management implies getting the right knowledge to the right person at the right time. This sounds like some old familiar proverbial statement that has an element of social acceptability at theoretical level but hardly paid heed to when it comes to the execution level because of being taken for granted by those who are supposedly responsible to carry it forward. The nitty-gritty of the term knowledge management implies a strong logical and sequential inter-connection between organizational strategies, understanding of the sources and means of knowledge creation, creating processes, and ensuring that initiatives are

accepted and supported by the stakeholders. Knowledge management may also include new knowledge creation apart from having focus on knowledge sharing, storage, and refinement.

It is important to remember that knowledge management is not about managing knowledge for knowledge's sake; the overall objective is to create value and to leverage, improve, and refine the institutions' competences and knowledge assets to meet the envisioned goals and targets. In the present study where higher education institutions are at the centre of the study, one of the key elements of the knowledge management practices would be dissemination of knowledge and developing desired level of skills and competencies among the participants or students so that they may become worthy citizens of society. Thus implementing knowledge management in educational institutions has several dimensions including:

1. **KM Strategy:** Knowledge management strategy must be dependent on organizational strategy. The objective is to manage, share, and create knowledge assets that will help meet tactical and strategic requirements.
2. **Institutional Culture:** The institutional culture influences the way its stakeholders i.e. teachers, students and other staff interact, the context within which knowledge is created and shared, the resistance posed or faced towards certain changes, and ultimately the way they make sense of (or not make any sense of) so created knowledge.
3. **Organizational Processes:** The right processes, environments, and systems that enable KM to be implemented in the organization.
4. **Management & Leadership:** KM requires competent and experienced leadership at all levels. There are a wide variety of KM-related roles that an organization may or may not need to implement, including a more experienced and competent leader who, by means of his/her subtle role, coordinates amongst the other stakeholders and encourages them to become active participants in the knowledge creation and sharing processes.
5. **Technology:** The systems, tools, and technologies that fit the institution's requirements in terms of properly designed and implemented instructional and other relevant systems.

These strategies and practices include knowledge generation, which encompasses activities that bring to light all the knowledge that is new to a group or to an individual. Knowledge generation comprises the exploitation of existing knowledge to create new knowledge, as well as finding new knowledge through interacting and collaborating with other individuals

or systems. This process therefore involves the acquisition of knowledge if it is to be successful. The acquired knowledge is of limited value if it is not organised and stored for easy retrieval. Once it is available for retrieval, there is a need to have systems that enable its sharing and transfer. A process of knowledge retention results when an organisation is able to facilitate the capture and transfer of both formal and informal knowledge through knowledge networking, thereby using the available intellectual capital to its advantage. (Mavodza, J. & Ngulube, P. 2012)

KM practices in higher education institutions are planning and formulating efforts and subsequent implementation of the same to improve the internal flow and use of information through knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing for institutional effectiveness. From this conceptualisation about KM practices, it appears that KM is a process that enables an organisation to improve its performance by enabling learning and innovation whilst solving its problems, acknowledging and resolving gaps in its operations, and recognising knowledge (comprising people and information) as an organisational asset which has to be managed through enabling policies and institutional tools.

The Present Study and its Context

The Indian sub-continent is witnessing, of late, a boom in educational sector. With the advent of private universities and increased governmental support to them, the private university system is spreading fast in Indian educational scenario. Out of 822 universities present at the moment, 282 are private universities which constitute over 34 percent of the total number. These educational institutions of higher learning are catering to the needs of quite a large number of students. It seemed imperative to see how some of these private universities are practising knowledge management strategies and about the perceived notions of the stakeholders of these universities. The present study attempted to look into the Knowledge Management (KM) practices prevailing in the private universities of the National Capital Region (NCR) of India. The assumption that led to planning and executing the present study is that the knowledge management practices assume a central place in an organisation if the organisation has to succeed in its endeavours. If knowledge management practices are present in educational system or organizations, the organisations are bound to succeed. On the other hand, if the organisations are not able to keep themselves in tune with the fast changing knowledge based society, then such organisations are bound to get extinct.

The National Capital region (NCR) in India encompasses the entire National Capital Territory of Delhi as well as the adjoining urban areas of the neighbouring states of Haryana, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. NCR is the largest settlement of India and the world's second largest congregation with a population of over 25,700,000. All the areas of NCR together generated GDP of \$128.9 billion in 2011-12, which was 7.5 percent of Indian GDP. The National Capital Region (NCR) has been maintained as a separate cluster from Delhi owing to a simple reason. The close proximity to the national capital makes it a vibrant place full of opportunities. This attracts people from all corners of the country as well as from abroad to come and make the most of the available prospects that the whole area offers to them. Obviously the basic services like education, health, transportation, accommodation, markets and shopping malls, etc. have increased rapidly in the NCR to cater to the needs of influx of the people here. The educational institutions have also increased in consonance with the other facilities and provisions. The self financed colleges affiliated to State Universities are into their existence since long back. However, the advent of private universities is relatively a new phenomenon. The Gautam Buddha Nagar district of the State of Uttar Pradesh has many private universities because of its geographical advantages compared to other places. The present study was conducted in selected private universities of the NCR to find out whether the knowledge management practices prevailed in these universities and if yes, then the contribution of such practices and strategies in the organisational advancement.

Objectives of the Study

The study intended to look into the prevailing knowledge management (KM) practices in some of the private universities of the NCR. The objective of the study was to develop insight into the knowledge management practices in private universities and their relationship with the institutional output. The study attempted to investigate the status of knowledge management practices or strategies (if there was any) the perceived notions of its stakeholders including mainly the faculty members' of the selected institutions.

Research Methodology

This study, being descriptive in nature, adopted survey method to collect the data. As a matter of fact, there were over five private universities in the area but hardly any institution had any sort of structured knowledge management practices effectively in place. Out of the five

private universities, three private universities were identified for the data collection and further analysis.

The sample of the study consisted of faculty members of these identified universities. Based on the availability of faculty members and their willingness to participate in the study, a total of 80 faculty members were shortlisted for the study.

The data collected were both primary and secondary in nature. The primary data were collected through a questionnaire and a self-developed semi-structured interview schedule. The secondary data were obtained through institutional records and internet search. The questionnaire and the interview schedule were the tools of data collection. The interview schedule had open ended questions that sought mainly about the faculty members' perception of the knowledge management practices and their stand on its consequences.

The data collection process underwent certain hurdle in the form of faculty members' hesitations and inhibitions about responding to the questions. Initial phase of interaction witnessed certain degree of diplomatic response from the faculty members to various queries regarding the knowledge management system prevalent in their respective institutions. But in due course of time they opened up to give realistic response and depicted their own perception of the whole process of knowledge management and subsequent actions by the management. They were also given assurance to keep the information given by them secret and non-revealed. The ethical consideration of the research was kept in mind.

Results and Discussions

Perceptions of Knowledge Management

Most of the professionals disagreed that knowledge management is just another field like total quality management (see Table 1). However, the respondents were equally divided on whether knowledge management is a new term for what academicians and educational professionals used to do. Also, a majority of them agree that information management is just an aspect of knowledge management, which is in line with the thinking that information management involves management of explicit knowledge while knowledge management involves the management of both explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Not surprisingly, there was almost a unanimous agreement that information professionals have important roles to play in knowledge management programs.

Table 1: Perceptions of knowledge management

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
KM is just another field like Total Quality Management	12 (15 %)	48 (60 %)	8 (10 %)	8 (10 %)	4 (5 %)
KM is a new term for what information professionals were already doing	5 (6.2 %)	32 (40 %)	7 (8.7 %)	31 (38.7%)	5 (6.2 %)
Information management is just another aspect of KM	3 (3.7 %)	16 (20 %)	4 (5 %)	48 (60%)	9 (11.2 %)
Information professionals have important roles to play in KM programs	1 (1.2 %)	1 (1.2 %)	4 (5 %)	40 (50 %)	24 (30 %)

From the above table, it is evident that 15 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed and 60 percent disagreed with the view that KM is just like TQM, whereas 10 percent were not sure about it and 10 percent of the respondents agreed while 5 percent strongly agreed with the statement. However, as stated above, 44.9 percent of the respondents in total were of the view that KM is a new term for that information professionals were already doing while 46.2 percent were opposed to this view. On the view of whether information management is just another aspect of knowledge management, majority (71.2 %) of the respondents marked in favour of this while 23.7 percent of them disagreed to this view and 5 percent remained not sure about it. On the issue of whether information professionals have important role to play in KM programmes, 80 percent of the respondents agreed to it while only 4 percent were indecisive about it and 2.4 percent of the respondent marked against this view.

Role in Knowledge Management Programs

Forty eight out of the 80 identified information professionals / academicians were working in organizations which have knowledge management practices present at the theoretical level though not in the articulated way. These organizations are in the process of integrating knowledge management principles into their daily activities while the majority of the programs are less than 10 years old because these universities have been established recently. In fact, the academicians and other information professionals, who were interviewed, mentioned that most organizations practicing knowledge management are still trying to come up with some concrete shape of the program. Though these private universities make very fancy and high claims of imparting quality education to the students, they have a long way to go. The physical infrastructures have come up substantially, but the academic rigor is yet to make its mark. The academic facilities are the major concerns for making the knowledge

management programs go smooth. For an effective knowledge management system to be in place, the management's vision of these organizations are very important, otherwise it may remain restricted to the vision documents of these institutions only.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to provide evidence that most of the academic professionals working in the private universities of NCR are involved in knowledge management programs in some or the other way. However one of the core elements of the knowledge management practice – that is articulated and structured process of the same needed to be strengthened. Some of the respondents were not so involved in taking up the initiatives for dissemination of the KM programs. The key reason for non-involvement of a few of them is lack of management's recognition of the role of academic professionals in knowledge management. The major roles being performed by the academicians in knowledge management programs include the formulation of KM strategies and setting up goals for self and colleagues. Team working, communication, networking and analytical skills were identified as the most important organizational skills required by information professionals to function in knowledge management programs. Making sense of the knowledge management process, ability to use information technologies, and document management skills were identified as the most important required competencies. This study underlines and emphasizes the need of knowledge management strategies to be put in place as well as the experiences of such endeavors need to be shared among the parallel organizations working in the field of higher education in India.

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