

Chapter 15

Guidelines to Innovate Organizations by Knowledge Management via Communities of Practice

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes to achieve an innovative environment via Communities of Practice (CoP) in companies that doesn't know Knowledge Management (KM). The contribution of the paper is to elucidate the relevance of KM presenting a research and the literature of KM, CoP, Organizational Culture and Information and Communication Technology. A survey was performed at ten companies in the interior of São Paulo state, Brazil. Any company that doesn't know KM and needs to be innovative may use the original twenty-two guidelines.

1. INTRODUCTION

The knowledge of a company is the result of years of organizational activity in which the knowledge of individuals is combined into a collective whole, according to Kogut & Zander (1992). Choi et al. (2008) state that knowledge is a critical source that has encouraged companies to devote attention to management, meaning that in the Knowledge-Based Economy (KBE), which has a very competitive base, companies need to settle an innovation environment. An active resource to KBE companies is knowledge; therefore, the Knowledge Management (KM) adds competitive value to assist managers.

To settle an innovation environment companies pay attention to the development of KM, which requires strategies, such as the use of Communities of Practice (CoP), to achieve employee learning. According to Skerlavaj et al. (2010), the participation perspective is derived from practice-based studies

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such as apprenticeship learning, in which no teaching was conducted; that means knowledge was not directly imparted to participants through instruction-based methods. Skerlavaj et al. (2010) explain that within this perspective, learning is understood as the function of participation in CoP, which means that learning takes place through sustaining a community where knowledge flows richly among individuals, thereby ensuring participation and interactions of individuals. While the participation perspective considers organizational learning as a relational phenomenon, it neglects the acquisition perspective. One of the KM principles cited is “assure learning”.

In this context, Valenzuela et al. (2008) state that KM will stimulate companies to become more efficient and effective by using the knowledge base existence and mobilizing the available knowledge sources to create new knowledge. According to Rosini & Palmisano (2003), the development of collective knowledge and for the continuous learning, Information Technologies (IT) are strategic, so people in a company may share problems, perspectives, ideas and solutions. Harris (2001) states that the KBE is linked to technology based on computers and new IT potential. In the context, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and IT are two inseparable concepts.

Bourhis & Dubé (2010) state that a community, whose overall objective represents an organizational priority, is embedded in an Organizational Culture (OC) submitted to organizational practices and exposed to political issues, which may all impact on its actions. Hislop (2005) highlights the potentiality of CoP in terms of knowledge processes as basis of organizational innovation by supporting and promoting the creation, development and use of knowledge, and as it facilitate and promote individual and group learning, and the sharing of knowledge.

Li et al. (2006) considers that OC and KM are correlated and critical to organizational performance. To develop KM, the use of ICT, OC and CoP should be considered. The CoP is known as a management tool for the enhancement of companies' competitiveness, according to Li et al. (2009). Organizational Culture and KM have been the target of numerous studies.

It wasn't found in the literature a known guideline to develop KM via CoP with the assistance of the OC and ICT literature. Based on this knowledge gap, the goal in this study is to propose an innovative environment to development of KM via CoP in companies that doesn't know KM. The main question of this study is: “which are the key practices at companies that may help manage the aggregated knowledge necessary to develop an innovative environment?” The contribution of the paper is to elucidate the relevance of KM for companies presenting a research and the CoP, based on the literature of KM, CoP, OC and ICT.

2. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

According to Prusak (2001), KM appears as an answer to social and economic trends, as globalization, computing influence and centered view on knowledge. Although the more accepted view on scientific community about KM is presented under a methodology based on knowledge life cycle or knowledge process, according to McElroy (1999), the interest in KM has grown along with the advances in computers, networks and data management systems. Sharing and collaboration among thousands of people scattered around the globe depends on the technology of connection and the organized storage of content, and many knowledge projects have focused on building systems to connect people and capture knowledge, according to Bose (2004).

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