

Chapter 40

The Impact of Media Richness on the Usage of Web 2.0 Services for Knowledge Transfer

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the impact of the use of web 2.0 applications on knowledge transfer in the Cocoa Sector in Ghana. Transferring knowledge via social media websites has received widespread attention by organizations. However, in most developing countries like Ghana, knowledge transfer still remains a major challenge, especially in the Cocoa Sector. The selection of media for a given task depends on the richness of the media and the characteristics of the task. The four modes of knowledge transfer theorized by Nonaka, require the use of media with varying degrees of richness. The study proposed that the usage of web 2.0 applications for the different modes of knowledge transfer can be affected by their media richness. And the use of web 2.0 applications for the knowledge transfer modes can influence knowledge transfer success. The study was conducted using a mixed method approach with a survey questionnaire. The results of the data analysis confirmed that the media richness of the selected web 2.0 applications affect their usage for the different modes of knowledge transfer.

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the use of web 2.0 applications such as Skype, Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia for knowledge transfer in the cocoa industry in Ghana. The term web 2.0 is defined as “the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the Internet as a platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is: Build applications that harness network effects to get better the more people use them” (Musser & O’Reilly, 2007). Web 2.0, which was originally coined in 2004 by O’Reilly media, is used to refer to a second-generation approach to the World Wide Web (WWW) with community-driven services such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, etc. (O’Reilly, 2006; Paroutis & Saleh, 2009). The capabilities of web 2.0 has shifted

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the focus of end users from being passive content consumers to active user participation where they are allowed to collaborate, communicate, create, control, and share contents using the web as a medium for communication. The adoption of web 2.0 in knowledge management initiatives in organizations (KM 2.0) involves the use of web 2.0 technologies like blogs, wikis, social networks, mash-ups, virtual worlds, RSS (Really Simple Syndication), tagging, peer-to-peer programs wikis and blogs for the transfer and sharing of knowledge. The use of these technologies on the public Internet platforms such as Skype, Facebook, YouTube, and Wikipedia have become a strategic communication channel used by organizations to reach out to both external and internal audiences.

MANAGING KNOWLEDGE IN THE WEB 2.0 ENVIRONMENT (KM 2.0)

The traditional knowledge management systems (KMS) positioned knowledge management (KM) and knowledge management tools in a distress state with some analysts giving titles like “Is knowledge management dead?” (Levy, 2009). These systems were based largely on the epistemology of possession, which views knowledge as object that can be captured through expert systems and intranets. This resulted in the creation of knowledge repositories that can be transferred through communication channels into other units of the organization. The content generated through traditional knowledge management systems was, thus, centrally controlled, validated and lacked interactivity making it ineffective for transferring knowledge with high degree of tacitness (Levy, 2009; Panahi et al., 2012). Some scholars are of the view that these systems lacked the human agent, which is one of the main components of KM processes (Haldin-Herrgard, 2000; Panahi et al., 2012). On the contrary, the epistemology of practice views knowledge as subjective and so for this school of thought, instead of managing knowledge as an object or entity, tools that are designed for KM focus on nurturing social interactions that enables people to build strong relationships to enable them to share practices.

The dawn of web 2.0 technologies comes as a sort of rescuer to assist in rebirthing KM (Levy, 2009; Spanbauer, 2006). However, adopting web 2.0 principles into knowledge management gives birth to a new generation of KM in organizations (KM 2.0) (Boughzala & Limayem, 2012; Shimazu & Koike, 2007). A situation Boughzala and Limayem (2012) think calls for a redesign of the study and scope of the traditional ways of managing knowledge in organizations. The scholars went on to outline some of the key changes that KM 2.0 can cause and their implications to organizations, research and technology. First and foremost, KM 2.0 changes the scope of traditional KM, from knowledge capital, comprising of impersonal and personal forms of knowledge to social capital, which focuses on interpersonal knowledge (Boughzala and Limayem, 2012). Interpersonal knowledge is communicable implicitly through the conversation and connection of people and more so related to relationships and interactions of people. This situation makes it difficult for the traditional knowledge management systems to capture interpersonal knowledge. Secondly, with KM 2.0 the focus shifted from individual intelligence to collective intelligence by regarding the connection, interaction and collaboration of individuals and their relationships as constituting a source of knowledge known as the intelligence of the collective. The place of individuals who mainly used to be users of knowledge (knowledge workers) has shifted to knowledge generators with less structured processes (knowledge pull) rather than more structured processes in KM (knowledge push). In terms of technology the web 2.0 on which the KM 2.0 is based is more user centered, flexible to use, and easy to install and use compared to traditional KM tools which are more task

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