

Chapter 3

A New Perspective in Competitiveness for Business Education: Communities of Practice – The Crystal Palace

Ana Martins

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Isabel Martins

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Orlando Petiz Pereira

University of Minho, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Organizations are currently living through profound changes while dealing with the prevailing rate of information change and innovation. Alternative ways of educating organizations highlight the strategic importance of humanization in organizations. Humanization is the stabilizer of productivity and communities of practice (CoPs) – the tools which enable employees to act in this space. Organizations that nurture CoPs embrace learning, are sensitive, tolerant, and cooperate. CoPs are nurtured by cooperation while disregarding both competition and egotism. Strategic variables emerge in this context which leads to the paradigm shift focusing on trust, voluntary sharing, employees' selflessness, and shared leadership. Knowledge in an organization and within each employee is viewed as complementary and not a substitute or as an issue of contention. Knowledge sharing is a necessary condition to improve both organizational performance and its attractiveness. The importance of CoPs in this chapter focuses on the humanization perspective as CoPs promote learning in business contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to discuss the importance of Communities of practice (CoPs) to promote learning in business contexts. Extant theories are reflected on to demonstrate the relevance of various constructs in fostering sustainable cross-cultural business education, namely, social capital, culture, emotional capital, knowledge and distributed leadership. In the current turbulent economy, given the fact that new capitals have arisen in organizations and society as well, soft skills also considered interpersonal and employability skills, should be viewed as complementary and not as rivals to job specific skill sets. If these are seen as rivals, mistrust emerges as well as a whole range of other challenges linked with change in attitude, behavior as well as paradigm. For decades individuals were pressurized by organizations to abandon their own personalities and instead to become that what the organization deemed necessary to become. This premise deprived the individual from his/her own personality and in so doing, dehumanized the organization. However, nowadays, individuals are living through a paradigm shift, which has impact on leadership, motivation and humanization in the workplace. Motivation policies, profit sharing policies and various productivity sources are important criteria that promote humanization in the workplace.

Motivation has become the driving force in the workplace, which compels people to act. Motivation has a double perspective, namely, (i) intrinsic, as well as (ii) extrinsic. The former emerges from within the individual, while the latter is the result of a quest for satisfaction. Even though technique and technology have not changed human nature, however, in time their evolution has produced new approaches on productivity, performance, efficiency, team spirit and organizational sustainability. In the new order of global competitiveness that which motivates people has become of vital importance. Motivation is achieved through valuing people, and encouraging them to take on initiatives, to adopt a more entrepreneurial stance as well as a greater capacity to delegate authority and promote change. This intrinsic motivation, a legacy value *par excellence*, which transforms into a competitive advantage driving force, leads to a positive correlation between trust and mindset of individuals.

In this context, learning, CoPs and knowledge transfer are part of the necessary conditions albeit are not sufficient for a shift in paradigm. For this reason, this chapter has the following structure: the authors outline an analysis *in loco* of CoPs as a tool for relationships between people, activities and an improved diffusion and utilization of knowledge in organizations. The dynamics of management with CoPs is further discussed taking motivation as the thread, which allows for sharing organizational, individual and assets with intangible value. The chapter highlights new tools as well as new methods, for example, those of training, coaching and mentoring and their impact on both professional and individual performance with a direct relationship to organizational and individual happiness. Finally and adopting a holistic perspective, this theme is related to the shift in paradigm, to one which is more humanized, more constructive, more inclusive and leads to increase in happiness.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND LEARNING: A HOLISTIC INTERACTION

In the current globalized business world, flat organization structures create CoPs, according to Nonaka (2006) and Roberts (2006). Organizations innovate by creating dynamic capabilities from effectively managing knowledge, developing their human capital with the support of structural capital to create knowledge, leading to creativity and innovation (Powell & Snellman, 2004; Cunningham, 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Edvinsson & Malone, 1997).

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