

Chapter 5

The Role of Middle Managers in Knowledge Creation and Diffusion: An Examination in Greek Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The role of middle managers in modern management theory has been already recognized, and this role is considered very important for the functioning of an organization. They have managed to be involved in many aspects of managing, and one of them is the novice field of knowledge management. In this chapter, the role of middle managers in knowledge creation and diffusion is explored and analyzed. A theoretical model of four middle managers' roles affecting the strategy of an organization is examined. The model was tested through a questionnaire in a sample of 241 middle managers of Greek organizations. After the analysis of the data collected, it was deduced that the theoretical model utilized was validated in the sample.

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INTRODUCTION

Middle managers (MMs) seem to have established an important position in modern management, functioning as facilitators between lower levels and top management of the organization, enhancing and facilitating the communications channels between these different levels.

Knowledge management (KM) is also an important and innovative aspect that has occupied the management theory and practice in the last years. Perhaps no concept has profoundly affected the discipline of management in recent years as the idea of KM (Psychogios, Alexandis & Onofrei, 2008). Its interconnection with information systems and business administration and the efforts made to diffuse knowledge inside an organization, have introduced a valuable asset to the field of management.

Evaluating and understanding the role of MMs in the context of KM is crucial for contemporary organizations as in today's business environment, KM has become a lifeline for organizations. While several authors recognize the important role of MMs in knowledge management and transfer, research on this topic is still in its embryonic stage and empirical studies are scarce (Al-Hakim & Hassan, 2011b; Carty & Walsh, 2007; Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Delmestri & Walgenbach, 2005; Janczak, 2004). For the above reasons, it is important to assess the role of MMs in knowledge creation and diffusion and the present work is another contribution in these efforts.

In this study, a theoretical model which includes four roles (champions, synthesizers, facilitators, implementers) of the MMs as a result of their influence in the existing strategy of the organization, is presented. These four roles were analyzed in twenty criteria, representing ways of actions and behavior of the managers in KM practices. The practical implementation of this model was tested through a questionnaire addressed in two hundred and forty-one MMs of Greek (public and private ones) organizations. The questionnaire introduced by Floyd & Wooldridge (1996) was utilized, with a purpose to access the dimensions of knowledge creation and diffusion.

BACKGROUND

MMs and Their Role

While in the 1970s Chandler (1977) emphasized that MMs' jobs cover exclusively the supervision of the lower hierarchical levels, now a large body of literature discusses their role in other fields. Furthermore, their jobs contain the integration of "the intentions of top-level managers with the day-today operational realities

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