



Chapter 64

The Knowledge Management Culture: An Exploratory Study in Academic Context

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge management is defined by different authors as the process that enables the sharing, capture and application of knowledge from the individual to the group and further to organizational level. The organizational atomization observed in the academia imposes importance in paying attention to a culture that encourages knowledge management and also assigns equal importance to the cooperation and the work in team. However, due to the different levels of heterogeneity among and within these organizations there is not just one model that fits well. Through a literature review on the knowledge management in the academia, the purpose of this chapter is an exploratory study that identifies the main cultural challenges in the development and implementation of a knowledge management system in the academic context.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management (KM) has been mainly developed in the corporate knowledge perspective. Nevertheless, there are other environments within which KM should be studied, such academic context. Despite the wealth of knowledge and knowledge-intensive (KI) activities, in general, the academia do not have their knowledge properly organized and they have been paying little attention to their management, differing from the corporate sector (Ali, Gohneim, & Roubaie, 2014; Geuna & Muscio, 2009; Rowley,

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2000). Geng et al. (2005) indicate that the application of KM in this context is fairly recent and that the first publication is dated in 1997.

The social academic communities are constituted by universities, public research institutes, and public research laboratories (Perkmann & Walsh, 2007).

Several authors have the opinion that the development and implementation of knowledge management processes in the academia presents often some difficulty (Petrides & Nodine, 2003; Rowley, 2000; Tippins, 2003). Although its missions are closely related to the management of knowledge (Howell & Annansingh, 2013; Tian, Nakamori, & Wierzbicki, 2009), and the existence of some important facilitator elements (e.g., large experience and expertise in creating and developing knowledge, and the horizontal and academic structure organizational).

In a similar way to the other KI organizations, academia are exposed to marketplace pressures (Rowley, 2000), which makes as critical as in the corporate sector the use of mechanisms of KM (Howell & Annansingh, 2013; Kidwell, Vander Linde, & Johnson, 2000). However, academia faces some difficulties in establishing an organizational culture that focuses on KM and significantly boosts the sharing of scientific knowledge.

The academic environment has certain characteristics that dominate their culture and that need to be understood. According to Tippins (2003), the academic environment is characterized by a group of individual experts in different and diverse areas of knowledge. This environment of diversity propitiates the development of sub-cultures (Howell & Annansingh, 2013) transforming these communities in complex social organizations composed by diverse cultures, predominating the academic freedom and autonomy (Sporn, 1996), where close control can induce negative reactions (Starbuck, 1992).

Knowledge in academic context is created by different forms and is related to the experience and competence of their teachers and researchers, without any coordination or management in line with a specific strategy. Geuna and Muscio (2009, p. 99) add that “the characteristics of individual researchers have a stronger impact than the characteristics of their departments or universities”. According to Tian et al. (2009), basically, in the creation process of new knowledge academics reach required knowledge from three dimensions (scientific, social, and creative) and can be supported from four knowledge sources (supervisor or professor adviser, colleagues, self-study, and outside scholars).

The created knowledge becomes explicit through articles, patents, books, conferences, classes, etc. In the meantime, part of this created knowledge is kept in the tacit form.

An effective KM in academic context is possible. However, the organizational atomization observed in the universities imposes importance in paying attention to a culture that encourages KM and also assigns equal importance to the cooperation and the teamwork (Bjørnson & Dingsøyr, 2008; Howell & Annansingh, 2013; Sporn, 1996).

Thus, in order to provide knowledge-intensive inputs to companies, government and to society (Schmitz, Teza, Dandolini, & Souza, 2014), as pointed out by Kidwell et al. (2000), the academia have to move from the old culture that considers, “What is in it for me?” to a new one “What is in it for our customer?”.

From a critical analysis derived from the literature on the KM in the academia, the purpose of this chapter is an exploratory study that identifies the main cultural challenges in the development and implementation of knowledge management processes in the academic context. The chapter also aims to address some further research directions.

In this chapter the authors address the non-profit academies, since the for-profit institutions tend to reflect more similar characteristics to business organizations (Kezar, 2001).

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