KM in Higher Education: Modeling Student Help-Avoidance Behaviors and Performance

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ABSTRACT
The application of corporate knowledge management (KM) practices such as customer relationship management (CRM) within the academic environment is considered within the sphere of student relationship management (SRM). By engaging in SRM, key issues such as student help-avoidance behaviors can be proactively addressed to ensure academic achievement and success. This study describes the development of a structural model to investigate how student help-avoidance is related to perceived academic performance. We based our model on one developed by Butler (1998) which includes autonomous orientation, ability-focused orientation, and expedient orientation as three dimensions of the help-avoidance construct. Preliminary results of a survey of 130 undergraduate students taking an IT course indicate that besides the three dimensions of help-avoidance, students have other student- and instructor-specific perspectives of help-avoidance also exist.

Keywords: Knowledge management, higher education, student help-seeking, help-avoidance, academic performance, student relationship management, structural equation model.

1. INTRODUCTION
Knowledge management (KM) is a relatively new management activity which many companies have embraced in an attempt to meet the challenges of an increasingly global business environment to compete over customers. Even though some have questioned the view that educational institutions can be and indeed are in business (Bishton, 2005), the competitive wave is being experienced in educational institutions. More than ever before, higher educational institutions now have to compete for students. Competition is particularly fierce among those institutions that are moving away from research and putting more emphasis on teaching. For teaching-oriented institutions, the student is the focal entity. While the debate about the view of students -- as customers, products, or partners (Clyason & Heley, 2005; Obermiller, Fleernor, & Raven, 2005) is far from being over, for institutions that consider students as their “raison d’être,” the predominant view is that students are their customers.

The nature of the student-university relationship is highly debated and three orientations of students as customers (Clyason & Heley, 2005). These authors found that instructors preferred referring to students as products while students preferred being referred to as customers. However, both instructors and students “believe the other orientation prevails” (p. 27). In an earlier study students were more deterministic about being called customers, and the researchers concluded that the operation of higher education was consumer-driven (Delucchi & Korgen, 2002). The use of both customer and products orientations has been advocated (Conway & Yorke, 1991). Other think referring to students as customers clearly reflects marketing material for customers in the corporate world, the urge by university departments to write marketing plans, the requirement for students to complete customer-like surveys about their educational experiences including evaluation of instructors.

In an empirical study involving instructors and students, Obermiller et al. (2005) found that instructors preferred referring to students as products while students preferred being referred to as customers. However, both instructors and students “believe the other orientation prevails” (p. 27). In an earlier study students were more determinant about being called customers, and the researchers concluded that the operation of a higher education was consumer-driven (Delucchi & Korgen, 2002). The use of both customer and products orientations has been advocated (Conway & Yorke, 1991). Other think referring to students as customers prefers not to be appropriate (Franz, 1998; Bay & Daniel, 2001; Bishton, 2005; Clyason & Heley, 2005).

An emerging view of students as partners has been proposed (Bay & Daniel, 2001). Although we support this view, we contend that KM practices associated with CRM can be applied to the partnership under the appellation of SRM as previously discussed.

2.2 Student-University Relationship
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2.2 Student Help-Avoidance and Styles of Help-Seeking Behaviors
When faced with a problem, between the alternatives of giving up or persisting unsuccessful alone and seeking help, it has been recommended that seeking help is the most valuable thing to do (Newman, 1991). Failure to heed to the foregoing...
recommendation may be due to several factors, including consideration that the cost of help-seeking outweighs the benefits of help-avoidance (Nadler, 1997), striving for independent mastery (Butler & Neuman, 1995), culture; where students tend to avoid embarrassment (Hambrecht, 2006), and reward; where high achieving students seek help for personal difficulties related to course work (Taplin, Yum, Jegede et al., 2001).

Other studies have pointed out that seeking or avoiding help, especially in computer mediated environments is dependent on the nature of learner-oriented factors such as help facilities (Bartholome, Stahl, Pierschl et al., 2006). Cognitive tutors have been developed in an attempt to help students learn to seek help (Aileen, McLaren, Roll et al., 2004). Evidence suggests that those who seek help have better learning outcomes, whereas those who really need help are less likely to seek help (Ryan, Ghee, & Midgley, 1998).

Help-avoidance have been characterized as a multidimensional construct and studied in relationship with the style of help-seeking behaviors (Butler, 1998). The help-avoidance construct has three dimensions – autonomous orientation, ability-focused orientation, and expedient orientation. The author defined autonomous help-avoidance orientation as striving for independent mastery; ability-focused as desiring to mask incompetence, and expedient orientation as reluctance to seek help attributed to the perception that asking for help will not expedite the task. The author used the model to investigate the relationship between help-avoidance and academic performance. The results of the study would provide management indicators for the establishment of SRM programs geared at understanding and eliminating help-avoidance. SRM will foster help-seeking behaviors of students for two potential benefits – instructors are able to fill gaps in student knowledge and adapt teaching, both of which should contribute to student achievement and success.

5. PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND FUTURE WORK
Preliminary analysis of the responses to the qualitative question requesting students to state one reason why they believe students do not ask for help indicate some student-oriented reasons such as students being lazy, students not wanting to learn, not caring if they get it right, scared and preserve self-respect, think attention being bad, and not wanting to slow progress. Instructor-oriented reasons cited include expectation of students to know certain things ahead of time and sometimes, instructor tells everything but the answer to the question asked.

Future work will focus on analyzing the data and examining the results to see if the three dimensional model of help-avoidance is applicable to higher educational environments. Results from the study would provide management indicators for the establishment of SRM programs geared at understanding and eliminating help-avoidance. SRM will foster help-seeking behaviors of students for two potential benefits – instructors are able to fill gaps in student knowledge and adapt teaching, both of which should contribute to student achievement and success.

6. REFERENCES
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