

Chapter 25

Beyond Knowledge Management: An Extended Model of Knowledge Governance

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ABSTRACT

The authors outline trends in managing knowledge, introduce the emerging framework of knowledge governance, and expand its scope. The major approaches of classical knowledge management, distilled to cook-book definitions and consultant practices, are increasingly viewed as inadequate in addressing the growing complexity of information and knowledge flows in modern organizations and societies dealing with rapidly changing environments. Reflecting a new normative push towards conceptual innovation, knowledge governance has emerged as a new paradigm to describe, understand, and analyze the expanding “knowledge domain” in a holistic and comprehensive way. Knowledge governance involves the design of structures and mechanisms to support the processes of sharing and creating knowledge. Knowledge governance has two main interpretation levels in the literature: the company- (micro-) and the national (macro-) level. The authors propose a three-layer model adding a layer of “global” knowledge governance. Analyzing and separating the main issues in this way, we can reformulate the focus of knowledge governance research and practice in all layers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management (KM) has existed since time immemorial in various informal and formal ways. However, in recent times, the interactive confluence of several factors: rapid creation of or-

ganizational knowledge, the growth of information and knowledge networks supported by dramatic advances in communication and information technologies, globalization, and the rising awareness of the commercial value of organizational knowledge (Prusak, 2001) has put the spotlight on the need for improving KM.

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Basically, KM is concerned with methods, strategies, and technologies to effectively create, represent, retain, integrate, share, and distribute both tacit and explicit knowledge in an organization. Though there are many schools of thought covered under the broad umbrella of knowledge management (Lloria, 2008) and there are some disagreements about definitions and approaches, broadly speaking, the core components of KM include people, processes, technology, culture and structure depending on the perspective (Spender & Scherer, 2007).

The focus of early efforts in KM was on technologies to store, capture, and distribute knowledge in an organization. In the next wave, the focus shifted to behavior, culture and tacit knowledge, but the development was more conceptual than practical. Newer movements and initiatives include communities of practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) that emphasize practicality, and other attempts to go beyond the knowledge aspects of the traditional organization to encompass broader sources. These emerging waves reflect the new reality that the main methodologies and approaches of classical knowledge management, distilled to cook book definitions and consultant practices, are becoming inadequate and inefficient to address the growing complexity of information and knowledge flows that include such types and forms of knowledge as reflective knowledge, meta-level knowledge, inter organizational knowledge, and macrostructures of knowledge.

Reflecting a new normative push for conceptual innovation, the current wave is seeing the emergence of a new paradigm to describe, understand, and analyze the expanding “knowledge domain” in a holistic and comprehensive way. This overarching framework called knowledge governance draws from and builds upon knowledge management and may be seen as a kind of meta-layer of knowledge management. The concept of knowledge governance first started with the premise that organizational processes involving knowledge creation, use, retention and sharing can be governed consciously for meeting

desired ends. The concept evolved over the years and in its most recent form knowledge governance “aims at managing knowledge processes in and across organisations” (Beckman, 2009) or “refers to choosing structures and mechanisms that can influence the processes of sharing and creating knowledge (Foss, 2009).” Knowledge governance has two main interpretation levels in the literature: the company- (micro-) and the national (macro-) level. In this paper, we propose a three-layer model adding a layer of “global” knowledge governance. Analyzing and separating the main issues in this way, as we will show, we can go beyond organizational knowledge management and reformulate the focus and agenda of knowledge governance research and practice in all layers.

This paper is organized as follows: we first outline a few forerunner schools and related directions within knowledge management, analyzing the emerging information governance approach, which is a pre-cursor as well as a subset of knowledge governance. Next, we provide a brief survey of the moderately short history of the emerging knowledge governance approach. Then, we propose an extended model for future knowledge governance research. Lastly, we conclude with future issues and implications.

2. RELATED APPROACHES

Many approaches have attempted to address the intersection of organization and knowledge processes in different ways. To illustrate, we briefly survey some historic to recent ideas and schools in rough chronological sequence keeping in mind that no attempt is being made to be comprehensive and not all these frameworks are described necessarily at the same level of abstraction.

2.1. Management Cybernetics

Taking birth during the systems movement, cybernetics is a broad interdisciplinary field that examines the design and function of all types

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