APPROACHES TO KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Educational, learning and research organizations are faced with challenging situation of managing knowledge. The paper highlights different approaches of knowledge management through knowledge sharing that can be followed in educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is one of the most important resources in an organization, be it academic, research, business or industrial organization. Social and economic progress is achieved by many countries principally through the advancement and application of knowledge [1]. In educational institutions, knowledge is present in individual faculty, researchers, administrators and decision-makers and other published sources such as books, journals, course material, curriculum and research reports, etc. The published sources are knowledge assets of an organization and these traditional knowledge assets are being converted into electronic form which can be easily preserved, accessed and reused to strengthen the community of researchers and organizational performance. Knowledge management with the help of information and communication tools improves the organizational efficiency and offers opportunities to share existing knowledge. Knowledge rich organizations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets. One of the most important knowledge management activities of any academic organization is to collect and disseminate knowledge in the organization.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT & HIGHER EDUCATION

Unlike the corporate world, there is a need to develop systematic and organized knowledge management systems in higher education. A study by Kidwell, Vander Linde, and Johnson shows that there is no organized knowledge management system in several institutions of higher education [2]. Laudon and Laudon state that higher education is all about the creation, transformation and transmission of knowledge [3]. Higher education organizations are the reservoirs of knowledge and the potential of knowledge can be utilized if it is organized and managed in a systematic and effective way.

Most of the organizations never give preference to internal knowledge, and most of the past knowledge is lost through attrition and changes in the organization. Much knowledge and knowledgeable resources remain unidentified, unrecorded, uncodified and unutilized in the absence of a system. It is the duty of information manager or knowledge manager to develop mechanisms to identify, map internal expertise, record, store and utilize the internal as well as external resources and share these through Intranets for creating value.

SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

It has been reported that knowledge management is not a project that begins and ends but an ongoing and evolving change in the way an organization operates [4]. Norris et al says that many academics and educators hold some types of knowledge in high regard and they respect the highly personalized knowledge that academics and practicing professionals have accumulated. There has always been academic collaborations but there is little systematic sharing of learning content, context and supporting materials. Many times knowledge

generated by research activities often stays within a laboratory or research team and rarely crosses disciplinary boundaries. In most academic settings, knowledge resides in archipelagos of individual knowledge clusters, unavailable for systematic sharing. Yet such defiance of the networked world will soon be unsustainable [5].

Organizations thus must identify key approaches to share the existing knowledge across the organization to achieve the desired goals. Some approaches to sharing knowledge have been discussed below.

Talks and Discussions

Organizations must arrange talks and discussions on the latest developments and complex issues to generate new ideas and collaboration. Such interactions can be fruitful and bring useful results for the betterment of the organization. Weekly talks and discussions among faculty and intellectuals in the organizations create a knowledge sharing culture in the organization. Organizations should take an initiative to create an environment to refine, reinvent and interpret knowledge and develop sharing and open exchange of ideas, emotions and behavior. Knowledge is a social construct and it originates and spreads with the interaction and communication to each other or with others. Interaction and knowledge sharing give a new dimension to the existing knowledge.

Lectures

Lectures in the classrooms and training programmes give a new direction to generate the knowledge. Knowledge can be created by asking questions and watching the responses that provoke an environment of conversations, responses and interactions. During classroom lectures sometimes new ideas are created and developed through interaction between the teacher and students and these become the issues of debates, discussions and create knowledge. The brain storming sessions must be recorded in the form of knowledge repositories. Sometimes question-answer sessions also create very thought-provoking and enthusiastic environment for the creation of new ideas and knowledge.

Debates and Conversations

Access of knowledge can be enhanced from the heads of few intellectuals to the other workers of the organization through better interaction and sharing and it is widely diffused around the organization through debates and conversations on the complex issues. Now-a-days most of the knowledge enterprises are paying more attention to capture the tacit knowledge and insights which comes to light through communication, interaction, collaboration and innovation. Tacit knowledge remains in the minds, expertise and experience of the people and it is communicated and shared through conversations and debates on complex issues.

Conferences, Workshops and Seminars

Conferences and workshops offer good results to solve the real world issues. Besides they offer an opportunity to discuss the issues through face-to-face conversation. In addition to conferences and seminars, sharing knowledge through exhibitions, demonstrations and training sessions can also be carried out effectively.

Appreciate the Talents at Workplace

To develop the successful knowledge sharing culture in the organization, there is a great need to attract and motivate the intellectuals to share the knowledge across the organization. Knowledgeable persons are instinctively reluctant, unwilling and hesitate to share their knowledge with others. They must be encouraged to contribute more information and knowledge to the knowledge management pool of the organization. It will not only enable recognition of their expertise in respective fields but will enhance their respect and recognition among juniors, counterparts and employers. Incentive schemes and rewards sometimes prove helpful to retain intellectuals, experts and knowledge workers from leaving the organization.

Knowledge Sharing Workspace

Web space collaboration applications are new tools which enhance the communication and knowledge

sharing capabilities for intellectual works. Through dynamic sharing environment, an organization can become more productive and responsive by providing access to critical resources. Other collaboration tools such as e-mail, web conferencing, discussion groups, alerts, workflow and document sharing are essential components of knowledge management. These tools offer resource sharing among faculty, researchers and administrators of various units of the organization. This approach assists to preserve, leverage and share the tacit knowledge easily and effectively – both inside and beyond the firewall. Web space in the organization offers a rich information sharing environment to workout the critical issues and is a powerful way to get work done in a more systematic and effective way. It eliminates the geographic boundaries by providing online workplace to the team of faculty, research scholars, planners and intellectuals working in the organization to accomplish the mission together online to collaborate on policies, procedures, documents, issues, discussions, complicated tasks, evaluations and assessments.

In competitive environment, it is important that people access information, databases and share the same when they need. This can be done only if organization has good IT infrastructure and shared space. It integrates employees and knowledge workers with each other on a single and open platform. The users can work together and respond more quickly, accurately and efficiently in single point of access. Having access to timely and accurate information is key when helping faculty with their technical and complicated decisions.

Intranet, Extranet and Internet

Organizations must develop the strategy to capture, nurture and strengthen the Intranet activities of the organization to handle various types of internal knowledge and expertise among employees. Major goal of any knowledge management system is to structure the unstructured information scattered in the organizational units in such fashion that can be easily accessed and shared in the organization. Knowledge Management team should train the faculty, administrators and management to access and use the tools and information to make effective

use of sharing in the organization. This team should also be involved in designing and developing knowledge management system according to their work culture so that research studies, data analysis and other information tools could be utilized in pursuit of excellence.

Lot of full-text information that is available in the organization can be made available on the Intranet and Internet. All kinds of forms used in the organization should be made available in HTML and Portable Document Format (PDF) on Intranet. These forms can be updated and reviewed by the administrators and decision makers on Intranet before uploading on the Web. Moreover, other documentation activities can be generated and updated from time to time. Other full-text online Indian and foreign databases, current contents of periodicals subscribed by the library, indexing databases, national and international reports can be linked with the Intranet to provide round-the-clock access.

Every organization must emphasize to build a system which could capture the organization's internal knowledge and integrate the same with useful outside knowledge such as educational news from the Web and e-mail communications with intellectual groups, discussions, talks, etc. The main purpose of the Intranet is to create one-stop-pool for knowledge rather than having to go to several places for the information needed. The site can also feature other organizational information such as budget information, financial benefits, work-in-progress documents, sale of documents, archived e-mail discussions of internal and external intellectuals, data and manpower directory, etc. Outdated, irrelevant and inaccurate data and information should be removed from the Intranet on the feedback of users. Moreover, other information which cannot be uploaded on the Web site is accessible and shared on Intranet, e.g. online databases and information about official circulation. Sharing of ideas on Intranet radically improve an organization's development and breaks communication barrier across the organization.

To disseminate or access the information beyond the firewall, a password-protected extranet enables

the faculty, research scholars and decision makers to share the internal and external pool of information and knowledge with the colleagues all over the world. They can contribute information to the knowledge pool from any part of the world. In an organizational environment, Intranet can act as a facilitator in the knowledge managing process by harnessing tacit knowledge on an intra organizational Web.

Greater Room for People to take Risks and Experiment

Experiments and innovations are the sources of creating new knowledge. Organizations must offer greater room to intellectuals and faculty to take risks and experiments for innovations and new projects. This will be a base for the creation of new knowledge. This autonomy leads the professionals to give a new direction for the development of knowledge. Sometimes people don't take risks to nurture and promote innovative culture of learning and sharing of knowledge due to professional jealousies. Autonomy to organizations offers opportunities to new ideas without any fear.

CONCLUSION

Educational and research institutions are reservoirs of knowledge and there is great scope to apply knowledge management practices in these organizations to facilitate sharing of knowledge across the organization. The future of these institutions not only depends on the acquisition, storage, publication and retrieval but also on how the knowledge is filtered, organized and shared to achieve their mission and goals. Knowledge networks of the educational organizations should be equipped with the next generation of tools, perspectives, e-knowledge, skilled manpower and practices of knowledge sharing.

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