Knowledge Management- An Overview

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Introduction
The changing nature of global business climate has made "knowledge" to emerge as an important phenomenon of today’s global economy and managing knowledge, has grown to be imperative for company’s success. Recently knowledge has been recognized as one of the most significant resources of organizations. The capturing of an organization’s knowledge facilitates an organization remain competitive and can help an organization continue to exist in the business world of today. ‘Knowledge’ can be defined as a fluid mix of experience, values, contextual information and expert insight that offers a framework for assessing and incorporating new experiences and information.

Management gurus like Tom Peters, Gary Hamel, Peter Drucker and CK Prahalad have given several prescriptions to deal with the changing business scenario in an effective manner. The essence of their recommendations is that organizations should become more flexible, lean, flat and learn to be responsive to face the new challenges of the century. The critical resource of business organization is information and knowledge possessed for proactive customer management (Waman S.Jawadekar, 2011). This research paper aims to trace the evolution and drivers of knowledge management and to investigate in to the recent trends adopted by the organizations in managing knowledge asset in organizations.

Objectives
- To trace the evolution and growth of knowledge management
- To study the recent trends adopted by the knowledge organizations

Methodology
The present study adopts the exploratory research design; it explores in to the past research works undertaken in the field of knowledge management in order to fulfill the objectives of the study. The research works and the conference reports that discusses the theoretical aspects of knowledge management namely evolution, benefits, process and approaches and the practical aspects namely current trends, issues, challenges and the strategies to cope up with the dynamic business environment have been reviewed and the discussions are summarized.

Evolution of Knowledge Management
Kimiz Dalkir has documented the origin and growth of knowledge management discipline in the book entitled “Knowledge Management in Theory and Practice”. This section throws light on the history of KM from the view of Kimiz.

The phrase “knowledge management” entered popular usage in the late 1980s (e.g., conferences in KM began appearing, books on KM were published, and the term began to be seen in business-oriented journals), KM has been around for many decades. Librarians, philosophers, teachers, and writers have long been making use of many of the same techniques. However, it could also be argued that knowledge management has been around far longer than the actual term has been in use.

Variety of disciplines and domains have blended together to emerge as knowledge management. Management theorists who have contributed significantly to the evolution of KM include Peter Drucker, Peter Senge, Ikujiro Nonaka, Hirotaka Takeuchi, and Thomas Stewart. In the early
1960s, Drucker was the first to coin the term “knowledge worker” in 1964. Senge (1990) focused on the “learning organization” as one that can learn from past experiences stored in corporate memory systems. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) studied how knowledge is produced, used, and diffused within organizations and how such knowledge contributed to the diffusion of innovation. A number of people, perceiving the value of measuring intellectual assets, recognized the growing importance of organizational knowledge as a competitive asset.

Milestones in the development of modern technology offer another perspective on the history of KM: industrialization beginning in 1800, transportation technologies in 1850, communications in 1900, computerization in the 1950s, virtualization in the early 1980s, and the early efforts at personalization and profiling technologies in 2000.

With the advent of the information or computer age, KM has come to mean the systematic, deliberate leveraging of knowledge assets. The design and development of such knowledge-based systems like expert system, intelligent tutoring system have much to offer knowledge management, which also aims at the capture, validation, and subsequent technology-mediated dissemination of valuable knowledge from experts. Books on knowledge management began to appear by the early 1990s, and the field picked up momentum in the mid-1990s with the development of a number of large, international KM conferences and consortia.

At the 24th World Congress on Intellectual Capital Management in January 2003, a number of KM gurus united in sending out a request to academia to “pick up the KM torch.” Among those attending the conference were Karl Sveiby, Leif Edvinsson, Debra Amidon, Hubert Saint-Onge, and Verna Allee. They made a strong case that KM had up until now been led by practitioners “problem-solving by the seat of their pants” and that it was now time to focus on transforming KM into an academic discipline, promoting doctoral research in the discipline, and providing a more formalized training for our future practitioners. Today, universities around the world offer courses in KM, and many business and library schools offer degree programs in KM.

The literatures in business research clearly define the transformation starting with agrarian economy, followed by industrial economy and now HR-Knowledge economy. The shift from production based to a knowledge-based economy (k-economy), the growth of information communications technology (ICT), the urge to become learning organisations and the emergence of knowledge workers (k-workers) have changed the strategy, systems and processes of doing a business. Development of new strategies and systems required the effective management of knowledge embedded in the human capital of the organisations.

Emerging Trends in India

In India over all, 75% of business organizations had or were seeing a knowledge management policy in place, 19% had not any program in place but were conscious about knowledge management and the rest 6% did not have a knowledge management program as well as were not conscious about knowledge management and its benefits to business. Different business organizations implemented Knowledge Management program at different extent. Around 12.5% organization had Knowledge Management as an integral part of their business process and the value of organizational knowledge is reported to their stakeholders. 31.5% organizations have integrated the knowledge management strategy with some technical or cultural issues. 37.5% organizations are utilizing knowledge management procedures to achieve known benefits and 50% organizations have initiated knowledge in a non-uniform manner with pilot approaches in place. 50% organizations have no knowledge management strategy in place for achieving overall organizational goals. However, the implementation falls short of a full Knowledge Management program (Vibha Thakur and Swarnangini Sinha, 2013).

Chandana Goswami (2008) portrayed the Knowledge Management (KM) in practice by some companies like Nerolac, paint-maker, Larson & Toubro, Infosys Technologies and Wipro Infotech. The researcher has clearly highlighted the origin, need for the KM and the benefits of KM implementation. In case of Nerolac, it embraced the KM system to capture knowledge from purchase
patterns of customers and dealer insights in terms of perception of the product and similar substitute products. The company faced a strategic challenge in designing an interface which will permit easy trapping of customer information. Know Net – the knowledge management portal of Larson & Toubro was set up to roll out real world construction projects at lower costs. At L&T each employee in the organization has accumulated experience over the years and has unknowingly used it for problem solving or creating strategies and the challenge was in getting people to know ‘what they know’ and then share it with others, make it articulate and explicit. Infosys Technologies (software producer) uses its KM system to capture and template permanently the learnings from projects because software professionals tend to be mobile. Infosys has conceived, developed and deployed internally an elaborate architecture for KM, that aims to take the company to a ‘Learn Once, Use Anywhere’ paradigm. The challenge was to create direct people-to-people sharing mechanism. Wipro Infotech has the model of building innovation through Learning Building Capacity Knowledge Extraction Enhancement & Practice (KEEP) to collect the disparate knowledge and expertise within organization and Competency Augmentation through Research (CARE) to leverage on expertise and knowledge built up to come up with innovative products and services. Thus as stated by World Bank, India is well positioned to take advantage of the knowledge revolution to accelerate growth and competitiveness. India will be judged by the extent to which it lays down the appropriate ‘rules of the game’ that will enable it to marshal its human resources, strengths in innovation and global niches in IT to improve overall economic and social development and transform itself into a knowledge driven economy (Waman S. Jawadekar, 2011).

Road Ahead

The discussions in the conference organized by the “Organisation of Economic Cooperation Development” (OECD) stated that the competitive advantage of firms will ever more rely on their ability to apply new knowledge to new products, processes and organizational forms. However, the knowledge that is embedded in firms and in persons cannot be easily transferred to other firms and organizations. New knowledge workers must increasingly feature flexibility, adaptability, team play, issue-based versus discipline or hierarchy based structures, mobility, and configurative awareness. The conference also emphasized for more understanding is clearly needed of the linkages in the knowledge system, of the flow of knowledge between firms, government departments, universities, and people. This flow is vital to network building, and network building is part of the problem solving that leads to new knowledge which can be shared by members of the network. The network is a stock of social capital and a facilitator of knowledge generation, transmission and use. Hierarchies are also stores of social capital, and the more stable hierarchical structure should not be excluded from the analysis of knowledge activities. In many organizations there are functions which require a well-defined division of labour, a hierarchical reporting relationship, and Taylorist quality control measures. If the understanding of knowledge management is to move beyond the case study, official statisticians must, with knowledge management practitioners, develop taxonomies of knowledge management activities, with the elements sufficiently well defined so that they can be used in surveys to produce aggregate statistics which can then be used to support the policy process, and the public policy debate. Additionally a knowledge manager in an intercultural context especially needs to keep in mind:

- The language barriers hinder a common understanding and a proper communication, even within the organisation,
- Creating an inventory can be a good starting point but the KM process should be flexible enough to quickly focus on – sometimes even ad-hoc – identified bottlenecks,
- Formalizing processes won’t always work, informal processes could play an even bigger part in southern Africa compared to Europe – often these informal processes work fine.

Never ending study area can be the importance of informal processes. Studying the importance of enhancement of skills for operational and for higher level personnel could make sense – to be able to strengthen further development cooperation activities. Comparing different case studies helps to falsify wrongly made assumptions from singular observations. And always to be kept in mind: people, organisations and societies have survived for centuries
without western knowledge management. Changes cannot – and should not – be established within a short time frame. Cultural identities won’t change simply because people from outside tell what they think is better. Even external advisors won’t avoid to learn from working in an intercultural environment, thus – next to experiencing possible conflicts – also emending “… the prospects of business and private environments that are labelled by cultural diversity.” (Nobert Herman, 2011)

Conclusion

The literature has clearly portrayed the significance of managing knowledge that is embedded in the human assets of the organizations. Even though the organizations possess knowledge and realized the significance of the knowledge, the question now is how to make use of the knowledge in a systematic and useful way in order to build an innovative and learning organization that can easily identify, accept and adopt itself to the changing dynamics of the business environment. The solution rests with in the people of the organization itself, researchers and success stories of the knowledge organizations have highlighted the significant role of the people in the effective implementation of knowledge management. Most of the organizations focus on the technical aspect of the concept leaving behind the people that lead them in adverse direction. Thus the need for the hour is to develop and maintain a blended coordination among the people and the management to create a versatile knowledge culture with a space for creativity and innovation. Future researches can focus on the strategies and the requirements to build a unique and resourceful system.

References