KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Lecturer PhD Ecaterina Livia Tatar

Regional Department of Defense Resources Management

Abstract:
The hereby paper attempts to address aspects related to knwoledge management and its relevance to the personal and professioal development of employees under the current economic, social and cultural circumstances. Some of the aspects examined will refer to understanding the relationship between knowledge and learning, knowledge creation and sharing, intellectual capital and its role in ivreasing organizational performance and the concept of „knowledge workers".

Key words: knowledge management, intellectual capital, human resource development, mentoring.

1. Introduction

Never before have the economic, social, cultural and security paradigms changed in shorter spans of time. Whatever was valid and applicable yesterday is obsolete today, starting from managerial theories, practices and techniques and ending with lessons learned and new approaches to organizational realities. As a result,

"one of the received wisdoms in the strategic management literature is that organizations that are able to integrate disparate sources of knowledge across their boundaries will be those that survive and prosper. These disparate sources include not only formal, written or coded forms of knowledge but also the possession of some advantageous, intangible, knowledge-based assets" (Sparrow et al., 2004).

However, one should mention that the term "knowledge management" pertains to much deeper analysis, for it may encompass adjacent concepts and techniques such as intellectual capital, knowledge transfer, learning ability, job enrichment, mentoring, coaching etc. In more practical terms, it underpins organizational phenomena such as organizational change and/or transformation, "glocalization" (i.e. thinking at a big scale and acting according to the local needs and expectations), or market extension. The following sections of the paper will briefly present some of the relevant concepts and/or frameworks, with an emphasis on their practical and theoretical implications.

2. Knowledge management related terms, concepts or practices

A potential way to approach the aforementioned aspects is to formulate some questions whose answer(s) might represent solutions to knowledge management challenges, as follows:

1. Do knowledge based organizations have or require a certain type of structure? What features do they display? Should even more traditional, i.e., pyramidal or hierarchical organizations change their structure? Could this be a feasible

solution to the problems they may encounter under the current change-dominated circumstances?

2. Why do management theorists and practitioners regard knowledge as a strategic resource and tool to achieve organizational success? Must one necessarily relate knowledge and technology, or could one approach them separately? What is the meaning of intellectual capital and how does it subscribe to knowledge management?

3. What changes in terms of leadership and management styles does knowledge management imply? What management levels are most likely to embark on these changes? What is the risk of <u>not</u> doing it?

I hereby argue that answering these questions should throw at least a little light upon the dilemma of why and especially how to maximize the advantages of using knowledge management in order to increase individual and organizational performance. Therefore, the next subchapters will provide some personal opinions concerning these aspects.

2.1.   Do knowledge based organizations have or require a certain type of structure? What features do they display? Should even more traditional, i.e., pyramidal or hierarchical organizations change their structure? Could this be a feasible solution to the problems they may encounter under the current change-dominated circumstances?

According to one of the classical approaches to the relationship between organizational structure and organizational culture provided by Charles Handy (1985), there is a strong connection between the organizational structure and the organizational culture it practices, in the sense that they influence mutually and in turn affect the way in which the organization reacts to change, external environment and internal turmoil. From this point of view, there seems to be little doubt, if any, that strongly hierarchical structures with bureaucratic culture have a propensity to resistance to change, lack of flexibility and reluctance to adapt to changes. Moreover, the key players in the organization regard information as a power retention tool, which makes them into gatekeepers rather than knowledge sharers. One may thus conclude that only agile organizations will be prone to adapt knowledge management and use it as a strategic tool to implement and foster an innovative culture.

2.2. Why do management theorists and practitioners regard knowledge as a strategic resource and tool to achieve organizational success? Must one necessarily relate knowledge and technology, or could one approach them separately?

A short answer to this question is yes, knowledge and technology are related and they play a pivotal role in achieving organizational performance because they are both important forces that drive organizational success. Management practice has shown that organizations that invest in research and development, as well as in their people's education and training programs are more likely to perform up to the required standards and even to exceed their customers' expectations, which leads to achieving excellence in their field of activity. It is in this context that the concept of intellectual capital gains relevance, for it results from how knowledge is made, transferred, used and exploited to its full potential.

Also, one must distinguish between *tacit* knowledge, which is embedded in people and represented by their knowledge and skills acquired by means of learning, education and training, *structural capital*, which consists of the organization's hardware, software, databases, brands etc., and *relational capital*, which is the relationship between the organization and its external environment, that is, customers, suppliers, stakeholders in general etc. (Martin, 2006). Given the depth and width of knowledge implications, therefore, one may infer that knowledge is essentially a human masterpiece, which explains why the new knowledge dominated economy depends on the quality and management of people.

2.3. What changes in terms of leadership and management styles does knowledge management imply? What management levels are most likely to embark on these changes? What is the risk of <u>not</u> doing it?

Some levers can be triggered in order to ensure that knowledge management is put in practice, for instance: quality circles, adequate human resource management practices, job enrichment, assessing and measuring individual and organizational performance. This requires intense and honest communication across the organization and full commitment of the top managers. Unless these pre-requisites are put in place, the whole effort will lack credibility and will be doomed to fail.

Considering the previously mentioned aspects, it is not surprising that knowledge-based enterprises have been created to clearly indicate that the new type of organizations rely heavily on the use of knowledge, although every organization has always relied on knowledge to various extents.

As far as the management practices used in knowledge-based enterprises are concerned, I would like to bring forward a widely popular technique: mentoring. Numerous successful organizations have applied it for decades, and it permeates all levels of the organization. Consequently, the present paper argues that this technique should be adopted by more and more organizations, regardless of whether they are private or public, military or civilian.

2.4. Characteristics of good mentors and advantages of mentoring

In today's organization, which no longer provides its employees with the comfort of job security and predictable career paths, it is clear that it is every employee's responsibility to take care of his/her career progress. While this is frequently put down to one's own individual educational background, skills, experience, needs and expectations, it so happens that staff also need guidance and advice in terms of professional queries. In most of the cases, these issues can be addressed by the human resources expert. There are other cases, however, when much more subtle, intangible counseling is needed, namely, mentoring, for a mentor "is someone trusted and off-line, who can act as sounding board, critical friend, guide and advisor" (Clutterbuck, 1996). One should not assume that the mentor will take decisions for someone else, but rather the mentor will help his/her mentee take charge of his/her own career.

It is obvious that every mentoring relation is different, for every individual is different in terms of their education, behaviors and motivations. Nevertheless, one can pinpoint some commonalities in this bond, such as: good mentors do a significant amount of listening in order to help the mentee clarify things, tell people about the moments when they themselves felt insecure or confused, support other in developing new perspectives on the realities they are facing, help the mentee make sense of the organizational culture and

personal culture in order to secure the psychological contract between him/herself as an employee and his/her employer. In other words, it is all about helping the mentee discover and develop as an autonomous individual and professional, and not about imposing the mentor's ideas upon the mentee in a ruthless attempt to create a younger clone of the mentor.

Considering what an effective mentor should be able to do, one may wonder what personal characteristics he/she should display. From the viewpoint, we may state that a mentor is very much like a leader, that is, both born and made. Empathy, people skills, listening and planning skills, maturity, confidence, competence and respectability – all contribute to delineating the profile of a good mentor. Mention should be made that the mentor does not have to be the mentee's peer or boss. As Clutterbuck (1996) points out, there are some excellent examples of mentors one or two hierarchical levels below their mentees. What counts is the quality and relevance of the experience they pass on" (p. 13).

3. Conclusion

The previous sections of this paper have briefly presented some thoughts on the importance and benefits of knowledge management in the current context of technology-dominated and net-centric business world, followed by a short overview of mentoring as a means to share knowledge across the organization. The experience gained by many successful organizations in the western economies shows that mentoring has become more and more popular during the last decades because it is a mutually beneficial endeavor for both parties who embark on it: on the one hand, the mentee has the chance to learn from a role model in order to progress in his/her own career. On the other hand, the mentors have the chance to enjoy personal satisfaction at supporting someone else grow and succeed while learning a great deal from their mentees.

Regardless of the hierarchical level where the mentoring relationship has been established, everyone involved in the process gains benefits – both the individuals and the organization itself, which is why the most reputed management theorists and practitioners "are developing a set of diagnostic tool to help organizations and individuals manage all the processes involved" (p. 13).

Last but not least, one should mention that having a mentor is already a critical requirement in individual career management, whereas being a mentor at some point in one's career is rapidly becoming a career essential, too.

References:

[1] Sparrow, P. R., *Globalizing Human Resources Management*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 157.
[2] Handy, C. B., *Understanding Organizations*, 3rd Edition, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1985
[3] Martin, G., *Managing people and organizations in changing contexts*, Elsevier Ltd., 2006 p. 266.
[4] Clutterbuck, D., *Will you be my mentor?*, Modern Management, June 1996, p. 12.