

The Writing on The Wall

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Abstract

Perhaps the concept of knowledge management has traversed a long journey than any other concept of management so far. Many of them have been the hype and fad owing to the way they were treated and observed by the professionals over the years. Could that happened to the concept of KM? This paper addresses such question broadly and similar issues in view of the future of knowledge management. Some issues of KM today and for tomorrow like its status, the massive generation and ubiquity of literature, Research trends, structuring, professional identity, integration of disciplines, technological issues, people side of KM and the like have been addressed using a standard methodology for suggesting how the future is likely to be using the futurological methodology. There is no doubt the future seems a mix of uncertainty and unhappiness since the contribution of km to the stakeholders internally and externally is elusive. Thus, implications for upholding KM for next version have been drawn.

I. Introduction

The phenomenon of knowledge creation, knowledge codification, knowledge preservation and perpetuation, utilization among wider constituents of business has been in existence since the beginning of industrial revolution. However, its professional avatar and the acceptance of it as a part of organizational structure has been since the last two decades. In the beginning of its making inroads into the organisation, it had witnessed resistance for its acceptance. Further the professionals in KM were disillusioned having entered into it. Pollard (2005) stated that there are two kinds of professionals in KM. The first kind of them are very imaginative, creative, intuitive, bold, assertive and extremely

outgoing and willing to share and diffuse the resources of knowledge and the like across the length and breadth of the organisation. In this paper, the most important issues challenging the future of knowledge management in modern organisation have been raised and addressed. Firstly, the status of knowledge management has been addressed, followed by the situation of publications of Knowledge Management works around the world. The Research trends in Knowledge Management have been consequently addressed. What should be the Structure of Knowledge Management has also been addressed. The Professional Identity of Knowledge management professionals and the profession itself is confusing. Integration of Disciplines is yet another challenge when all

the multi-disciplines converge at one place in organisation. Such issues are addressed. Technology obsession and KM in future has also been addressed. Lastly, the people Side of KM has been discussed since this issue is crucial determinant of the successful implementation of KM.

1. Status of Knowledge Management

Despite creating the function of KM while establishing as a full-fledged department and evolving structures for the department, its status is still not reckoned with in modern organisation including businesses of variant nature. There is no one better method of practicing knowledge management either by an organization or by an individual. Further, there is no standard job description for the role of the knowledge management professional: Consistent body of knowledge is still missing or still being built despite two decades of its formal existence. The literature, professional orientation, and educational opportunities related to knowledge management are diffuse.

Miller (2005) analyzed and stated that the concept has transited from corporate knowledge management to personal knowledge management during the period in which "knowledge workers facing ever-increasing sources of knowledge . . . need to find solutions to manage knowledge at the personal level." Miller (2005) also stated that personal knowledge management as being both structurally and functionally separate from corporate knowledge management and, as such, in need of completely distinct solutions.

2. Publications of Knowledge Management

Google search resulted in millions of pages on knowledge management. A large majority

of them are purely digital publications. Around one third of them are in the print media scanned and stored in the commercial database. This sounds quite positive since intensive work is going on in this domain of management. However, one common observation is that most of these publications are either a mere replication or reporting of cases from different sectors of business across different countries and continents.

A handful of dedicated journals on knowledge management, either closed or open source ones are in the market place today. A cursory glance of such works was only conclusively to state that the publications are from diverse disciplines, the inconsistent trends and mostly in the form of case research works. Interestingly, of late, the works are tilted towards the software's and the technology which have made inroads into the domain of knowledge management.

3. Research in Knowledge Management

While reviewing the research studies published over the years, some observations are as follows. Firstly category of the research is more of exhorting in nature and prescriptive to the organisation for its adaptation into the business processes. The second round of work concentrated on successful implementation, with specific approaches, and techniques in particular settings. Emphasis was also laid on software's and hardware adaptations. Besides, very few of them have used standard research methods using quantitative analysis. Focus also was on quantification of intangibles, linkages to competitive advantage, capturing the capabilities, and so on.

4. Structure of Knowledge Management

Km professionals though have been very late in forming into associations for networking with each other and for strengthening the movement. Surprisingly, in our country, such efforts are still in nascent stage. The body of knowledge for KM to be considered as a profession is still to be reckoned with. Professional ethics are still considered to be in the infancy stage. This may be due to the reason that KM being a multidisciplinary system, it needs the involvement of professionals from diverse backgrounds. Since people of such backgrounds would tend to identify with their own professions, they might hesitate to be part of KM movement.

5. Professional Identity

Professional identity comes with certain standards applicable for all professionals as accepted in the society. Firstly, the profession should have a distinct body of knowledge, secondly, social recognition for social benefit. Thirdly, training and education institutions should be conducting short and long term training programmes for those who are interested in pursuing the profession. Fourthly, there should be a professional community which works for the furtherance or advancement of the profession in a given geographical confines. As of now, such qualities are not completely acquired by the KM, consequently, it is not a complete profession. Unless there are full-fledged courses offered it cannot be a profession recognized.

6. Integration of Disciplines

Since KM is a multidisciplinary domain, it is contributed by one too many professionals working in diverse organisation. Since they are diverse, it is difficult to integrate all of

them. For instance, the social sciences and the natural sciences are in conflict. The lack of understanding among both of them on one hand and the problems of ego clashes among them on the other hand makes it quite difficult for KM professionals to come to terms with each other and consequently reify the profession.

7. Technology Obsession

The commercialization of the software and the hardware on one hand the open source software movement which has already provides free software products of high utility value. The dilemma of using the software, the compatibility of such software, the platform of such software is very challenging issues.

8. People Side of KM

As covered other areas, but worth repeating here, you need to understand the people, both in terms of the legitimate needs they have regarding the change and also the personal concerns and potential responses.

- i) Stakeholders in Change: Who are they? How might they behave?
- ii) The Psychology of Change: How will they react when they are told?
- iii) Resistance to Change: How might they push back against the change?

Even the most casual observers of Knowledge Management, the profession, can appreciate the strong links that exist between KM and the equally active field of intellectual capital (IC). Thus, the relations are complex.

Moreover, KM processes, knowledge processes, and business processes are performed by decision-making, behaving agents. As we have seen, agents, if they are groups, have an internal culture, both subjective and objective. At the same time, the objective cultural component of social ecology also impacts agent decisions. Finally, knowledge and KM processes are

affected by culture through the influence it has on behavior constituting these processes. In turn, these processes are keys to producing new knowledge and consequently changes in objective and subjective culture.

"I'm more confident than ever about the importance—and the difficulty—of addressing the topic of knowledge worker productivity. Just remember: It's the Next Big Thing, and you heard it here first."

— Tom Davenport, CIO Magazine, Oct. 2003

II. Where do we go from here?

Dave Pollard, (2003) says The writing is on the wall for Knowledge Management, once the darling of business schools and business gurus, and the fastest growing area in Management Consulting. The evidence is everywhere:

1. budgets for KM have been slashed everywhere, and whole KM departments eliminated
2. many companies are now trying to outsource KM, no longer viewing it as a core competency
3. where at one time six of the top 10 best sellers at Books for Business were about KM, now very few KM titles even crack the list
4. writers are starting to predict 'the death of KM', lament 'where did KM go wrong' and even decry 'the autism of KM'
5. there are now fewer Chief Knowledge Officers in Fortune 500 companies than there were five years ago
6. half of the KM conferences scheduled in the past year in Toronto were cancelled for lack of interest

Table 1 : Future State of KM

Function	Future State
Research & Analysis	Researchers will provide personalized training in how to do research and analysis yourself; and will do less research themselves.
Intranet & Extranet	Personal weblog-based 'world of ends' architecture; anyone
Architecture Development & Management	can publish, anyone can subscribe, peer-to-peer browsing, expertise finders, knowledge mining and other 'social software'; Centrally-managed expert systems where processes are prescriptive; Extranet is an extension of the Intranet, with different permissioning protocols.
Community of Practice (CoP) Management	Self-managing communities and self-managed community tools and spaces (another 'social software' category).
Database Purchasing & Subscriptions	External databases and resources are subscribed to and accessible individually the same way internal weblogs are, with automatic tracking for volume rebate purposes.
Knowledge Training, Communication & Content Management	Personal, one-on-one scheduled training; each front-line worker selects their own taxonomy, organization and access (permissioning).

