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Abstract

The importance of knowledge sharing for sustainable competitive advantage has been emphasised by [1], [2] among others. Knowledge application enables the organization to provide good quality goods and services, improve productivity and innovation, improve delivery lead times, manage complexity and effectively respond to change. Competitiveness can be achieved through new ways of managing.[4],[5],[1],[6], among others have suggested movement away from bureaucratic management, process improvement, and enhanced customer knowledge, brainstorming for knowledge sharing as avenues for achieving sustainable competitive advantage. Additionally, [1], [2], [7], have emphasized the importance of new cultures based on transparency and trust, continuous learning, continuous employee development through coaching, mentorship and training. In order to encourage change of employee behaviour, [1], [5], [7], have emphasized use of human resource management approaches that encourage risk taking, recognises knowledge sources, and establishment of flexible reward systems based on team contribution. Managers are also encouraged to delegate responsibility, empower workers and provide task flexibility and autonomy. Technology can be used to share knowledge and improve interaction for value generation.

Key Words

Sustainable competitive advantage: continuous improvement in quality, creativity and efficiency [2]. **Knowledge:** is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information [2]. **Trust:** confidence in other's character and competencies [1]

1.0 Introduction

The importance of knowledge in enabling organizations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage cannot be overemphasised. A number of authors have explained the role of knowledge in enabling an organization to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, Awad and Ghaziri (2010), [1], Davenport and Prusak (2000)[2], Daft (2012)[3].The increasing recognition of knowledge arises from its benefits to an organization. Davenport and Prusak, [2], [1], have cited a number of benefits that knowledge contributes to organizational success. If properly harnessed, knowledge enables organization to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

This is because of the following reasons;

- 1) Knowledge enables the organization to meet consumers' demand for better quality goods and services.
- 2) Proper Knowledge use improves productivity, innovation and overall organizational performance.
- 3) Knowledge leads to improved business processes which minimises costs and shortens lead times in the delivery of goods and services.
- 4) Proper application of knowledge improves business profitability.
- 5) Proper use of knowledge guarantees organizational continuity.
- 6) It enables the organization to effectively utilize modern technologies.
- 7) It ensures that useful knowledge and experiences are shared to provide a guide to organizational decision making.
- 8) It enables the organization to speed up decision making.
- 9) It enables the organization to develop capacity to deal with complexity.
- 10) It enables organizations to quickly find solution to customer problems.
- 11) It enables the organization to effectively manage environmental risks.
- 12) It enables employees to gain respect and self fulfilment.
- 13) It enables organizations to adapt to change.
- 14) Proper use of knowledge enables an organization to achieve long-term success.
- 15) It enables the organization to achieve its potential by developing new knowledge and sharing it.

While the benefits of Knowledge to organizational success are clear, several factors hinder effective knowledge utilization in organizations. These include;

- 1) Managers lacking insights on existing knowledge.
- 2) Lack of proper systems of knowledge access and transfer in organizations.
- 3) Managers' lack of understanding of the functioning of knowledge markets.
- 4) Managers' pre-occupation with data to make critical decisions.
- 5) Lack of well established systems of passing over information.
- 6) Lack of collaboration and trust between managers and subordinates. This may require improvements in communication processes.
- 7) Managers having wrong values and beliefs which do not encourage knowledge sharing.
- 8) Inadequate investments in knowledge development and utilization.

- 9) Lack of opportunities for people to think, learn and share knowledge with each other. This occurs when managers overemphasize the use of procedures and rigid job descriptions.
- 10) Development of wrong organizational culture and climate.
- 11) Improves the employees' ability to organize.
- 12) Helps employees to effectively utilize new knowledge.
- 13) Helps employees and managers to make effective business decisions.

As a result of this, the full benefits of knowledge utilization are not realized in many organizations. This paper endeavours to identify the various approaches that can be used to enable organizations promote knowledge use for competitive advantage.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- 1) To identify the various Managerial factors that lead to ineffective knowledge utilization in Organizations.
- 2) To identify the Organizational factors that may impede effective knowledge utilization.
- 3) To identify individual factors that contributes to effective knowledge utilization in Organizations.

1.2 Materials and Methods

This Paper relies on secondary sources of data to analyze critical organizational and managerial factors that influence knowledge use to contribute to effective Organizational performance. Information has been sourced from published materials and conclusions drawn based on the analysis of causal relationships on the variables under investigation.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Reasoned Action

This theory was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975, 1980) is used to explain volitional behaviours as applied in knowledge sharing. It also explains why individuals develop the intention to share knowledge. The theory suggests that volitional behaviour is influenced by the individual's behaviour intention and the attitudes they have towards performing the behaviour and the subjective norms related to the behaviour. Subjective norms is the degree to which an individual perceives others approval of his or her behaviour. It is argued in this paper that managers have a great role to play in creating a work environment where employees can feel free to develop the right attitudes towards knowledge sharing. Since in many organizations work is structured in such a way that results can only be generated through cooperation and collaboration, naturally employees have positive expectations about the need to share knowledge. Despite these positive attributes, knowledge sharing is not guaranteed particularly in environments where roles are not clearly defined or where managerial practices are unresponsive in terms of facilitating knowledge sharing.

2.0 Results and Discussions

2.1 Knowledge creation and utilization for sustainable competitive advantage

For knowledge to offer sustainable competitive advantage to an organization, many factors must interact in different ways. These factors can be broadly clustered into managerial, Human resource, individual and technological factors.

2.1.1 Managerial factors

In Organizational settings, knowledge can be effectively utilized if Managers create the physical environments where knowledge can be created and shared. This environment should enable close interactions and building of long term relationships. This can be achieved through Organizational visioning, developing a shared identity, organizing work around teams, inspiring people to deliver new products and be accountable for results. Hislop (2009) [4], Schilling (2010)[5]. They also need to develop clear goals define the path to their attainment. In addition, they need to regularly appraise the organization so that they can understand how much and what type of knowledge they need [1], Laroche and Rutherford (2012) [6]. In addition employees should be allowed to apply what they know in the work processes. Focus may be on business process engineering, quality improvement and customer knowledge. Information can be obtained through brainstorming activities and application of the rule of the thumb [2]. Managers needs to develop business strategies supported by knowledge. This can happen if they focus more attention on research and development which will go a long way in delivering long-term success for the organization.

a) Developing the right culture, climate and values

For Knowledge to have long term benefits to the organization, managers need to develop a culture that rewards people based on their knowledge contributions and knowledge shared, constantly evaluating decisions to discover the level of knowledge applied, hiring people with high knowledge content, and educating employees on the value the organization places on knowledge creation and sharing[2]. In addition, managers need to develop a climate in which mistakes are tolerated to offer employees an opportunity to learn from their mistakes. This will encourage continuous learning and innovation. They also need to emphasize on the values of trust and transparency in management and day to day execution of organizational activities. The values of truth, teamwork and inspiring leadership should also be emphasized [1].

b) Developing the right structure

In order to encourage knowledge creation and sharing, there is need to move away from the traditional bureaucratic systems of managing and controlling organizations. Rigid controls destroy employees commitment to the organization and to the job, and negatively impacts on their passion and commitment. In addition, it creates fear, job insecurity and poor performance. This is because priority on knowledge acquisition is through training as coaching is largely ignored [1]. In changing the structure focus should be on the communication system so that information is directed at trying to discover what the organization needs to succeed rather than giving instructions and commands [2]). Additionally, more emphasis should be on the use of cross-functional teams to execute work. This will improve decision making and problem solving ability of the team members and expands their insights on the work situation which improves their creativity and innovation[1], Drucker (2011)[7]. Other benefits of using cross-functional teams include development of new products, new work processes, improved customer service and emergence of a better working environment. The overall advantage is to prevent knowledge diversion as would occur when employees transfer critical knowledge to other organizations where they may be employed as external consultants.

2. 1.2 Human resource management practices

Developing a learning organization can play a critical role in enabling the organization to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The human resource function can play leadership role in this activity through development of a range of programmes for example;

a) Recruitment and selection

In attracting employees into the organization, managers should hire people with experience, capacity and who are ready to learn and share knowledge. The employees should be willing to spare their time to learn. This is the only way to generate new knowledge and transfer validated knowledge into future activities [2].

b) Recognizing knowledge sources

The human resource function should help in identifying knowledge sources and develop systems of making them feel valued and appreciated. People with knowledge can be promoted, given job security, increase in pay, bonuses and other rewards to encourage them to create and share knowledge. They should also be given credit and encouraged to participate in informal networks for effective knowledge sharing so as to build trust [2], (Kimiz, 2005) [8], [1].

c) Coaching, mentoring and training

Since coaching encourages personal interaction between the coaches and team members, it is very effective in encouraging knowledge sharing. Active discussions help to clarify goals and direct team effort towards it. In addition, it helps members to discover their potentials as well as that of their organization [2]. Mentoring which involves transferring knowledge from experienced workers is invaluable in developing the capacity of upcoming employees [2]. Coaching and mentoring can be complimented by formal training programmes to achieve the broader goal of achieving employee commitment, loyalty, autonomy, improved customer service, improved efficiency and development of better methods of work (Havard Business Review, 2004)[12]. A combination of these activities together with provision of career opportunities, job security, and better rewards improves the organizations 'capacity to retain knowledge workers hence achieving sustainable competitive advantage [9].

d) Employee empowerment and rewards

Activities that can be considered to empower employees includes encouraging them to take risks, giving them access to knowledge sources, allowing them to make and learn from mistakes, and to operate in informal and autonomous groups[1],[5],[7]. Reward systems can also be changed to focus on team contribution [9], [7].

2.1.3 Individual factors

a) Self efficacy

Individuals can be encouraged to develop confidence in their abilities and potentials through a number of actions. Nominating them to project teams, recognizing them for knowledge shared, and rewarding them for success and giving them autonomy in their work can go a long way in boosting their feeling of self efficacy and that they are being trusted [10], [1], [2]. To the extent that goals are clear they are likely to be achieved by an employee who believes has the capacity to deliver the expected results.

b) Risk taking behaviours

Employees need to be encouraged to take risk in their day to day activities to make them to feel trusted. Risk taking leads to development of creative and innovative ideas well as sharing different

perspectives which are useful in enabling the organization to achieve its strategic objectives (Joe & Bessant, 2009)[11], [1], [2].

2.1.4 Technological factors

a) Knowledge sharing systems

Technology can be used to develop systems for sharing knowledge. While new technologies such as e-mail, telephone and fax can be useful in quickly transmitting information, they do not offer opportunities for sharing knowledge. People are more willing to share knowledge when technologies allow face to face interaction such as the use of video conferencing. The use of technology can be complemented by face to face meetings and brainstorming sessions to facilitate effective knowledge sharing. Technology can also be used to generate, locate and access information. [2].

3.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The use of knowledge has emerged as a leading source of sustainable competitive advantage. For organizations to effectively compete, survive and grow, various managerial and human resource interventions are required. In addition, individual behaviours need to be aligned to the overall business strategy through creation of proper environment, improved rewards, and development of career opportunities. A comprehensive appraisal of the organization needs to be carried out to ensure that it is aware of the need to clarify goals and give employees an opportunity to accomplish them.

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