

Applying Knowledge Management as an Instrument for Improved Community Development

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about community development. Community development is a broad term applied to the practice and academic disciplines of civic leaders, activists, involved citizens and professionals to improve various aspects of local communities. Community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing these groups with skills they need to effect change in their own communities. These skills are often concentrated around building political power through the formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. Community developers must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions.

Knowledge Management (KM) is the key factor for the improved and survival of community development. The concept of (KM) has been familiar to many people and most organisations and communities have taken it only as theory and not put it into practice KM is as important as managing finances.

Keywords: Community Development, Knowledge Management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Management (KM) is deeply the running of community knowledge and intellectual resources that can improve a variety of structural and community performance characteristics and add value by enabling the creativity to act more knowledgeably. KM comprises of strategies and practices used in an organizations and that can also be used by the community to identify, create, represent, distribute, and enable adoption of insights and experiences. It can be taken as a discipline that seeks to improve the performance of individuals and organizations by maintaining and leveraging the present and future value of knowledge assets.

From the discussion above, KM can be taken is a process that may help community identify, select, organize, disseminate and transfer important information and expertise that are a part of community memory that typically resides within the community in an unstructured manner. This may enable an effective and efficient problem solving, dynamic learning, strategic planning and decision making.

According to the Knowledge Management Forum (1991), knowledge management (KM) is the collection of processes that govern the creation, dissemination and utilisation of

knowledge and this forum stated that KM has been around for a very long time.

2. KNOWLEDGE MANAGMENT

Coates; (2001) says Knowledge management is one such management approach, and is portrayed in the popular business literature as an innovation with the potential to affect the whole of an organization's business, especially its processes and information systems but it requires a major transformation in organizational culture to create a desire to share, the development of methods that ensure that knowledge bases are kept current and relevant, and a commitment at levels of a firm for to succeed. Again it overlap with community learning and may be distinguished by greater focus on the management of knowledge as a strategic asset and a focus on encouraging the sharing of knowledge for better development of community.

From all the definitions above; knowledge can be taken as a factor of production that surpasses them in importance because it is not only in par with factors of production. It can be taken as the central business success of today because it is the ability to maintain with the state of understanding the

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information of action. According to Albrecht; (2003:177) people who create and possess knowledge that could be useful to other, and to create some means for making it freely accessible must be identified as sharing and distribution of knowledge within organization is vital precondition for turning isolated information or experiences into knowledge that the whole organization can use according to April & Izadi (2004:95).

For knowledge management to have its intended impact, the role of culture must be understood and managed. Culture is both obvious and subtle according to Kathleen & Barbara; (2001:63). According to Bollinger & Smith (2001); Pemberton & Stonehouse (2000); Spender (1996); the Knowledge Management's purpose simply put, is the creation, collection and conversion of individual knowledge into organizational knowledge

In the review of KM, critical success factors has been identified in recent research, Davenport & Prusak, (1998) found that many factors have been suggested as important to implementing a successful KM program. These factors include culture, training, top management support, technology infrastructure, knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer. Additional studies suggest the importance of culture; technology; systems and procedures; structure; tasks and incentives. In rapping the above definitions and comments, the definition of Van Beveren (2002) that says knowledge management as a practice that finds valuable information and transforms it into necessary knowledge critical to decision making and action can be slotted in for best decision making.

In this paper KM is viewed as an innovation for the development of community. The process of creating knowledge, distributing knowledge and applying knowledge may play an important role in developing the community. Knowledge management's strength in this paper may lie in the ability to harness knowledge for the benefit of itself and the community.

In this regard it must be taken into the consideration that Knowledge cannot be managed without knowhow. Managing knowledge is a refreshing refocus of managerial thought and practice. According to Curley and Kivowitz (2001:43) managing knowledge assets involves three key processes that has been said above: **Creation:** Community creates them-working with expressed, expressible, and inexpressible sources; **Distribution:** Community distributes them – making the available in the right places at the right time; and **Application:** community apply them – applying knowledge effectively is what enables an organization to succeed, through efficiency, through innovation, or by any other means. For the creation, distribution and application, the involvement of the community for their development is needed.

- **Creating knowledge:** According to Curley & Kivowitz; (2001:46) knowledge can be generated

through social networks. When knowledgeable people connect with other knowledgeable people, new ideas emerge. In this study, for the objective the study to be met, the community and the municipality should have positive orientation to knowledge, they should be bright, intellectually curious, willing and free to explore and also executives should encourage their knowledge creation and use.

- **Distributing knowledge:** Curley & Kivowitz; (2001:47) stated that distributing knowledge is the process that usually attracts the most attention. Knowledge can be kept in places where it is recorded in an existing document or database, it can be kept in processes where it is embedded in a known work process, it can be kept in people where it is known to an identified individual and it can be in pieces where distributed in parts among several people or processes.

The community should not be withdrawn from sharing knowledge, that is; they should feel that they are not alienated or resentful of the company or area they belong to and they must not have the fear that sharing knowledge will cost them what they already have. Distribution of knowledge may bring effective managing of knowledge and therefore a healthy and conducive culture in the community may lead to development. The community may be encouraged to share their knowledge so that new ideas are combined together to bring development in the community.

- **Applying knowledge:** According to Curley & Kivowitz; (2001:49) once knowledge is found and distributed, it needs to be applied for its value to be realized. Application requires that people be motivated to produce and perform in the right direction. Knowledge must be applied in the service of the company goals and objectives. For this to occur, employees need to understand those goals and objectives, at the corporate level and at the level of their own work unit.

In this paper, application of knowledge may play an important role to the community as they will be encouraged to see their knowledge been applied for their development. Sometimes it is not easy for all of the community members to know the objectives of the community by being made to understand the objectives and applying their knowledge may lead to better development.

As it has been said more about Knowledge Management (KM), it has been deducted that KM has the processes that have been placed in order to enable a department in the public service and organizations to identify the activities involved in knowledge management. This process provides a useful entry point for understanding knowledge management, identifying areas for intervention, and for communication on the subject of

knowledge management between the various department and divisions within government.

2.1 Goals and objectives of KM

KM involves a strategic commitment to improving the community's effectiveness, as well as to improving the opportunities. The goal therefore is to improve the community's ability to execute its core processes more efficiently. The four broad objectives of KM systems in practice described by Davenport, DeLong & Beers (1998) are: Create Knowledge repository; Improve knowledge assets; Enhance the knowledge environment and Manage knowledge as an asset.

The key to KM is capturing intellectual assets for the tangible benefits for the organization. As such, imperatives of KM are to: Transform knowledge to add value to processes and operation of the business; Leverage knowledge strategic to business to accurate growth and innovation and Use knowledge to provide a competitive advantage for the business.

In this article the aim of KM is to continuously improve the development and the performance of the community through the improvement and sharing of the knowledge throughout the community members. That is, the aim is to ensure that the community has the right knowledge at the right time and place. The set of proactive activities to support the community in creating, assimilating, disseminating, and applying its knowledge may play an important role in the development of the community. Applying KM may lead to continuous process of understanding the community's knowledge needs, the location of the knowledge, and how to improve the knowledge of the community.

2.2 KM activities

Frappaolo, (1998) stated four basic functions of KM which can be used to familiarize the community with the key concepts of KM which are: externalization; internalization; intermediation and cognition.

- **Externalization:** the capturing of knowledge in an external repository and organizing it by some framework in an effort to discover similar knowledge. Technologies that support externalization are imaging systems, database, workflow technologies, document management systems using clustering techniques, etc.,
- **Internalization:** this is the process of identifying knowledge, usually explicit, relevant to a particular user's needs. It involves mapping a particular problem, situation, or a point of interest against the

body of knowledge already captured through externalization.

- **Intermediation:** this is similar to the brokering process for matching a knowledge seeker with the best source of knowledge (usually tacit) by tracking the experience and interest of the individuals and groups of individuals. Some technologies that facilitate these processes are groupware, intranets, and workflow and document management systems.
- **Cognition:** this applies the knowledge exchanged preceding three processes. This is probably the knowledge management component that is most difficult to automate because it relies on human cognition to recognize where and how knowledge can be used.

From the discussion above, the combination of the four activities of the KM in this article may play the important role as the capturing of knowledge in the external repository may improve the identification of knowledge from the individuals and also the community may recognize how and where the knowledge can be used. The application of the activities above may lead to development in community.

3. COMMUNITY DEVELOPEMNT

Community development (CD) is a broad term applied to the practice of civic leaders, activists, involved citizens and professionals to improve quality of life. Community development (CD) seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing these groups with skills they need to effect change in their own communities. These skills are often concentrated around building political power through the formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. Community developers must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions.

Although Community Development Exchange from <http://www.cdx.org.uk/community-development/what-community-development>. 2010:1 defines community development as both an occupation (such a community development worker in a local authority) and a way of working with communities, its key purpose is to build communities based on justice, equality and mutual respect. It involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives. It starts from the principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience, opportunities for the community to learn new skills and, by enabling people to act together, community development practitioners help to foster social inclusion and equality. It seeks to empower individuals by providing them with skills they need to effect change in their own communities.

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Considering these, there are skills that are often created through the formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. In the CD there are Community Developers who must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions. This involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives.

3.1. Possibilities of Community Development

According to Coetzee (1994:269) community development is the process of helping people to help themselves. Taking this statement into the consideration, CD starts from the principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which if used in a creative ways, can be channeled into collective action to achieve the communities' desired goals.

Such a statement presupposes the outreaching of a generous development agency to a particular community. Where black communities are concerned, various forms of institutions and strategies for community development are provided for, for example through the Black Communities Development Act No 4 of 1984. The purpose of the act is to provide for the purposeful development of Black communities outside the national states; to amend and consolidate certain laws which apply with reference to such communities; and to provide for matters connected therewith.

Meyer & Theron (2000: 5) took Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) of 1994 as necessary to embrace people-centered development. Nevertheless, this was a good means to provide a starting point in addressing the injustice of past development efforts through its 1994 socio-economic policy framework. By looking into their statement, this may led to public participation, social learning, empowerment and sustainability which will be discussed later in this chapter.

According to Davids, Theron & Maphunye; (2005: 40) the human development perspective emphasizes a holistic understanding of poverty in terms of which anti-poverty actions enlarge people's life choices. This refers to enabling individuals to lead a long and healthy life. From the above statement it can be deduced that community development is important as it will lead to elimination of poverty and is directed at promoting a better standard of living for people in their local communities especially the disadvantaged people whereby a desired change could be brought about in communities.

3.2 Characteristics of community development

Beer & Swanepoel (2001:125) stated the following characteristics and it is anticipated that the following

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characteristics will achieve the long term priorities: Felt needs; Educative process and Conflicts resolution

a. Felt needs: It is the people themselves who must define their needs and not the government or any other development agency. This means that a government or a non-governmental organization that wants to be effective in its development efforts must engage in dialogue with the intended beneficiaries to determine their needs. However, Jeppe (1985) notes that in some cases there could be encouraged felt needs. Due to lack of access to information about factors which affect them, community may not be able to clearly define their needs. Thus, the necessity could arise for community development workers to help them to clarify these needs and to priorities them. Yet Jeppe (1985) states that; cautions that are must be taken to distinguish between needs inducement and manipulation of the people to make them see needs imposed from outside as their own needs. In the end, inducement can only mean that community members are served with information that will enable them to see the broad picture.

b. Educative process: To reach its objective community development must be an educative process; it must continuously improve the ability of the people to deal with the challenges confronting them; (Jeppe 1985:30). Considering this characteristic, there are many ways in which people's participation in community development becomes a learning process. Firstly, people learn technical skills necessary for them to carry out their development projects. Secondly, people acquire administrative skills through community development projects. According to Walters (1987:24) they learn to keep proper records of their activities, to conduct meetings, to manage time as well as to manage other people.

From the discussion above it has been deduced that people learn differently and have different strength, and in that the community and learning methods in the community need to respect the diversity of learning methods if the diversity of environment that provides opportunity for people to participate fully need to be created.

c. Conflict resolution: According to Kemp (1999) through community development people learn to resolve their conflicts and so solve problems together. It has been realized that they acquire confidence in themselves and learn to become the interrelationship between the different dimensions of development. Although according to Beer & Swanepoel (2001:129) by learning to work together (social aspect) the people increase their chance of implementing their projects successfully (economic aspect), conflict and problems resolution increase the community's learning capacity.

4. RESULTS

The above discussion led to the random interview of the society about how they feel about the community development

in their areas. The interview was based on the characteristic of community development. That is felt needs, educative process and conflict resolution. The results that were found were that the community needs to define and discuss their needs to the government or developing agency. Considering educative process, there are many ways in which people's participation in community development becomes a learning process. Firstly, people learn technical skills necessary for them to carry out their development projects. Secondly, people acquire administrative skills through community development projects and lastly people like to resolve their conflict but this can only be possible through the help of government officials.

5. CONCLUSION

In the conclusion of this document, the community is not as simple as one might think because the views and perspectives of what constitutes a community and the roles the community should play in the development process are broad and contradictory. People who form a community provide the most direct opportunity for making a difference within that community. The community development may not be improved without their participation in the application of knowledge management.

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