READINESS FOR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION IN KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

Presented by Ms F. Nenungwi

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INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

The impact that today's global economy has on organizations is realized in the modifications in the way they operate, and thus organizations needs to have endless phases of transformation for it to be seen as effective.

In response to this change, some organizations have pursued the transformation of their strategies by restructuring (Van Tonder 2004).

In most cases, departmental restructuring is undertaken to improve efficiency for service delivery, as today's government departments' measure is not within the magnitude of jobs provided, but by the efficiency of its service delivery (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996).

However, this process comes with different risks, one of them being the loss of an organization's key resources such as employees' knowledge, which is itself important for effective service delivery (Minnaar and Bekker 2005).

Over the past few decades, organizations have gone through three rings of change, namely reengineering, delayering and restructuring (Kermally 2002:51).

As a result, employees may be resistant to the changes because of the related loss of position, confidence and understanding that emanates with them (Rubin, Oehler and Adair 2013). The rise in uncertainty amongst staff, as well as the measure of disruption to their work may affect organization's productivity and lead to delays in service delivery.

In the current economy, information is highly important and most businesses are realizing that knowledge can lead to competitive advantage (Ehlers and Lazenby 2010:16). The public sector is now expected to improve its performance to respond to challenges that comes with the new knowledge economy by transforming its structures, processes, procedures and culture of job performance for efficient delivery of service (Betchoo 2016:109). This can be accomplished by executing a Knowledge Management (KM) approach,

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Department of Public Works (DPW) is a public sector that offers wide-ranging construction infrastructure facilities to the various Departments of KwaZulu-Natal's (KZN) regional management.

The Department is focused on transforming itself into an organization of excellence by encompassing fundamental changes in every facet of the organization and its programmes, including governance, performance management, policy and planning, as well as service delivery.

The Department has four regions that are operating under the Head Office (HO), namely: the EThekwini, Midlands, North Coast and UMgungundlovu region. In the hope of improving service delivery, it was decided in 2016 that a new organizational structure should be implemented and that there would be migration from the old to the new structure.

After restructuring, the number of components remained the same. However, there were some name changes and some sections were moved from one component to another.

In anticipation of improving efficiency in service delivery, a process of restructuring of the Department, followed by an extensive exercise of consultation, matching and placing employees according to their skills and competencies was undertaken.

This exercise may result in employees being overloaded with work because their support systems will no longer be adequate.

Restructuring has a significant effect on employee performance, which later affect how organizational service is delivered (Notanubun, Ririhena and Batlolona 2019:123). As Child (1988) warns, decision making gets delayed and lacking in quality because necessary knowledge is not transmitted on time to the appropriate people due to the change which delays service delivery.

For such delays to be avoided, a need to mainstream KM across the Department of Public Works to improve service delivery was realized.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of the study was to inspect the extent to which the KwaZulu – Natal Department of Public Works in Pietermaritzburg demonstrate readiness to implement KM strategy after restructuring to support effective service delivery

OBJECTIVES WERE TO:

- Explore KM practices available within the Department

- Inspect the extent to which the recent restructuring had affected employees and how they respond to change

- Determine whether KM enablers available within the Department will stimulate effective KM strategy

QUESTIONS

- What are the KM practices already available within Department?

- How has the recent restructuring process affected employees and how will they respond to changes such as KM strategy if implemented?

- How will KM enablers available within the Department stimulate effective KM strategy if implemented?

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Knowledge

Is a dynamic combination of experience, expert insights, values and contextual information which can be intangible, personal, elusive and immeasurable (Gorelick 2005).

Knowledge management

The practice of selectively applying knowledge from previous experiences of decision-making to current and future decision-making activities with the express purpose of improving organizational effectiveness (Jennex 2005).

Knowledge management enablers

Lee and Choi (2003:181) defined KM enablers as organizational mechanisms, which foster knowledge consistently by stimulating KM practices. Such enablers also facilitate the provision of infrastructure necessary to increase efficiency of knowledge processes to improve organizational performance. For the purpose of this study, these enablers includes those that were recognized by Yeh, Lai and Ho (2006) namely: **organizational culture; human resources; information technology; organizational structure and strategic planning.**

Restructuring

Restructuring is a process in which duplication is avoided by ensuring that assets, human and financial resources are used efficiently and effectively, leading to improvement in service delivery (Reddy 2003:455).

LITERATURE REVIEW

- From the reviewed literature, though there is a growing awareness of KM in the public sector at large, its importance in terms of achieving organizational goals still needs to be emphasized (Dube 2009), hence the importance of the current study.

- Few studies that looked at the importance of KM after organizational restructuring.

Importance of conducting knowledge management readiness assessment

- Shirazi, Mortazavi and Azad (2011:167) state that the in order for an organization to put up a KM strategy, it must first evaluate its willingness, which includes recognizing issues within the organization which have impact on its preparedness to adopt a KM initiative. The objective of undertaking a KM readiness evaluation is to find the extent to which an organization is willing to practice KM.

- A KM readiness assessment can also be used to gauge an organization's appetite in implementing a KM initiative (Mohammadi, Khanlari and Sohrabi 2009:29).

- Studies such as those of Nagarajan and Ganesh (2009) and Mohd Zin and Egbu (2010:789) believe that a KM readiness assessment provides an extent to which an organization is ready to attain rewards that comes from effective application of KM.

The use of knowledge management in the South African public sector

- Even though there is a framework by Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) (2008:3) that provides a guide for KM adoption in the public sector for effective service delivery few numbers of organizations within the South African public sector that are recognizing the importance of KM strategies to improve service delivery (Hourigan 2017).

- Public sector that are effectively practicing KM strategy includes: the city of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, the Western Cape Provincial Government and the city of Cape Town Municipality.

LITERATURE REVIEW CONT.

Knowledge Management practices in the public sector

- According to King (2009:3), KM is centered on a principle that, just as people are incapable of utilizing their entire mental abilities, organizations are commonly not able to apply completely the information that they have. Therefore, KM practices are there to fill that gap. The application of these practices within the organization enhances speed and effectiveness in delivering services to customers (Hourigan 2017).

- Empirical studies on KM practices in the public sector include Ondari-Okemwa's (2007) study, which aimed at investigating the practices, procedures and challenges of managing knowledge in Kenya's government-owned organizations. The findings showed that although there are no formal structures for managing knowledge in these organizations, a large amount of knowledge flows through them.

- Mphahlele (2008) explored KM practices in the National Governmental Departments. The findings of the study revealed that KM was presented over a decade in the South African public sector with the Government providing assistance by the use of the DPSA and Government Information Technology Officers Council (GITOC). Several National Departments are at various phases of putting KM into practice, some Departments are effective, whereas others are yet to begin.

- A study by Ramohlale (2014) investigated KM practices in the Defence Department within the Republic of South Africa (RSA) and found that KM was barely comprehended and such method to manage knowledge was not applied and institutionalized to the Department's advantage.

The impact of organizational restructuring on service delivery

- Due to restructuring process, employees may lack an understanding of why the Department in its current form must change, and ultimately may resist the proposed new design (Recardo and Heather 2013:24).

- There is relatively less consideration towards the experience of employees after the process of restructuring has been conducted within the organization (especially in the public sector), and studies that do exist tend to offer conflicting results on the actual impact of restructuring (Jones 1996).

- However, if employees do not feel satisfied with their organization, they will not be productive towards attaining the objective of effective and efficient service delivery.

IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTING KM AFTER RESTRUCTURING

- After restructuring, organizational and personal knowledge may be at great danger of being misplaced, for example due to changed communication channels, or new and different operating processes, etc.

- The aim of KM is to maintain a constant progress of service delivery through the improvement and sharing of organizational knowledge throughout the organization (Hussain, Lucas and Ali 2004).

- The implementation of KM strategy is of delicate importance in the turbulent post-restructuring period when communication may be hampered, and intellectual capital may be lost or not stored in a manner that will facilitate its optimal use. Leading to potentially declining organizational performance, inefficiency and weakened service delivery.

- Ultimately, every organization needs KM strategy to help them make sense of what they know, to know what they know, and effectively use what they know (Murray 2008).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- The study was constructed under auspices of the knowledge category model brought forward by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995).

- The model was a robust model in the field of KM as it presents organizations with four ways in which knowledge is transformed when individual and organizational knowledge interrelate with each other (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995:62).

- The modes are referred to as socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization (SECI).

- Nonaka and Takeuchi's model of knowledge conversion was preferred as it is one of the leading models in KM, focused on the information conversions among individual and organizational knowledge within organizations, and has been utilized in associated areas of KM (Nonaka, Reinmoeller and Senoo 2000; Memon 2015; Karuoya and Senaji 2017).

- In the literature assessing the readiness of organizations to implement KM, this model was applied in studies such as those of Lee and Choi (2003), Gaffoor (2008), as well as Jalaldeen, Karim and Mohamed (2009), to demonstrate how organizations can reap the full benefits of the KM initiative if implemented correctly.

- This model works in conjunction with the KM practices as it is focused on how organizational knowledge is created, shared and converted from one form of knowledge to another, the model generally deals with how organizations can manage their knowledge. This model was deemed suitable for this study as it correctly presents the conversion of knowledge in the process of organizational restructuring (Grzybowska and Gajdzik 2013). Furthermore, Grzybowska and Gajdzik (2013) state that **organizational restructuring** would not be efficient without the acquisition and dissemination of information by the individuals within the organization, a stance that is of high relevance to the present study.

- This model's usefulness in the present study also lies in its provision of a thorough understanding of KM theories concerning KM practices.

SIGNIFICANCE, LIMITATIONS AND KEY CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

Significance

- The significance of this study lay in the fact that KM implementation readiness assessments within organizations are generally undertaken largely within the private sector. Therefore, conducting a study to assess readiness of provincial governmental departments became important in order to work towards successfully implementing KM initiatives within the public sector.

- The study provided an opportunity to explore KM practices that were currently being employed within these departments and to see how they affected the delivery of services to citizens.

- The researcher's assumption was that the findings of the study would encourage the DPW and other provincial departments to consider implementing KM for more efficient and effective service delivery.

Limitations

- The study was conducted with a special focus on the KZN DPW HO, located in Pietermaritzburg. The Department has four regions that are operating within the province; however, the investigation only included employees from the HO employed within the four selected sections from the Corporate Services component of the DPW, namely: strategic management; human resources; information technology; and monitoring and evaluation.

Key contributions

- The study was a valuable contribution to the field of KM implementation in the public sector as it provided an evidence-based account of the Department's readiness to adopt KM by:

- The study also contributed to the improvement of KM practices across other governmental departments, both at provincial and at national level. Additionally, it contributed to the body of knowledge and literature on KM, especially in the context of KwaZulu-Natal.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- The pragmatic paradigm formed the basis of this study while the mixed methods approach was adopted.

- The convergent parallel mixed methods design where both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and data were integrated was adopted.

- The unit of analysis in this study was each of the KZN DPW employees selected from certain groups that were of interest to the study. These groups or departmental sections (strategic management; human resources; information technology; monitoring and evaluation) within the Department were of interest as they deal with the technical facets necessary for implementing KM as a departmental initiative.

- For quantitative data collection, the targeted sections consisted of a total number of 77 employees who are junior members and for qualitative data collection, 4 directors from the same sections were purposively selected. Initially the HOD was to be interviewed, however, due to his busy schedule it did not materialized.

- Gay and Airasian (2003:113) advised that if the targeted population for the study is less than 100, then no sampling is required, therefore, census of the whole population was deemed appropriate.

- Structured questionnaires were personally distributed among junior staff and interviews were scheduled with the personal assistants of directors.

- The data emerging from the quantitative and the qualitative collection instruments respectively were each analyzed separately. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis via the application of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), while content analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data.

Ethical consideration

- Participants to this study only included adult people; therefore, consent on each participant was sought through the covering letters of the data collection instrument before they agree to be involved in the study.

RESEARCH RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

- Out of seventy-seven (77) respondents that were targeted for the survey questionnaire, sixty-one (61) [N=61] questionnaires were returned, yielding a 79% response rate. This total comprised females (59%) and males (41%). Fifty-two of these respondents (85%) were permanently employed

- (38%), have been working at the KZN DPW for more than 10 years

- In terms of the sections that the respondents are currently working under, most of them, (68%) are employed in the Human Resources (HR) section

- Respondents were also asked whether the recent Departmental restructuring had affected them. respondents (84%) indicated that the recent restructuring did not affect them, while the other (16%) indicated that they were affected and as a result they had been moved to the current section they are working under.

What are the KM practices already available within Department?

- Respondents were asked to provide answers to a multiple response question by indicating the KM practices that they think are used within the Department. Findings showed that 64% of respondents think that knowledge sharing is the most used practice. Accordingly, knowledge utilization, knowledge dissemination and knowledge retention was also practiced. The least practice use was knowledge creation as indicated by 21% of the respondents.

Interview response

- Directors were asked if there are KM practices in place within the KZN DPW and to further indicate whether employees are aware of and make use of these KM practices. 50% of Directors indicated that the Department does not have in place anything officially classified as KM practices or systems; they further identified what they considered their own sectional methods being employed to preserve knowledge, for example, managing knowledge gained through various resolutions, resolving problems, learning from past mistakes and learning when performing a task.

- One Director indicated that this was noted to be another neglected area where a lot need to be done, This respondent concluded by stating that the Department should: "Start by emphasizing KM to the management so that it filters through the organization".

- All Directors (100%) agreed that there is:

No system in place to capture tacit knowledge.

RESEARCH RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION cont.

How has the recent restructuring process affected employees and how will they respond to changes such as KM strategy if implemented?

- The findings revealed that 84% of respondents were not affected by the recent restructuring at the KZN DPW. This generally indicates that the Department still have a chance to salvage employees tacit knowledge if they implement KM strategy

- Respondents (92%) said that they would support KM initiative if implemented;

How will KM enablers available within the Department stimulate effective KM strategy if implemented?

- (39%) identified IT as the best enabler that ensures the effective use of KM practices. HR enabler regarded as helpful as identified by twenty-three respondents (38%). Department structure identified by (30%). Fifteen respondents (25%) identified strategic planning enabler as helpful, while fourteen respondents (23%) think culture as an enabler is the least helpful. Out of 4, one Director (25%) responded that the Department has sufficient technologies in place that can facilitate effective KM. However, other three Directors (75%) mentioned that the Department does not have sufficient Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to facilitate effective KM. One (25%) of the Directors even went further to state that: The fact that the organization is not a learning organization means that the same applies to our ICT.

- Most respondents identified IT, HR and organizational structure as KM enablers that have a great impact on the use of KM practices.

- The researcher also asked whether employees would benefit if more structured and regular modes of KM practices were introduced within the Department. (84%) mentioned that they agreed, (13%) of them indicated that they do not know if employees would benefit and only two respondents (3%) stated that employees will not benefit from structured and regular modes of KM practices.

- Respondents were also asked whether they think implementing a KM initiative in the Department is required to enhance performance and service delivery. (79%), agreed. Three Directors (75%) mentioned that KM is important. One director went on further to note that it was critically important. Elaborating on their answers, each of the three Directors provided explanations as follows: Director 1: Managing knowledge is important as strategic plan achievements need to be captured appropriately

    Three Directors (75%) agreed that how knowledge is managed does affect decision-making.

- Two Directors (50%) agreed that there is a culture of sharing knowledge within the Department through the intranet or internet.

- From the respondents' point of view, KM is an important initiative needed for employees' benefit as well for as that of the Department to enhance performance and service delivery. The results indicate that respondents have an interest in KM and will support KM initiatives if implemented.

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

Explore KM practices available within the Department

- The practice of informal KM limits the organization from obtaining potential benefits of KM and an active participation from all employees due to lack of awareness. The KZN DPW will need to work on making available KM programmes in a bid to enhance employees' understanding and increase the chances of participation once the KM initiative is formally implemented

- The lack of formal KM initiative create competition among employees as a results they may hold back on sharing imperative knowledge since it may not be clear how the other person may use it

- The use of different ways of preserving knowledge in an organization create confusion and individual work groups instead of using one method through KM initiative that will unite the entire organization and produce better results.

- The fact that there are no formalized KM practices means that the Department is at risk of repeating mistakes that were not recorded, and when employees retire, they simply leave with their knowledge (Tiwana 2002).

Inspect the extent to which the recent restructuring had affected employees and how they respond to change

- The recent restructuring did not affect most respondents This generally indicates that there will be less resistance to change that comes with the implementation of new initiative like KM, which brings about new work processes and the respondents are clearly open to new approaches and routines . There is a rapid realization of the importance of KM in enhancing organizations performance and service delivery within the South African public sectors.

Determine whether KM enablers available within the Department will stimulate effective KM strategy

- This Department has a culture of self-reliance and of using one's background knowledge to complete a task. This kind of culture will decrease the effectiveness of KM if it is implemented, as KM initiative requires a strong organizational culture that encourages knowledge sharing and consultation (Kermally 2002). HR can be able to assist in creating the required culture while putting emphasis on the importance of KM.

- The hierarchical structure of the KZN DPW may negatively influence the effectiveness of a KM initiative and serious alterations would be required should the Department decide to implement such a programme. The hierarchical organizational design affects the culture of trust and openness within a department.

- The KZN DPW strategy positively promotes the creation and preservation of new knowledge and ensures that it is delivered among employees in a timely manner. Considering the mission and strategy of the Department, the Department views KM as 'critically' important even though the Department is not dedicating significant interest to formally implementing a KM strategy.

- The KZN DPW has in place general communication tools, but ICTs that may assist effective KM are still lacking. Procedures to retain the tacit knowledge of retiring employees are not effective. A KM professional and a specific KM component that can help to facilitate a KM initiative, if implemented, are required for the KZN DPW to enhance its productivity and service delivery.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

- Raise awareness of KM across the entire Department

It is critical that employees within the Department are aware of KM and of the objectives in its implementation so as to avoid resistance among staff to participate, which would ultimately lead to the failure of the initiative. Among the ways in which this can be achieved is ensuring the involvement of both employees and management in planning towards the implementation of KM, because if they have been included in the process from its inception, then staff will hold in high regard for the need to participate. The topic of KM practice can also be included in the compulsory induction course for new employees so that they become aware of it before they even begin work (Dube 2009). The importance of KM should be realized from the Head of Department down to the management so that the awareness will then be filtered down to the Department's employees.

- Further develop all KM enablers

KM enablers are the prominent features that regulate the success of KM within an organization; therefore, it then becomes imperative for the KZN DPW to ensure that before implementing a KM initiative, all KM enablers are in place, creating a favorable environment towards KM and its processes. However, those charged with the development of these enablers should bear in mind the cost associated with, and the budget allocated towards the implementation of KM.

- Establish a KM directorate, managed by a Chief Knowledge Officer

Having a KM directorate in place before implementing a formal KM initiative will assist the Department because such a directorate will assume full responsibility of planning for and ensuring that the initiative is successfully implemented. Similarly, the CKO will take responsibility for guaranteeing that the initiative is being applied consistently across the entire Department and at a later stage, for examining the effects of this initiative on the performance and service delivery of the Department.

- Include the formal implementation of a KM initiative in the Department's strategic plan

The need to implement formally a KM initiative should first form part of the strategic plan so that it can be strategically aligned to the mission and vision of the Department: in this way, a KM approach suitable for the organization can be developed

- Conduct exit interviews when employees leave the Department and review these interviews regularly

HR section to ensure that an exit interview is conducted with each employee departure and the information obtained during this interview should be stored safely but reviewed frequently. This will assist in sourcing employees' tacit knowledge, since organizations are recognizing the need to manage tacit knowledge

- Formally implement a KM initiative

In order to fulfil completely the objectives of the recent Departmental restructuring, it is recommended that KZN DPW formally implement a KM initiative in order for the Department to be able to adapt, survive with competence and keep up with new developments so as to preserve efficient performance and the effective delivery of service

THANK YOU

Questions and comments:

fulu.nenungwi@gmail.com