KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECTOR IN INDIA: A STUDY

Shaik Kamruddin
Assistant Professor,
Department of Management, Maulana Azad National Urdu University,
Gachibowli, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

Md. Wasim Akram
Research Scholar,
Department of Management,
Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Gachibowli, Hyderabad, India

ABSTRACT

During the last century, the world has undergone a change from an agriculture society, where natural labour was the critical factor, to an industrial society where the management of technology, capital and labour provided the competitive advantage. In the 21st century, a new society is emerging where knowledge is the primary production resource instead of capital and labour. Effective utilization of this existing knowledge can create comprehensive wealth for the nation in the form of better health, education, infrastructure and other social indicators.

Today business view is shifting from a product-centric to a knowledge-centric view. Companies cannot afford to under invest in using, reusing and losing knowledge that they already have. In this rapidly changing business environment, intellectual capital has become a key asset of the enterprise. The ability of companies to exploit their intangible assets has become far more decisive than their ability to invest and manage their physical assets (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). By managing its knowledge assets, an enterprise can improve its competitiveness and adaptability and increase its chances of success. The Information Technology (IT) industry is having a major contribution to service sector and GDP in general.

In this context, an attempt is made to study knowledge management practices in IT industry. In the first part of the article the significance of knowledge in Indian economy, the fundamental concepts of knowledge, knowledge management have been discussed elaborately. The significance of managing organisational knowledge and steps of knowledge management process and reasons and need for the companies to go for knowledge management has been discussed. Subsequently various knowledge management practices adapted and successfully executed by the companies discussed in detail.

Key words: Knowledge management, IT Industry, Organisational Knowledge, Knowledge Management Practices.
1. INTRODUCTION

According to Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam, India is a nation endowed with natural competitive advantages as also certain distinctive competencies. But these are scattered in isolated pockets and their awareness is inadequate. During the last century, the world has undergone a change from an agriculture society, where natural labour was the critical factor, to an industrial society where the management of technology, capital and labour provided the competitive advantage. In the 21st century, a new society is emerging where knowledge is the primary production resource instead of capital and labour. Effective utilization of this existing knowledge can create comprehensive wealth for the nation in the form of better health, education, infrastructure and other social indicators.

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2. KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY IN INDIA

As a result of the 1998/99 World Development Report on Knowledge for Development, the topic of the knowledge economy gained prominence with policymakers worldwide. In 2001, the K4D (Knowledge for Development) program held a high-level policy forum to share knowledge strategies among key stakeholders from Brazil, India and China—potential knowledge superpowers representing 45 percent of the world’s population. The timing of the event was nearly perfect. The Indian government was already working on a strategy to transform the country into a knowledge superpower and was keen to cooperate and explore a set of issues that coincided with its own reform agenda. India had gradually been building a knowledge economy, having made great strides in pharmaceuticals, medical sciences, and information technology. This led to increased interest on the part of the government and private sector to look for ways to raise the country’s growth rate.

India has witnessed Knowledge Management (KM) in practice by some companies. GoodlassNerolac, paint-maker, embraced Knowledge Management in March 2003 because a need was felt to capture knowledge from purchase patterns of customers and dealer insights. Along with money paid for the product, customers also provide a lot of information as their perception of the product and similar substitute products. The strategic challenge lies in designing an interface which will permit easy trapping of customer information. Know Net – the knowledge management portal of Larson & Toubro (a construction company) was set up to solve problems occurring at project sites. It uses KM to roll out real world construction projects at lower costs. Each employee in the organization has accumulated experience over the years and has unknowingly used it for problem solving or creating strategies.

3. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Knowledge and its Management have been dealt with many writers from the time it was first used by Wiig (1990) in a key-note address for the United Nation’s International Labor Organization.

The term Knowledge Management was coined by Karl Wing at a 1986 conference in Switzerland sponsored by the United Nations. It has defined as “a systematic, explicit and deliberate building, renewal and application of knowledge to maximize an enterprise’s knowledge relative effectiveness and return from its knowledge assets.

Alavi and Leidner (2001) defined KM system as “IT based system developed to support and enhance the processes of knowledge creation, storage/retrieval, transfer and application “Thus they considered IT as enabler of KM (Jennex2005)
KM enables the creation, distribution and exploitation of knowledge to create and regain greater value from core business competencies.

4. TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge has been classified and characterized in several different ways.

For example, knowledge has been categorized as individual, social, causal, conditional Rational, and pragmatic (Alvi and Leidner 2001) and also as embodied, encoded and Procedural (Venzin et al. 1998). Most important classification of knowledge views are Tacit and explicit (Nonaka 1994; Polanyi 1966).

4.1. Explicit Knowledge

This type of knowledge is formalized and codified, and is sometimes referred to as know-what (Brown & Duguid 1998). It is therefore fairly easy to identify, store, and retrieve (Wellman 2009). This is the type of knowledge most easily handled by KMS, which are very effective at facilitating the storage, retrieval, and modification of documents and texts. Explicit knowledge is found in: databases, memos, notes, documents, etc. (Botha et al. 2008)

4.2. Tacit Knowledge

This type of knowledge was originally defined by Polanyi in 1966. It is sometimes referred to as know-how (Brown & Duguid 1998) and refers to intuitive, hard to define knowledge that is largely experience based. Because of this, tacit knowledge is often context dependent and personal in nature. It is hard to communicate and deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement (Nonaka 1994).

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to provide an overview on knowledge management in India. The study also focuses on fundamentals of knowledge and Knowledge management. What are the basic reasons for introduction, the management and practices of knowledge and what are the common practices that are being practised in renowned knowledge based companies.
6. IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge management is the process through which organizations generate value from their intellectual capital and knowledge-based assets. Usually, the value is obtained by finding what employees, partners and customers know, and sharing information with employees, departments and even with other companies, in order to find best practices. For companies, it is the most important to understand ‘what they know’. This knowledge is contained in databases, research and development activities, competent staff and quality products that are supplied in the market.

The knowledge management process is an everyday business process within the company, with a major role in transfer of relevant information for decision-making across all levels of structure and corporate governance. The ultimate result of well-created process of knowledge management is that every employee in the company fulfils its mission, which reaches the corporate objectives and strategies, and identifies the most valuable knowledge from the “sea of information”. It is not an easy task because it involves the management structure at the highest levels of management. They are responsible for the processes of finding, selecting, organizing and presentation of information in a manner that promotes understanding of employees in a particular area of interests. Knowledge management is an important tool that promotes the creation of new knowledge and its sharing through the corporate values. Managers need to have a greater sense of invisible and intangible assets of people, featured in the minds and experiences of employees. Without these assets, companies are unequipped with vision and ability to predict the future. The use of knowledge management process increases the effectiveness of decision-making processes, as well as the level of operational efficiency, flexibility, commitment and involvement of employees.

7. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Knowledge Management relies on four main kinds of KM processes. These include the process through which this knowledge is shared and applied.

8. KNOWLEDGE DISCOVERY

Knowledge discovery may be defined as the development of new tacit or explicit knowledge from data and information or from the synthesis of prior knowledge. The discovery of new explicit knowledge relies most directly on combination whereas the discovery of new tacit knowledge relies most directly on socialization. In either case, new knowledge is discovered by synthesizing.

9. COMBINATION

New explicit knowledge is discovered through combination, wherein the multiple bodies of explicit knowledge are synthesized to create new, more complex sets of explicit knowledge (Nonaka 1994).

10. SOCIALIZATION

In the case of tacit knowledge, the integration of multiple streams for creation of the new knowledge occurs through the mechanism of socialization (Nonaka 1994). Socialization is the synthesis of tacit knowledge across individuals, usually through joint activities than written or verbal instructions. For example, by transferring ideas and image, apprenticeships help newcomers to see how other think.

11. KNOWLEDGE CAPTURE

Knowledge can exist within people (individuals or groups), artifacts (practices, technologies, or repositories) and organizational entities (organizational units, organizations, inter-organizational networks). It may be simply defined as “the process of retrieving either explicit or tacit knowledge that resides within people, artifacts or organizational entities. The knowledge capture process benefits most of directly from two KM sub processes –--- Externalization and internalization. These two helps capture the tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge respectively.

12. EXTERNALIZATION

Externalization involves converting tacit knowledge into explicit forms such as words, concepts, visuals or figurative language. It helps translate individual’s tacit knowledge into explicit forms that
can be more easily understood by their group. This is a difficult process because tacit knowledge is often difficult to articulate.

13. INTERNALIZATION
Internalization is the conversion of explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. It represents the traditional notion of learning. The explicit knowledge may be embodied in action and practice so that the individual acquiring the knowledge can re-experience what others have gone through.

14. KNOWLEDGE SHARING
Knowledge Sharing is the process through which explicit or tacit knowledge is communicated to other individuals. Three important clarifications are in order. First understand it well enough to act on it (Jensen and Meckling 1996). Second, what is shared is knowledge rather than recommendations based on the knowledge.

Depending on whether explicit or tacit knowledge is being shared, exchange or socialization processes are used. Socialization facilitates the sharing of tacit knowledge in case in which new tacit knowledge is being created as well as when new tacit knowledge is not being created. There is no intrinsic difference between the socialization process when used for knowledge discovery or knowledge sharing.

15. EXCHANGE
Exchange in contrast to socialization, focuses on sharing of explicit knowledge. It is used to communicate or transfer explicit knowledge among individuals, group and organizations (Grantt 1996).

16. KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION
Knowledge contributes most directly to organizational performance when it is used to make decision and perform tasks. The process of knowledge application depends on the available knowledge and knowledge itself depends on the processes of knowledge discovery, capture and sharing. The better the process of knowledge discovery, capture and sharing the greater the likelihood that the knowledge needed is available for effective application in decision-making and task performance.

17. DIRECTION
Direction refers to the process through which the individual possessing the knowledge directs the action of another through which transferring to that individual the Knowledge underlying the direction.

18. ROUTINES
Routines involves utilization of knowledge embedded in procedure, rules and norms the guide future behaviour. Routine economize on communication more than time to develop, relying constant repetition.

19. ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN ORGANISATION
The changes in the nature of business, the shift to “knowledge economy” and the new information age brought new resources that companies use in business processes. In the era of industrialization, companies have created value by the physical transformation of tangible assets (land, buildings, equipment and supplies) into the products.

Knowledge management solutions are now the most important strategic technologies for large companies, according to a new report and survey of European executives by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU.com, 2003), sponsored by Tata Consultancy Services. In the survey, 67% of companies cite knowledge management/business intelligence solutions as important to achieving their strategic goals over the next three years.
To serve customers well and remain in business companies must: reduce their cycle times, operate with minimum fixed assets and overhead (people, inventory and facilities), shorten product development time, improve customer service, empower employees, innovate and deliver high quality products, enhance flexibility and adoption, capture information, create knowledge, share and learn. None of this is possible without a continual focus on the creation, updating, availability, quality and use of knowledge by all employees and teams, at work and in the marketplace.

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Reasons for launching the Knowledge Management Programme

20. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN VARIOUS IT COMPANIES

20.1. TCS

20.1.1. Web Content Management

An enterprise web site or portal is much more than a storefront or static digital brochure. It is a medium through which all known and unknown stakeholders namely customers, prospects, partners, suppliers, and employees interact with the enterprise. Through the web site partners, prospects and competitors learn about products and services of the enterprise. It enables your employees to be more efficient and effective in their everyday work.

20.1.2. Enterprise Reports Management

Report management is the process of electronically capturing, indexing (adding intelligence), archiving and distributing reports to improve access to critical business information. As business operations expand across multiple locations and lines of business, enterprise reporting requirements grow in scope and complexity. The information that was once maintained in a single system and routed to a single destination must now be captured from a variety of different sources, in an increasing number of fi le
formats. In addition, different sections of reports need to be routed everywhere from user workstations to network printers, and from wireless devices to conventional retrieval processes.

20.1.3. TBEM

Tata Business Excellence Model (TBEM) is the basis for conducting organisational assessments and for giving feedback to applicants. In addition, the Criteria have three important roles in strengthening competitiveness:

- to help improve organisational performance practices, capabilities, and results
- to facilitate communication and sharing of best practices information among organisations of all types
- to serve as a working tool for understanding and managing performance and for guiding organisational planning and opportunities for learning

20.1.4. Collaboration

Collaboration and content management are about getting work done — faster and better than ever before. Web-based collaboration tools are fast becoming the preferred way for knowledge workers to communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with each other. These tools enable a dynamic and flexible environment for bringing people together, allowing them to focus on a complex goal, deliverable, or outcome.

20.1.5. Digital Asset Management

Today, graphics files, photos, presentations, design layouts, streaming audio and video, and other rich media assets alongside traditional documents are part of the content or knowledge that an enterprise generates or uses. To efficiently manage this digital content, organizations look at software applications designed specifically to manage digital assets. Digital Asset Management (DAM) delivers business value and Return on Investment (ROI) through innovative and specialized methods of storing, organizing, distributing, and tracking digital media across multiple delivery channels. DAM provides businesses with the ability to leverage digital content efficiently along the supply chain through production, postproduction, and distribution processes.

20.2. INFOSYS

20.2.1. Web Share, Video Conference, Virtual White Board

These Techniques are being used to conduct training session. Training is being conducted in virtual organisation. Trainer is at one geographical location whereas trainees are at different client location. If the Trainer is web sharing the material during training that the trainees can get to see, then both the parties will be on the same page. Some web sharing tools. For e.g. White Board can be used to make the training effective. If a video conferencing for the training is made possible it will help the trainer to see the facial response of the trainees.

20.2.2. Teleconference, Videoconference

Videoconference is generally being used to conduct interaction between two teams deputed at two different locations. For e.g. onshore is gaining knowledge because of frequent with the customer whereas offshore is losing out on knowledge because of less interaction with customer. This may lead to de-motivation and misunderstanding between the two teams. If both the teams can have frequent interactions over teleconferencing and video conferencing such that the customer onshore team and offshore team can all get to participate and share the knowledge. It will help the offshore team gain knowledge and stay motivated.

20.2.3. E-Learning Videotaping/Webinar

Virtual Team members, located in multiple geographies, are working in different time zones. Because of different time zones, some team members cannot go through the training conducted at the same time. Using E-learning, technology based training, videotaping etc. can help all team members to get trained as per their convenience and availability of recorded webinars on internet sites will help team members go through the recorded sessions as their convenience.
20.2.4. Meeting Recording
Some virtual team members are not able to attend the meetings that are conducted at different time zones. Recording the meeting and sharing it with team members who were unable to attend the meeting, will help the team members to listen to the entire conversation to avoid any communication gap in knowledge sharing.

20.2.5. Webshare, Video Conference, Virtual White Board
There is a need to conduct Joint Application Development (JAD) session within virtual team members. By using tools like web sharing, video conferencing and virtual white board, JAD session will be more effective in a project having a virtual team.

20.3. IBM

20.3.1. Asset Management
IBM's first KM initiative in 1994 involved asset management from the business unit perspective. The strategy was to provide a knowledgebase of the work and knowledge of colleagues so that the assets and intellectual capital could be reused, enabling IBM to deliver client solutions with more quality and speed.

20.3.2. Expertise Location
As IBM started focusing on collaboration, rather than teaming, the ability to identify and access expertise in an organization with 300,000 employees became a significant problem. The organization started Blue Pages as a corporate wide directory enabled with instant messaging and e-mail linkage. It goes beyond IBM's corporate directory because it provides a searchable resource for employees looking for a network of experts to collaborate with or to help solve a business problem. Employees can even provide a photo to personalize their listing.

20.4. On-Demand Learning
This form of workplace training started in 2004 to give employees an ongoing set of learning opportunities. On Demand Workplace portals focus on critical job roles within IBM and deliver asset management programs and best practices directly to the right audience. Learning @ IBM is an example of a new application on IBM's On Demand Workplace that streams profile-driven learning right to learners' desktops. It ensures employees are focusing on learning that is relevant to their specific job role by providing learning recommendations and resources based on job role, geography and business unit.

20.4. CAPEGEMINI
Controlling and leveraging information assets that are not stored in documents is proving a challenge for many organizations. Capgemini’s Knowledge Management solutions help you manage your intellectual or “human” knowledge to reduce information loss caused by attrition or staff turnover.

20.4.1. Leverage Intellectual and Business Assets
Capgemini’s Knowledge Management solutions enable you to optimize customer intimacy, human resources and supplier relationships. The benefits of knowledge management services are many and advantages for your stakeholders include:

20.4.2. Employees
- Greater productivity and efficiency through knowledge re-use
- Enhanced company culture through increased cross-company collaboration
- Accelerated learning, training and internal recruitment
- Increased ability for organizational change management

20.4.3. Customers
- Improved customer service and support
- More customers in existing markets and new markets


- Customer participation in product development
- Customer interactions

20.4.4. Suppliers
- Greater integration
- A network of experts
- Lower purchasing costs
- Improved partner/supplier processes

21. EIGHT FACTORS IMPORTANT TO MAKE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PROJECTS SUCCEED

From this and thirty other case studies, Davenport and colleagues have identified eight factors important for knowledge management projects to succeed (Davenport et al., 1998, Davenport and Prusak, 1998). These are:

21.1. LINK TO ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OR INDUSTRY VALUE

Knowledge management projects can be expensive for the company and therefore must be linked to economic benefit or competitive advantage. This can be in money saved or money earned, or more indirect in form of other measures like customer satisfaction or timesaving. For example, in another case in Davenport’s study, the company measured the amount of knowledge reused in form of proposals, presentations and deliverables. They measured the contribution of the company’s knowledge repository to closing sales (Davenport et al., 1998).

21.2. TECHNICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

According to Davenport et al., knowledge projects are more likely to succeed when they use the broader infrastructure of both technology and organization. Technology infrastructures are tools that provide opportunities for learning and gives access to knowledge. Examples from the research by Davenport et al. (1998) are Lotus Notes and web-based intranets. Organizational structures mean that there are roles and groups whose members have the skills to serve as resources to individual projects.

21.3. STANDARD, FLEXIBLE KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURE

Successful knowledge management projects benefit from some degree—though not too much—of a knowledge structure. Because knowledge is naturally fluid and closely linked to the people who hold it, its categories and meanings change frequently (Davenport and Prusak, 1998 p. 159). The structures of knowledge repositories cannot be too rigid, but must be flexible enough to always reflect the pattern of use.

21.4. KNOWLEDGE-FRIENDLY CULTURE

A knowledge-friendly organizational culture exists when people have a positive orientation to knowledge and take part in knowledge sharing instead of avoiding it in fear of losing a competitive advantage. According to Davenport et al., this participation is one of the most important factors for success with knowledge management, but also the most difficult one to create. Davenport et al. (1998) notes that it is important that the knowledge management project fits the culture.

21.5. CLEAR PURPOSE AND LANGUAGE

Effective and suitable communication around learning and knowledge was important in the cases studied by Davenport et al. (1998). He notes that the language must fit the culture. A statement from a knowledge manager in Davenport’s study explains that “normal business language gives the impression of being fact based, often drawing on military and natural science metaphors. But knowledge management deals with things like complexity, uncertainty, and organic growth. That calls for a new vocabulary and managers aren’t used to it” (Davenport et al., 1998 p. 53).
21.6. CHANGE IN MOTIVATIONAL PRACTICES
The motivation to create, share, and use knowledge is a critical factor for Knowledge Management projects. Approaches to increase motivation should be long-term and linked to the general evaluation and compensation structure.

21.7. MULTIPLE CHANNELS FOR KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER
Knowledge management projects should facilitate knowledge transfer through both technologies and face-to-face channels. The multiple channels are suitable for different forms of knowledge, and they will reinforce each other.

21.8. SENIOR MANAGEMENT SUPPORT
Davenport et al. (1998) found that strong support from managers was crucial for transforming-oriented knowledge projects but less necessary in efforts to use knowledge for improving individual functions or processes. The important types of support from managers were that they signalled the value of knowledge, which knowledge was most important, and provided resources for knowledge infrastructures (Davenport et al., 1998, Davenport and Prusak, 1998).

22. CONCLUSION
It is very clear that knowledge management is fundamentally an activity of managing and transferring information in such a way that one can both understand and use the information in some way and, for this, effort is required to create a knowledge repository consisting of skills, experience, assignments, specialisations and published works of the people in organisations so that it can be used for future problem solving. Knowledge management quests should be conducted to assess the knowledge gap in terms of searching for the best practices. Knowledge management and two broad types of knowledge i.e. Explicit and Tacit has been elaborated in literature. Knowledge management process has also been explained. Knowledge management has a key role in shifting today’s business to knowledge economy. Four major IT companies has been selected to provide an overview on knowledge management practices. Some of the common Knowledge management practices that are being practiced in IT industries are web content management, enterprise resource management, teleconferencing, video conferencing, E-learning, web share, virtual white board etc.

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