Managing Change in Organizations

A Knowledge Management Perspective in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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Abstract: Organizations depend on data & information in running their operations, and most importantly on knowledge to develop new and improve existing technologies. According to Massa & Testa (2009) the ability of an organization to utilize knowledge to get things done and maintain a competitive advantage is more important for organizations with ‘global ambitions’ (Massa & Testa 2009:129). One of the remarkable changes that has been taking place in the business field is the change in technology which has tremendous effects on all aspects of business. Although new technologies are improving around the world dynamically, some people still have hard time accepting and coping with these new challenges. This study aims to understand the awareness of employees about Knowledge Management (KM) and to identify the main reasons for resistance to change. Where the purpose of the study is to investigate the resistance to change that influence the process of knowledge management awareness and implementation in the workplace and make relevant recommendations.

This research followed a quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire following a survey method. The target population for this research included 202 employees with different levels of seniority and education in both the financial and the education sectors. The sample was selected following a simple random sampling approach to reach representative sample of all employees. A key finding is that the majority of people are not aware of knowledge management and its importance in the workplace and their commitment to KM initiatives is not evident. A concern was highlighted by the study that employees were not aware of the duties of the KM and the staff working on implementing it within organizations. Recommendations are made to increase the awareness of knowledge management in organizations; it was recommended that employees should be made aware of the KM role and practices within organizations. Further recommendations were made to increase employees’ engagement and participation in formulating and developing the KM practices.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Knowledge Management Systems, Knowledge Management Awareness, Technology, Resistance to change, Change Management, Kingdom of Bahrain.

Introduction

Business organizations in the 21st century need effective Knowledge Management practices in order to enhance the performance and growth of their businesses and ensure long-term sustainability and competitive advantage (Makambe, U., 2015). Bishop et al. (2008:17) mentioned that organizations have to make better use of their knowledge
resources with the adoption of effective KM initiatives as a business solution. Guo & Sheffield (2008) added that despite the complex nature of knowledge, it is closely related to knowing how to ‘get things done’ for the welfare of the organization. Knowledge is an intangible intellectual asset that: ‘plays an important role in the success of any enterprise’. Whereas, Knowledge Management (KM) strategies result from knowledge workers’ awareness of trends in the current business environment, and their responses to those trends. Moreover, the formulation of a KM strategy depends on the ability of management to change the corporate culture into one that creates opportunities for tacit knowledge to be made explicit (Ndlela & Du Toit 2001:156).

The ability of an organization to utilize knowledge to get things done and maintain a competitive advantage is more important for organizations with: ‘global ambitions’ (Massa & Testa 2009:129). As per Teng (2007), for an organization to realize its innovative capacity, it should be able to continuously: ‘identify new ways of doing business, develop new technologies and products and enter new markets in new organizational forms’ (Teng 2007:119). The other main objective of a KM strategy as per Shin (2004) “is to facilitate effective and efficient knowledge sharing amongst the organization’s employees” (Shin 2004:179).

Managing knowledge is crucial for knowledge economy; Al-Alawi et. al. (2007) defined knowledge as “a combination of experience, values, contextual information and expert insight that help evaluate and incorporate new experience and information. Knowledge not only exists in documents and repositories, but it becomes embedded in people’s minds overtime and it is demonstrated through their actions and behaviors”. Al-Alawi stated that Gammelgaard and Ritter in 2000 illustrated that knowledge can be defined as: “A fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provide a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. Knowledge originates and prospers in the minds of experts. In organizations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents of repositories but also in organizational routine, process, practices, and norms”. Knowledge can lead to competition between organizations. Organizations are promoting knowledge management for the employees to teach them more about technology, provide them with the necessary information and how to be aware of knowledge management. There are many challenges with knowledge management and one of those challenges is maintaining security. Nevertheless, Dalkir & Liebowitz, (2011) defined Knowledge management as “the deliberate and systematic coordination of an organization, people technology process and organizational structure in order to add value through reuse and innovation”.

Therefore, the level of awareness of employees of Knowledge Management affects the acceptance of change and the way managers prepare proper communication and orientations to facilitate coping with change. The purpose of the study is to show knowledge management awareness in the workplace. Many previous studies show that there is positive relationship between successful knowledge management approach and organizational efficiency and effectiveness. According to Nissen (2002) knowledge management involves organization policy and culture human resources, information technology and methods that support knowledge management. Managers of an organization must be aware of prospective impact of knowledge management and the variables that affect it such as motivation, capabilities and opportunities that can influence organizational performance. Employees in the workplace should be able to
share knowledge between them in order to create innovation. Managers that apply successful knowledge management approach can benefit their employees, firms and their customers. Usually employees are resisting change because they fear the unknown. They think of how change will affect them, their relationships with the employees and their job performance. Administrators in order to manage change effectively they need to understand why employees resist change.

**Problem Statement**

Fast changing environments is the main characteristic nowadays among business and organizations and hence, this requires organizations to exploit the knowledge and skills they possess in a more efficient way to ensure their survival and business continuity. Moreover, according to Davis et al. (2005) “Knowledge has become an important factor in creating and maintaining a competitive advantage in this dynamic and turbulent business environment (Davis, Subrahmanian & Westerberg 2005:109). Many organizations are facing today with people that tend to resist change for several reasons such as fear of the unknown and the satisfaction with the current status quo, which will prevent knowledge management from spreading. As mentioned before, knowledge management is aligned with technology and it is the most important factor of development nowadays, so when people resist it they are limiting the organization capabilities and potentials to be more advancing, productive and efficient.

The problem of this research lies in the lack of understanding of the role of Knowledge management within organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain and how employees are dealing with the vast changing environments.

**Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Are employees in organizations aware of knowledge management?
2. Why do employees resist to change? And how can a firm overcome this resistance?
3. Are there enough efforts in firms to increase and spread the Knowledge Management awareness?

**Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To understand the awareness of knowledge management among employees.
2. To understand the main reasons for resistance to adopting new technologies and implementing knowledge management.
3. To recommend strategies to spread knowledge management awareness.
4. To draw conclusions and make recommendations for various stakeholders.

**Research Limitations**

This research is limited to Knowledge Management and the challenges facing employees in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Future researchers might investigate the following areas for future research:

1. To expand on the sample size.
2. Longitudinal study to understand the effect of Knowledge Management Implementation.
3. Conduct a cross industry analysis to see the impact of the nature of business on the employees’ awareness and acceptance. This might reflect different resistance factors that might be industry-specific.
Literature Review

Dana et al. defined Knowledge Management (KM) as the integration of organizational information and ideas to generate value for the organization by facilitating the sharing of knowledge and, through this, promoting continuous organizational learning (Dana, Korot and Tovstiga, 2005:10). Van Bereven (2002) and Robbins (2003) referred to KM as the process that can be utilized to collect and distribute the collective wisdom among people within a certain, to help make critical decisions, to link KM strategy to business strategy (López-Nicolás & Meroño-Cerdán 2011:503). KM has also been described as a process that can promote and facilitate the sharing of knowledge in an organization (Singh 2008:5) to assist organizations that want to maintain or achieve a competitive advantage and in ensuring that the KM strategies implemented are managed efficiently (Ndlela & Du Toit 2001:155).

‘Knowledge Management has become a critical issue for competitive dynamics, international strategy, the building of resources, the boundaries of firms, and many other issues’, according to Foss, Husted and Michailova (2010:456). Over the past years, knowledge has emerged as a resource that can contribute to an organizations’ sustainable competitive advantage (Lopes 2008:7).

Recognizing the barriers during implementing the knowledge management system is one of the most crucial phases; Bartczak (2002) stated that recognizing the problems or challenges are a temporary step toward the goals of the organization in transferring the knowledge management. And hence, the significance of this research arises. When the organization problems are understood, the organization would be able to implement the strategy to increase the efficacy of the organization over better knowledge management. (Beijerse 2000).

According to Hsiu (2004) the people, procedures and competitors effect negatively in the process of knowledge sharing and it is difficult to recognize these problems. In order to deal with such problems in implementation the knowledge management system in the organization, the organization must attempt and make big efforts to ease the process of implementation (Nonaka and Takeuchi 2000). The study indicates that the organizational culture is an important factor in sharing the knowledge in the organization (Al-Alawi, et. al, 2007). However, the types of organizational culture have some influences in implementing the knowledge system. For example, resistance of change due to culture effect implementing the knowledge system where the people are afraid of new cultural changes such us new technologies or any new methods of implementing the knowledge management.

The types of actions that are employed in the knowledge management are affected by the organizations awareness of the type of the organizational culture that they have, where they can use this effectively and efficiently on these actions (Dyer 2000). Organizations must communicate a culture of learning and knowledge sharing if it intends to expand the knowledge management orientation, there are both direct and indirect communication processes that are commonly used in organizations. The direct methods include face to face conversations, online chats and emails. The indirect method uses a third party for knowledge transfer.

There is some significant evidence that although the right technologies are available to ease the knowledge transfer, these technologies and resources are not used in a tactic manner. There is a lack of skills in transferring the tactic knowledge to information.
Identification of knowledge needs and better use of resources must be taken care of to have a tacit knowledge communication. To use communication technologies in the advantage of knowledge management, employees must be trained on the uses of these means of technology (Smith and Lumba, 2008).

Experience of the companies is an important factor to ensure the success of knowledge management and also to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. The system of knowledge management is a tool that used in the organization in order to share knowledge, capture the data of organization and the creation of information across and within the departments. Organization performance and knowledge sharing can be affected by many variables such as: motivations, opportunities and capabilities. The manager should take in consideration these three variables (Al-Alawi, et. al., 2007).

Collaboration is needed between employees and departments in terms of quality, research and development and manufacturing which will lead to increase the performance of productivity (Islam and Alam, 2012). The study suggests that the organization will not be able to manage the knowledge management in an effective way to avoid and reduce the resistance to change, unless they know the reasons behind the decrease in performance in the organizations and the causes that affect the change among the organization. Therefore, by collecting information about the causes behind the resistance to change, the organization can build a strong power to avoid the resistance to change, and managing the knowledge management in efficient way.

The study indicates that the most important method to avoid the resistance to change in the organization is to build trust between the co-workers inside the organization. Moreover, there are many ways to distribute the trust, these ways could include, face-to-face meetings and trying to allow the employees to express their feelings about, for example the reason behind their resistance to change. In addition, trust can be developed by working collaboratively as a team to resolve the problem behind the resistance to change. Communication is an important element in managing the knowledge management (Curtis & White, 2002).

The study found out the most important factors that cause resistance of change. It suggests that resistance to change could happen because it is hard to transfer and understand the tacit knowledge. Also, because many employees may not understand the new knowledge management system. Moreover, some of the employees may fear losing their jobs because of the new change in knowledge system. Most importantly, the employees fear of the unknown that causes them to resist any change.

Research Methodology
A quantitative cross-sectional research methodology was chosen to measure employees’ awareness about Knowledge Management. A survey was distributed to employees of varying years of experience, education levels, and genders

Data Collection
The data was collected using and electronically distributing a structured questionnaire with close ended questions. The questionnaire was distributed to employees of a financial company and an educational institution from the public and private sector, with ensuring confidentiality to the providers of information and their place of work.

Convenience sampling was selected to ensure that the sample of the target population represented the employees’ awareness of Knowledge Management and the reasons for
resistance. The target population for this research was 202 employees with varying levels of seniority and education. The sample of study has been targeted towards respondents who are working in different fields. Sample included respondents in different jobs, ages, genders, education and income levels. The respondents will be selected on the basis of simple random sampling. A sample size of 202 employees from different industries and different positions were selected. The reason for this kind of sample selection is to collect the response of employees throughout the entire firm, and not limit the response to employees of a particular position or to a specific industry.

Data Analysis
The target population for this research included 202 employees with different levels of seniority and education in both the financial and the education sectors. The sample was chosen to represent all categories of employees and to establish whether there are any criteria that contribute to shaping employees’ awareness of KM. The questionnaire was distributed and date was collected and analysed in figures and charts as follows:

Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents according to their gender. It indicates the largest percentage respondents were females with 53.5%. And male respondents were 46.5%.

![Figure 1: Gender of Participants](image1.png)

![Figure 2: Age of Participants](image2.png)

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents according to their age. It indicates that the largest percentage respondents were in the 31-40 age group with 34.7%. The next largest group were in the 50 and above age group with 31.2%.
Figure 2 shows the sample distribution results according to the age group of participants. Participants in the age group of 41 to 50 years old are the highest, and they reached 34.7%. The age group of 31 to 40 years old is the second highest percentage reaching 31.2%. And the third rank was participants in the age of 20 to 30 years old, with 18.3%. Whilst the last ranked are 50 year old participants and above with 15.8%.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents according to their position. It indicates that the largest percentage of them work as managers consisting 32.2%. Also, respondents who are senior managers reached 25.2%. However, lower level employees, executive managers, and operation managers had the least percentage of respondents respectively reaching 16.3%, 14.4%, and 11.9%.

Figure 4 shows the participant's number of years in service. First, the highest percentage of respondents those are in the service for 11 to 15 years, reaching 23.8%. Second, respondents working for 16 to 20 years are the second highest category consisting 19.8%. The 6 to 10 years in service category came in third consisting 19.3% which is only 0.5% less than the second highest. Respondents working for 21 years and more reached 13.4%.
The last two categories which consists respondents working for five years and less reached 11.9% each.

**Figure 5: Participants Awareness of Knowledge Management**

![Figure 5: Participants Awareness of Knowledge Management](image)

Figure 5 distinguishes between participants that are aware of knowledge management, and those who are not. The largest percentage of participants reaching 39.6% are not aware of knowledge management, and 36.6% of participants think they are aware of knowledge management, which indicates to either the lack of participant's awareness or to participants not knowing the difference between being aware of, and knowing the term knowledge management.

**Figure 6: Are there knowledge management awareness techniques or lectures in your workplace?**

![Figure 6: Are there knowledge management awareness techniques or lectures in your workplace?](image)

Figure 6 show firms that provide methods of spreading or teaching knowledge management awareness in the workplace. More than half the participant's workplace does not offer or provide programs to make sure that their employees are aware of knowledge management, reaching 53%. And 19.8% of participants say that their workplace rarely provides knowledge management awareness programs for its employees. However, 17.8% of participants confirmed that their workplace does provide knowledge management awareness programs for its employee, where 9.4% of participants are in a workplace that sometimes provides knowledge management awareness programs.
According to figure 7, more than half of the participants strongly agree with the statement that knowledge management awareness has a positive impact on the development of an enterprise. And more than 40% of participants also agree with it. And those who don't agree with the statement were less than 5%.

8 shows a percentage of 47.5% employees strongly agree and 46.5% agree with the fact that knowledge awareness in the workplace can and will increase the efficiency of an enterprise and its employees.
Figure 9 indicates that the majority of respondents see that knowledge management is an important issue to care and focus on because of the periodic changes nowadays in the business environment.

Figure 10 shows that almost all of the respondents see that knowledge management is necessary for every industry to have and consider in firms and among employees with 46.5% of respondents agreeing and 51% strongly agreeing.
As figure 11 clearly shows, majority of respondents agreed on the necessity of educating employees about knowledge management and its awareness in the workplace since it has a high level of impact on their and the firm's performance and outcome.

Figure 12 revealed that 62.4% of respondents are working in a company that is very often introduces new strategies or techniques or new programs, while 24.8% of respondents say that their workplace sometimes introduces new programs. However, 10.4% or respondents are working in a company that rarely has new programs and strategies being introduced to the employees in the workplace. Add to that, less than 5% of respondents work in a company that does not introduce any kind of new programs, techniques, or strategies to its employees.
The above figure shows that 44.1% of respondents revealed that when a new program or technique is being introduced to them, the firm sometimes makes sure that all employees are aware of the reasons for this change and the benefits of it. While 36.1% said that their place of work does not inform them of the reasons for change and why it is being applied in this time specifically. And only 19.8% say that their firm makes sure that its employees have the knowledge of why and when this change is being applied.

According to figure 14, 43.1% of participants say that employees take a negative reaction by resisting any new change being introduced by the firm, while 33.7% of total respondents confirmed that resistance to change sometimes occurs in their workplace. And 12.4% say that there is no resistance to change in their place of work, and 10.9% say that resistance to change rarely occurs.
This figure shows the factors that cause employee's negative reactions towards changes. It is shown that 78.2% of total respondents see that all factors mentioned contributes to the employee's negative reaction towards change, such as employee's fear of the unknown after implementing the change, employee's fear from losing their position that may occur after applying the change, the change might be sudden and fast that the employees didn’t have enough time to grasp it, and the employee's lack of knowledge of why is this change being implemented.

As clearly in the shown figure above, the majority of respondents believe that resistance to change has a negative effect on the organization's efforts in development.
There are many ways that can help in overcoming resistance to change that were mentioned in the graph above, and 79.7% or respondents believe that all of them are effective ways to be followed in attempting to overcome resistance to change. Those ways are involving employees in the process of change and developing the new ways that will be implemented, properly communicating the change to employees by informing them of the new ways that might be introduced and the reason for this kind of change, applying the change gradually to give the change a chance to grow on the employees, clearly explaining why is this change needed and why is it needed in this specific time period, and firms should explain the benefits of the new ways and the negatives of the currents ways to help them in accepting the change.

**Discussion & Findings**

The questionnaire included several sections, and each one was mainly directed and focused on a specific aspect of the study's objectives. The first one was mainly focused on the demographic information of participants. The second section of the questionnaire focused of knowledge awareness in the workplace, the majority of respondents were not aware of knowledge management, and a very high percentage of respondents agreed on the fact that knowledge awareness is basically a necessity in the workplace that should be focused on and more efforts should be directed towards spreading this kind of knowledge among employees and educating them about it. The third and final section focused on resistance to change and how could it affect the implementation of knowledge management awareness education in a firm since it is considered a new program that will be introduced to the workers. The majority of respondents confirmed that in many timed firms tend to introduce a new processes, or strategies, or even techniques that the employees may or may not be aware of the need for this type of change, and in the findings of this paper it is shown that most of the times employees are kept in the dark and not enlightened with information about the change and its purpose, and in majority of the firm's attempts to introduce new techniques employees tend to resist and carry a negative reactions towards those efforts, which adds to the difficulty of applying new programs to help in improving the firm's performance.

**Conclusion**

The research questions mainly focus on the reasons why employees tend to resist change in terms of knowledge management, and the degree of how employees and organizations are aware of the importance of knowledge management. This study emphasizes and highlights the importance of knowledge management nowadays, and how can
organizations keep up and cope with the latest techniques. Also, how can organizations deal with resistant employees, by clarifying the need for change, the benefits of change and motivate employees to participate and be a part of the change process, this will help in building a trusting relationship between the management and the employees.

**Recommendations**

For the purpose of spreading awareness of knowledge management and avoid resistance to change, the following recommendations were made:

1. Import knowledge management experts to train employees and explain to them the importance of knowledge management.
2. Introduce technology and knowledge sharing training in the employees’ job orientation.
3. Encourage employees to come up with creative knowledge ideas by offering compensations and bonuses for those who have the most brilliant ideas.
4. Management must build trust between the co-workers inside the organization, allowing better communication and self-expression among employees and between managers and their subordinates.
5. In order for employees to accept change faster, the management must implement the change gradually and not all at once, this way it will be easier for employees to cope with the new changes.
6. Motivate employees to participate in the change process by taking the employees opinions and point of views through surveys of focus groups.
7. Train employees after the changes have been made so they could find it easier to deal with the new technologies and knowledge management systems.

**REFERENCES**


