When Knowledge Management Collides with National Culture: the East-European Knowledge Management Experience (or Lack Thereof?)

Abstract: Knowledge Management comprises a diverse and growing body, however there is little that discusses the condition in the East-European countries while few published studies can be considered as an exception. Two research surveys are conducted to investigate two hypotheses focused on Knowledge Management and Knowledge Sharing and Transfer in the particular East-European country – the Czech Republic. The results reveal that Knowledge Management is a foreign, mostly unknown, concept. A shift in responsibilities and the democratisation of knowledge are contrary to the ideologies and practice of doing business today. The experience of Knowledge Sharing and Knowledge Transfer reflects not only the cultural values but also a culturally demographic divide.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Knowledge Sharing and Transfer, Czech Republic, Technology, Culture.

1. Introduction

Knowledge Management (KM) is a controversial topic within academic circles in many countries. As with the introduction of many other “foreign” management practices, enterprises analyse the cost of introduction and if substantial benefits exist, implement - oftentimes, to the chagrin of employees. In recent history, the introduction of ISO 9000 quality standards met with substantial reticence both on the side of corporations (costs) and employees (resistance to change). Specifically to East-European countries, issues are not technically related but as one director summarises, “the cooperative aspects seem too much like old socialist (communist) brigades, and it is difficult to teach workers the difference” (Clark and Soulsby, 1999:211) (the word communist added by the authors). As acknowledged by Brunet-Thornton and Bureš (2009), successful KM implementation, despite governmental encouragement, is a rare accomplishment in East-European countries in general. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to based on the qualitative research investigate the current state of Knowledge Management, Knowledge Sharing and Knowledge Transfer at the cultural national level in the Czech Republic as a special case study and where possible generalise results for the East-European region. The paper is organised as follows. The next section briefly describes KM foundations. The third section presents the research methodology
whereas the fourth section depicts the acquired results. The consecutive section discusses the results from several perspectives and the last section concludes the discussion.

6. Conclusions

Based on the qualitative research two hypotheses are tested in this study. All of them can be confirmed based the results acquired from the Czech environment. It is proved at the national level that perception of KM as a foreign concept alien to the country acts as a cultural barrier to its successful deployment. Moreover, the cultural model is the major influential factor to KS and KT in universities. Given that only 38% of respondents claim to have a KM programme in place, it is not surprising that over 60% claim to have no idea as to when other KM related activities are planned. Likewise 58.8% respond in the same fashion as to what improvements, if any, are scheduled. Results indicate that there is an overall lack of motivation through feedback and encouragement. There is a lack of motivation to develop new ideas. One possible remedy is for the universities to adopt a proactive position (yet undefined) towards KS.

KM is a foreign concept complete with its case studies of the larger enterprises such as GM, British Telecom, or IBM. KM requires interaction with colleagues and subordinates that entails additional work. A shift in responsibilities and the democratisation of knowledge are contrary to the ideologies and practice of doing business today in the Czech Republic. Lastly, the experience of KS and KT reflect not only the Czech cultural values but also a culturally demographic divide. Lacking national heroes and traditions, youth adopt a progressive and contemporary view on learning whereas the providers are in a process of evaluating the impact of the past twenty years. The inherent sense of bureaucratisation, research and lectures, and changing priorities dictated by the state, add already to the anxious nature of
academia. Although results can be directly applied only to the Czech settings and other countries have different cultural models (Brunet-Thornton and Bureš, 2012), authors believe that certain level of generalisation and application to other countries is possible. However, further research in particular countries needs to be conducted.

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References


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