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Knowledge Management Tools and Practices for Successful Implementation in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

Knowledge Management (KM) practices have existed for long in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); although little attention has been given to successful implementation of KM practices as a means of gaining competitive edge and sustainable development. In view of this, this paper discusses knowledge management tools and practices for successful implementation in HEIs in Nigeria. The methodology adopted for this study was a literature search spanning across several studies on KM and their extent of application in HEIs. This paper further discusses elements of KM as applicable to HEIs, KM tools that are required for successful implementation of KM; and the challenges faced by HEIs in applying and sustaining KM principles in their day to day operations and work processes. Policy recommendations were equally made to improving the implementation of KM in HEIs. It was concluded that leadership of HEIs along with Government should show more commitment in the area of funding, procurement of infrastructures and organizing sensitization programmes that would entrench KM culture and sustain its practices.

Keywords

Knowledge Management, Tools, Higher Education Institutions, Practices, Implementation

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Introduction

Knowledge Management (KM) has been viewed from varying perspectives in the literature based on diverse approaches that have aided its use and applications in organizations. Notwithstanding, few definitions will be examined briefly for the sake of this paper. For instance, Scarborough, Swan and Preston (1999) defined knowledge management as "any process or practice of creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing and using knowledge, wherever it resides, to enhance learning and performance in organizations". Based on this definition, KM can be viewed as comprising specific processes that can enhance the value of knowledge

through its use and reuse to facilitate learning among employees in an organization. Also, Dalkir (2009) gave a more detailed and comprehensive definition of KM "as the deliberate and systematic coordination of people, technology, processes, and organizational structure in order to add value through reuse and innovation. This definition has brought to limelight the meaning of KM as "people management", which is, managing people maximally in their roles as carriers, producers and users of knowledge.

The application of KM in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is of immense importance in this 21st century due to its vital role in the attainment of competitiveness and innovativeness (El-Farr & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019). KM practices have existed for long in most HEIs, although little attention has been given to such practices. Some of these practices include mentoring, coaching, records management, librarianship among others (Shannak & Masadeh, 2012). However, in this knowledge economy, HEIs need to give utmost attention and recognition to KM to drive optimal performance and competitiveness. Although not much have been achieved by HEIs in developing countries in terms of KM adoption due to reasons such as passivity and inconsistent approaches (Ojo, 2014; Donate & Canales, 2012). In support of this assertion, Ohiorenoya and Eboreime (2014) reported in their study variations in the implementation of KM am ong Six NUC accredited Nigerian Universities; which accounted for differences in their performance.

Undoubtedly, HEIs are producers and consumers of two major knowledge which are: academic and organizational knowledge, which centres on teaching, research activities and administrative processes. Pinto (2014) elaborated on these two types of knowledge in the context of HEIs. He defined academic knowledge as "knowledge that emanates from teaching and learning by lecturers and students; while organizational knowledge refers to the overall knowledge of an institution comprising of tacit, documented knowledge, routines, administrative processes, strength, weaknesses, and relationships among others". These two types of knowledge could either be tacit or explicit in nature. Tacit knowledge can be viewed as knowledge that exists in the subconscious of the knower, while explicit knowledge is a documented kind of knowledge that have been captured in the course of interaction in an organization (Mohagan, 2016). Examples of tacit knowledge are experiences, perceptions views or opinions that may exist in the subconscious mind of an individual, although the person may not be aware of it. On the other hand, explicit knowledge includes documents, books, journals, correspondences, and minutes of meeting that had been captured and

documented. These two types of knowledge are complementary to one another; therefore, it can be converted from one form to the other through capturing and codification (Subashini, 2010). These types of knowledge could also be captured or preserved in an institution's memory; and maximized fully for the attainment of success of the institution and their stakeholders. It is therefore required that HEIs harness their knowledge resources from internal and external sources to drive institutional performance.

Without any gainsaying, HEIs globally, are gaining new grounds in sustaining KM to drive high performance, competitive edge and innovation in this knowledge era (Ohiorenoya & Eboreime, 2014). However, the implementation of KM in HEIs in a developing country like Nigeria is ridden with quite a number of challenges such as inadequate awareness of the benefits of KM by top management, lack of KM strategy, lack of funds, lack of management support among others (Ojo, 2012).Some other studies in the literature have shown that HEIs are lagging behind in the implementation of KM practices due to the academic culture of knowledge hoarding (Brewer & Brewer, 2010; Marouf & Agarwal, 2016).

Notwithstanding these challenges, most HEIs in Nigeria play indispensable roles as knowledge producers, consumers and disseminators through research and non-research activities to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders within and outside the institutions. There are diverse knowledge sources that can be used to drive huge performance and sustainable development in HEIs. These sources include: Students, Faculty, Departments, Academic and Non-Academic Staff, Administration, Training and Placement unit, Academic Planning Unit, Library, Management Information Systems unit among others (Bhusry, Rangan & Nagar, 2012). In spite of the diverse knowledge sources, most HEIs have not been able to fully harness these resources maximally to compete favourably with their global counterparts.

However, in a robust KM driven HEI environment, knowledge that are produced by these sources are supposed to be filtered, organized, and stored in an institutional Repository to ensure proper harmonization and use by stakeholders within and outside the institution. By this process, knowledge can be used and re-used continuously to enhance timely decisions. An institutional repository is a structured collection of knowledge generated by all the stakeholders in an institution (Bhusry, Rangan & Nagar, 2012). Therefore it serves the following usefulness such as: ease of access, enhanced validity of knowledge, identification of the source of knowledge, maintenance of shared interest among others (Kevin & Evaristo, 2004). Apart from this, a decentralized KM Portal can also suffice to capture knowledge at

the level of faculties, departments and administrative units among others. Also, other KM tools can also be used to facilitate successful KM practices in HEIs such as knowledge mapping, knowledge directories, knowledge taxonomy among others (Mutula & Mooko, 2008).

In the light of this, this paper would unravel the KM elements that cut across HEIs in Nigeria, discuss tools required for successful implementation of KM across institutions, as well as challenges that hinder successful implementation of KM in Nigeria's HEIs. This paper would further discuss policy recommendations in the successful implementation of KM by these institutions. Conclusion and recommendations would equally be made towards improving the successful implementation of KM among HEIs in Nigeria.

Elements of KM Practices in HEIs

There are essential elements of KM practices as identified in the literature that are levellers to successful implementation of KM in HEIs. These elements are required to ensure successful implementation of KM in any organization. They include: people, technology, content, leadership, sharing culture and organizational processes (Lee & Roth, 2009; Harper, 2019). Each of these practices is discussed briefly below:

(ii) People: People constitute the human resource or the workforce in an institution. These are employees that serve in various capacities in discharging their daily functions and assigned duties. In a KM environment, people play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of KM especially in the area of capturing, processing and sharing of knowledge (Omotayo, 2015).People are the main carriers of knowledge, and therefore they need to be continually motivated through incentives, awards, rewards, and training programmes to achieve the goals of KM.

(ii) Technologies: These tools are needed in the successful implementation of KM practices. The use of these technologies would allow HEIs to capture, store and share knowledge across institutions. However, most public Institutions constantly face the problem of funding, thereby resulting to lack of requisite technologies across institutions. Examples of these technologies include: collaboration and work system, learning systems, knowledge maps, groupware and corporate portals among others.

(iii) Content: These are documented or non-documented knowledge of an institution. that have been handed down from one generation to another. Some of this knowledge can be found in an institution's repository covering diverse areas. On the other hand, knowledge

may be residual, because it exists in people's head. In a non KM driven environment, accessibility and availability to these contents may be problematic due to irregular capturing, mapping and auditing to ensure the right knowledge is captured, stored and used as the need arises. However, in a KM driven environment, reverse is the case because the organizational knowledge will continually be subject to auditing, mapping and capturing and storing for future use.

(iv) Culture: Culture can be defined simply as sets of practices, values, assumptions, ethics and codes that are peculiar to a particular group of people or community (Schein, 1995). Therefore, sharing culture in an academic community involves the practice of continuously passing knowledge from one person or group of persons through a medium or platform. These include students, lecturers, and administrative personnel among others. A sharing culture is essential in a KM driven environment, because it allows knowledge to flow freely without any hindrances. This can be accomplished through a reward system to motivate people in sharing knowledge. Bock, Zmud & Lee (2005) affirmed that if shared knowledge is recognized and rewarded, people will be willing to share knowledge without fear or prejudice

(v) Leadership: leadership is of great importance in the successful implementation of KM in HEIs. Therefore, management of HEIs should support all activities tailored towards achieving the goals and objectives of KM and the institution at large. There must be an alignment between the institutional goals and KM. Anything that falls short of this, will amount to KM failure on the part of management. However, in most cases, the level of preparedness of the leadership towards KM can be said to be low, perhaps due to lack of awareness of the tenets of KM, therefore most times, decisions may not be in support of KM practices. Also, lack of adequate funds in procuring appropriate KM technologies may be a challenge for the management.

(vi) Organizational Processes: Organizational processes cut across all facets of an academic institution. There are different tasks of varying processes carried out in diverse manners across Faculties, Departments and Administrative units, such as academic and administrative processes, examination, admission, training, placement, and research among others. Therefore, these processes should align with KM processes for better productivity and optimal performance (Omotayo, 2015).

Tools Required for Successful Implementation of KM in HEIs

Quite a number of tools are required for the successful implementation of KM in HEIs. Some of these tools are being used by HEIs, while some are yet to be deployed. The purpose of KM tools is to support organizational processes such as capturing, processing and storing knowledge; and creating an enabling environment for knowledge sharing and collaboration (Pinto, 2014). Therefore, the importance of these tools to HEIs cannot be overemphasized due to their relevance and applicability. Some of these tools are discussed briefly:

(i) Capturing Tools: These tools support the process of capturing explicit and tacit knowledge in HEIs. Examples of these tools are: word processing, spread sheets, scanners, and scanning software, email and fax server software, voice dictation, intuitive search tools, practice management systems, automated document assembly, and collaborative and communication technology.

(ii) Codification Tools: These tools support the codification process in the processing and storage of knowledge in HEIs. This can be accomplished through the use of computer databases and other storage and retrieval devices Examples of codification tools: knowledge databases, advanced computer storage techniques; sophisticated retrieval techniques such as query languages, multimedia databases and database management systems

(iii) Intelligent Tools and Technologies: Intelligent tools are used in HEIs tocapture and codify academic and organizational knowledge to assist in taking vital decisions. These include: artificial intelligence, expert systems, neural networks, fuzzy logic, genetic algorithms, case-based reasoning, agents and knowledge discovery database among others.

(iv) **Communicative and Collaborative Tools and Technologies:** These technologies support the transferring of knowledge across space or over a distance. It facilitates the collaboration of ideas among students, lecturers and other stakeholders outside the institution. It brings about a bridge between those that have knowledge and those that do not have. Examples of communicative and collaborative tools and technologies are cutting edge technologies such as bulletin boards, discussion groups, emails, discussion databases portals, internet, intranet, extranet and web based portals. These tools facilitate student exchange programmes whereby they can collaborate with other students virtually together without any barrier to geographical location. It also facilitates capture and transfer of tacit knowledge between students and lecturers within and outside the home institution.

(**v)Application Tools and Technologies:** These tools support the application process by codifying, automating and embedding knowledge in the organisational routine. Examples include corporate intranets updates, organisational directives (manuals and policy) and decision support systems among others. These tools are used to ensure decisions are arrived at logically without any form of prejudice.

(vi) Enterprise Information Portals: Enterprise information portals provide a single point of access to information and knowledge held in many forms within an institution. Information or knowledge on an Enterprise information portal must be accessible and available to the users at a single click. Therefore, knowledge must be regularly updated on an enterprise information portal. HEIs can deploy a decentralized form of EIPs that will be accessible to students, lecturers and administrative staff as need arises.

(vii) Knowledge Databases and Software tools: Knowledge databases and software tools are repository of structured explicit knowledge. Examples include collaborative hypermedia, summarisation, content management systems, visualisation software, categorisation software, automated document and search and retrieval software. These repositories serve to capture and retrieve knowledge for imminent and future purposes. Knowledge repositories typically contain specific types of knowledge for particular business functions. Examples of knowledge that can be found in HEIs knowledge repositories are: client matters, financial information, best practices, knowledge for sales, lesson learned in projects, learning histories, competitive intelligence, patents, academic and conference papers, The different types of knowledge can be classified into three categories: external knowledge, structured internal knowledge and informal internal knowledge.

(viii) Corporate Knowledge Maps and Directories

A knowledge map is a virtual representation of an organization's knowledge. It can be seen as a navigation aid to codified information and tacit knowledge, showing the importance and the relationships between knowledge assets. It encourages the use and re-use of knowledge. It helps in identifying knowledge sources, expertise and ways of creating bridges to increase knowledge sharing. Corporate knowledge maps and directories of explicit and tacit knowledge are repositories that do not provide actual knowledge but points to knowledge, people, documents, collections and data bases where knowledge is stored (Harmanpreet, n.d.).

(ix) Learning and Professional Development Systems

These are the tools that can assist staff and students in HEIs to learn individually and collectively. They include computer-based training programmes, web-based learning, web-based tools, multimedia applications, presentation support systems, the use of virtual reality and the virtual learning environment. For instance, most private institutions in Nigeria have embraced the use of these learning systems, and this was well demonstrated during the Covid -19 Pandemic Periodwhen these tools were utilized for teaching and collaboration among students and lecturers.

(x) Knowledge Taxonomy: It is also known as knowledge organization. It refers to the classification of knowledge assets for the purpose of making them accessible to users inthe organization. It is referred to as a high level information search device that are constructed to provide a means of managing knowledge, navigation and access to intellectual capital (Herd, 2001).Knowledge taxonomy can be used by faculties, departments and administrative units in HEIs due to its flexibility in use. Therefore, the importance of knowledge taxonomy in HEIs cannot be overemphasized due to its role as a tool in facilitating the sharing of common language of classifying knowledge resources. It also facilitates easy searching and retrieval of knowledge resources through controlled vocabularies in search engines, web contents and online databases (Mutula & Mooko, 2008).

(xi) Knowledge Packaging: It refers to methods, tools and techniques used for formalizing experiences and know-how and making it available in the form of products and services.The purpose of packaging knowledge within an institution is to facilitate its communication, enhance its understandability, commercialization and use (Mutula & Mooko, 2008).Knowledge Packaging involves creating products or services, converting them into useable formats, as well as commercializing them for sale within and outside the institution. Knowledge can be packaged in various formats such as abstracts, indexes, bibliographies, catalogues, best practices, brochures, books, bulletins, charts, blogs, diaries, annotations, journals metadata, pamphlets, posters, directories, intranet and portals, knowledge centers, expert systems. The type of format or packaging features will be determined based on the targets or users of the knowledge. Most libraries in HEIs do a lot of knowledge packaging to satisfy their end users and patrons.

(d)Knowledge Auditing (K-Audit): It refers to a systematic examination and evaluation of the explicit and tacit resources of an organization (Hylton, 2012).It involves a comprehensive investigation of the entire knowledge within a particular institution. It is diagnostic in nature, that is it gives a clear picture of how well an institution's knowledge resources are being utilized or underutilized to attain business performance. K-audit is people centered because all employees in an organization carry useful or important knowledge, skill and experiences of the org they work for. The benefits of knowledge auditing to HEIs cannot be overemphasized due to the following reasons: Identification of knowledge gaps within an institution, identifying what knowledge is needed to support overall goals, determining individual and team knowledge assets, Provision of a map of communication flow, determining best practices across faculties and departments, identifying knowledge barriers and blockages; and lastly it enables HEIs determine a strategy for KM initiatives and projects (Hylton, 2012).

Benefits of KM Practices as Applicable in HEIs

The application of KM principles and practices by HEIs is tied to several benefits at the short and long term. Quite a number of these benefits of KM have been identified in the literature, however, very few HEIs have been able to achieve these beneficial outcomes in Nigeria (Ojo, 2016)The benefits of KM is applicable to HEIs in several areas as identified by researchers globally and locally (e.g. Menkhoff, 2020; Ramakrishnan, & Yasin, 2012; Biloslavo & Trnavcevic, 2007) as discussed below:

(i) Research Process: A KM environment allows research activities to be better managed through capturing, processing and dissemination of research outputs carried out by academic staff and students. These research outputscan be further used to promote socio-economic development.

(ii) Curriculum Development Process: KM also allows quick curriculum development of various fields by ensuring contents of different curricula are developed in line with best practices, captured and updated as the need arises. It will also allow for inputs from experts in the industry based on their core areas.

(iii) Better Decision Making; In a KM driven environment, decision making processes are faster based on quicker accessibility to the required knowledge resources.In the context of HEIs, when there is quicker access to information or knowledge, it will lead to good decisions on the part of management. Strategic information caneasily be shared amongst institutions, thereby leading to faster decisions.

(iv) Faster Response to Key Institutional Issues: There are several institutional challenges calling for attention in HEIs. A good KM system will enable a faster response to institutional challenges by management. KM helps in fixing organizational problems at a faster rate, by examining similar problems and scenarios that have occurred in the past were resolved using the available knowledge resources.

(v) Improved Academic and Administrative services: Academic and administrative services can be easily carried out seamlessly with the implementation of KM. Data are easily captured from source, processed, stored and retrieved for future use through sophisticated and evolving technologies. These technologies facilitate unique and quicker services on academic and administrative matters.

(vi) Reduced Cost and Eliminating the "reinventing the wheel syndrome": Without any gainsaying, the implementation of KM is quite costly, however, at the long run, KM eliminates duplication of several processes within the system; and when this happens, it helps in reducing operational and running cost expenses.

Challenges Faced by HEIs in the Successful Implementation of KM

Globally, several researchers have examined challenges faced by HEIs in the successful implementation of KM within and outside Nigeria. These challenges vary from inadequate funds, lack of skilled manpower, lack of continuous training, lack of KM policy, lack of KM professionals among others as identified by authors in the literature(E.g. Marouf & Agarwal, 2016; Ohiorenoya & Eboreme, 2014; Olayiwola, 2010; Brewer & Brewer, 2010).These challenges are briefly discussed below:

(i) Lack of KM Professionals: In most HEIs in Nigeria, there are very few KM professionals that are skilled in setting up KM enabled environment. KM champions are expected to train and retrain employees to align their work function with KM processes. Another major role of KM professionals is to educate and enlighten stakeholders on the rudiments of KM, however, the lack of professionals is one of the challenges faced by HEIs.

(ii) Lack of Essential KM Technologies: In the implementation of successful KM practices in HEIs, essential technologies are required in the form of human ware, software and hardware. These technologies are required to capture, organize, store, and retrieve knowledge from databases and repositories. However, most HEIs are still grappling with inadequate technologies due to lack of funds to procure them as the need arises, and also, lack of knowledge on the use and benefits of such technologies. Apart from this, there is lack of

skilled personnel to operate the evolving technologies. Therefore, training and re-training of personnel cannot be undermined in this regard**.**

(iii) Lack of Leadership skills that aligns with knowledge Management: Successful implementation of KM in HEIs is anchored on good leadership. If the leadership of any institution do not aligns with KM, in terms of policy enactment and decisions, the followership would not easily imbibe the culture of KM especially in terms of aligning their work processes.

(iv) Lack of sharing culture: Most HEIs are yet to imbibe sharing culture that will serve as a leveller for KM. The culture of sharing knowledge is still alien in some academic circles due to the pride of ownership of intellectual property (Marouf & Agarwal, 2016). The sharing culture should be embraced right from Top management to the lowest cadre in the organization. Students should share knowledge freely amongst themselves through several channels. However, there are some hindrances to sharing culture in some HEIs due to reasons such as pride of ownership, lack of rewards for sharing, competitiveness, lack of innovation, hoarding culture among others (Ho, Cheng, & Lau, 2008).

(v) Lack of awareness of the Benefits of KM: Although KM is fast evolving in the 21st century due to the need to utilize knowledge resources in the attainment of competitiveness and innovativeness. However,some HEIs are still not aware of the benefits of KM and its applications to their day to day processes. Surprisingly, Ogunbanwo (2019) found a significant difference in level of KM awareness between private and public institutions in south-western Nigeria. This study has proven that HEIs are getting to realize the importance of KM to their productivity and performance.

(vi) Inability to Capture and Reuse Knowledge-Reinventing the wheel syndrome is a common phenomenon in most of the HEIs in Nigeria. Academic and organizational knowledge are not captured as expected, thereby leading to duplication of efforts in diverse areas. Apart from this, captured knowledge are not being used and re-cycled to save cost and sustain competitiveness.

(vii) Lack of KM strategy: Quite a number of HEIs in developing countries lack KM strategy due to inadequate knowledge of what KM entails and lack of an appropriate strategy that would ensure full implementation of KM. Since KM is just evolving in most of these institutions, the right approach to implementing KM has not been given adequate attention

due to lack of strategy. However, it is worthy of note that the use of another Institution's KM strategy may not work due to the peculiarity of every institution along with their varying challenges of KM (Shannak & Masadeh, 2012). Therefore, it is expected that each institution carves out her KM strategy based on the operating environment that is sustainable and feasible.

Policy Recommendations in the Implementation of KM in HEIs

In view of the challenges faced by HEIs in Nigeria, the following policy recommendations are hereby made to facilitate successful implementation of KM recommendations:

- KM strategy should be devised by each individual institution in line with their operating environment. No two environments are the same, therefore, KM strategy should align with the institution's operating environment comprising of resources such as people, technology and knowledge.
- HEIs in Nigeria should develop her KM policy to facilitate successful implementation of KM within and outside the institution. This policy should be reviewed from time to time to conform to best practices.
- Leadership commitment to successful KM practices especially in the area of funding and procurement of appropriate technologies.
- Furthermore, Management of HEIs should create an enabling KM environment through sensitization programmes forstudents, lecturers and administrative staff on the tenets of KM and its application and
- continuous capturing, storing, sharing and use of knowledge resources to drive optimal performance and innovativeness should be given priority by HEIs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 21st century is posed with several challenges for the continual relevance and sustainable development of HEIs. It is therefore essential that HEIs harness their internal and external knowledge resources to attain competitiveness and drive unparalleled performance through successful implementation of KM, In the light of this; the following recommendations are hereby made to kick start and sustain KM in HEIs:

i. Management of HEIs should exhibitlong commitment to KM through continuous funding, procurement of infrastructure and sensitization of staff and students to gain support.

ii. Knowledge auditing should be embraced by HEIs to identify the knowledge gaps, needs, and available knowledge resources. This would enable HEIsto be able to evaluate their knowledge resources and the extent of usage and its application.

iii. Decentralization of KM activities to facilitate its effectiveness at the level of Faculties, Departments and administrative units in HEIs. This will further entrench the culture and acceptance of KM amongst students and staff.

iv. Training and re-training of staff and students to ensure compliance to the tenets of KM.

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