Managing Constraints and Removing Obstacles to Knowledge Management

Sidharta Chatterjee*

Practice of knowledge management is often characterized by obstacles to creation, distribution, and transfer of knowledge from specific groups of settings. Obstacles or constraints to attempts to constitute knowledge as an organizational resource have been previously dealt within the context of organizational learning perspectives; however, there still remain barriers toward making learning available and all-pervasive throughout organizations. This is often as a result of two important factors: (i) bureaucratic and hierarchical forms of organization; and (ii) owing to the situated and tacit character of knowledge. This paper is a result of theoretical exploration aimed at addressing these core issues, and proposes solutions to manage constraints and remove obstacles to knowledge management, as well as means to codify the tacit character of knowledge. The research offers a view that although it is reasonable to value knowledge in financial or economic terms, it is also important to consider the problems which make it difficult to extract and transfer knowledge within specific organizational settings. Addressing the issue of rising competitive pressure for innovation, this paper proposes several solutions to enable lateral flows of knowledge-sharing by overcoming the factors that affect acquisition of, and creation and distribution of knowledge across fluid social boundaries.

Introduction

"To what problem is knowledge management the answer?" This was the question raised by Spender and Scherer (2007) in their editorial, "The Philosophical Foundations of Knowledge Management". The philosophy of knowledge management is founded on the concept of synthetic analysis of the ontology of conceptual framework for exploration of knowledge processes which rests on the art and science of managing knowledge systematically (Staab *et al.*, 2003). But one is free to ask—what is knowledge management? Although there are many definitions of Knowledge Management (henceforth KM), I quote a widely accepted definition from Davenport (1994): "Knowledge management is the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge."

This formal definition may be simply redefined as "management of learned information as knowledge", aimed at systemizing the process of knowledge management so that the knowledge processes can be organized into a structural framework. In similar thought, one may present this question in a slightly different format—"how can knowledge management answer the questions related to the problem of removing obstacles to organizational learning?" What is the nature of obstacles to organizational learning and KM? If the obstacles are not

*   Visiting Researcher, Department of Economics, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India.
      E-mail: sidharta123@yahoo.com