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## Professional Redevelopment: Interruptions in Knowledge Management

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# Academic Leadership Journal

Learning organizations are a strategic response to increased competition due to globalization (Amy, 2007; Dodgson, 1993; Senge, 2006; Tsang, 1997). Organizations that are able to utilize the ideas and energy of their employees are better prepared to operate in a global economy. An understanding of cross-cultural knowledge management for learning organizations is highly relevant and adaptive to a variety of industries because learning is a continuous process for any organization. Educators are important leaders in the development of participants in the global economy. Studies of cross-cultural management in learning organizations inform education and prescribe methods of knowledge management for efficient knowledge management. The deficiency in knowledge management connected to the learning process that is often overlooked is remediation and follow-up training for professional development.

Systematic, organizational loss of knowledge is a barrier to organizational learning (De Holan & Phillips, 2004). The lack of consistent innovation and follow-up training is a weakness many organizations have. The difficulty in creating the organizational learning opportunities lies in the activities after the trainings and development have finished. A possible solution to combating knowledge loss and lessening the need for professional redevelopment is investment in building a flexible learning community of educators that share a common goal. Businesses, schools, and any organization participating in the global economy as learning organizations would benefit from understanding how gaps in knowledge management result in ineffective learning. This literature review examines inefficient and ineffective knowledge management in cross-cultural learning organizations that results in knowledge loss.

## Role of the Individual

Individuals learning in an organization are essential for the organization to survive and grow (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Senge, 2006). The development of communities which share knowledge in the organization is paramount to facilitate learning (Shieh, Wang, & Wang, 2009). Knowledge is acquired through the learning process and managed through a community. The validity of the community, though, is determined by the participation of individuals. Organizational culture is determined by the participants (Wong, 2001). The process of learning is complicated by the influence of the individual's culture and values (Hatrup, Mueller, & Aguirre, 2007). A single approach to employee training as professional development does not address adequately the influence of cross-cultural communication on the learning process (Hofstede, 1993; Kohlbacher & Mukai, 2007).

To facilitate learning experiences needed to make a successful community of learners dialogue is important (Peterlin, Penger, & Dimovski, 2009; Senge, 2006). Mezirow's theory of transformative learning values discourse as a process in which "people weigh evidence for and against the argument and critically assess assumptions" (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 134). The culmination of the steps that start with the individual, lead to team learning and is connected to the organization as a system. Leaders function as facilitators of knowledge influencing, facilitating the communication processes and therefore, knowledge management (Lam, 2002; Wong, 2001).

## **Knowledge Loss**

The individual is the link in effective knowledge management. Organizations with effective leadership and cooperating cultures best support and benefit the process of learning (Kayes, Kayes, & Yamazaki, 2005). Despite an organization's investment in trainings and professional development knowledge, loss in learning organizations remains a problem. The paradox of investment in learning opportunities is that the system organized to promote learning is at the same time responsible for the loss of knowledge.

Knowledge management fails to operate efficiently when the organization's culture impedes assimilation of knowledge (De Holan & Phillips, 2004). Leaders have a role influencing the culture of the organization as do participants whose own culture in turn influences the organization culture. Differences in trust are a contentious cultural value between Eastern and Western thinking which contributes to knowledge loss (Kidd, 2003). Eastern organizational systems exert influence that is more influential than the role of the leader Lam (2002). On the other hand, in Western organizations the opposite is evident; a leader is more influential.

Knowledge and training are commodities of information which determine success of educational programs. Educators in cross-cultural organizations rely on effective knowledge management for efficient training and professional development programs. Retraining and professional redevelopment are a result of ineffective trainings and knowledge loss.

Identifying gaps in knowledge is the first approach to understanding knowledge loss in a learning organization (Bijlsma-Frankema, Rosendaal, & Taminiau, 2006). Knowledge loss could be an indication of a larger problem or it could be a learning opportunity. Leadership has a central role facilitating strategies to address knowledge gaps (Amy, 2008). Utilizing a leadership approach that facilitates communication and learning is a solution to lessen loss of knowledge. Peterlin, et al., (2009) wrote that the strategic role of an authentic leader is the best approach to facilitate relationships between leaders and followers.

## **Effective Knowledge Management**

Leadership shared with followers in the learning organization is an effective method of knowledge management. Making members of a learning community responsible for their learning also makes them responsible for the assessment of their learning (Shieh, et al., 2009). Too often learning is separated from assessment. Likewise, the issue to address is the organization's system memory. Failure on the part of the organization to learn equates to loss of knowledge (De Holan & Phillips, 2004). A response to a gap such as this is to allow the address of the discrepancy by any individual; an example of shared leadership.

## **Discussion**

Research collected for this literature review examined knowledge management in cross-cultural learning organizations. Knowledge loss was attributed to individuals based on differences in ethnic and organizational culture. With technological advances and economic globalization, comes necessary change to the approach of knowledge management as a commodity in learning organizations (Merriam, et al., 2007). An additional component for the explanation of knowledge loss is connected to

the learning process, most importantly the role of educators in professional development. The collective results of the cross-cultural learning organization studies for this literature review suggest that a new perspective of educators is warranted. Educators participating as leaders in a knowledge supply system can address inefficiency of knowledge management system.

## **Global Community**

Technological advances and globalization prompted a shift in the purpose and delivery of employee training and professional development. Increased dependence on workers to learn skills that change often or are not invented yet shifts the responsibility of education from traditional schools to learning organizations, such as businesses and employers. For an organization to remain viable in the future, which is constantly being redefined and reinvented, educators need to be recognized as leaders of knowledge management.

Required is a shift from the educator as a provider of knowledge to the educator as a leader in the knowledge flow system connected to the organizational community. Organizations that recognize the role of educators as essential for developing their students, their workforce as global citizens and empower educators as leaders begin to operate an effective knowledge management system connected to efficient learning.

The next step to establishing an effective knowledge management system is to connect individuals to others in the learning organization to foster and to promote learning because the flow of knowledge as a supply chain is ultimately human-driven, despite innovations in technology (Dixon, 1997). The responsibility for supporting learning in the organization is shared as community. A flexible, adaptable learning community is an asset to prevent knowledge loss (Kohlbacher & Mukai, 2007; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2007). Collaboration is a significant tool, because individuals work together passing information and knowledge; however, inherent in collaboration and knowledge flow is friction between individuals (Merriam, et al., 2007). In this capacity the educator is best suited as leader to address friction as it propagates knowledge loss. The alternative is a costly solution- to revisit lost knowledge with remedial trainings, to redevelop skills in professional redevelopment.

## **Professional Redevelopment**

For educators, professional development viewed as knowledge management is valuable and operative. There is, however, a loss of knowledge after professional development as organizations emphasize input of information with less review and support for revisiting concepts. There is never enough time to cover again the lessons learned from the trainings, so with intent to infuse up-to-date information, knowledge management fails to be reflective and instead serves to increase information as opposed to managing collected knowledge. Educators are left wondering what the next breakthrough idea will be while wishing that "old" ideas were kept intact and revisited.

Education is a reflective practice- looking forward while learning from the past. Globalization has prompted a wider view of educators' responsibilities and reflective nature. Educators work to prepare a workforce for the future, which has yet to be invented, as educators themselves learn the technology needed to teach. The educator in the learning organization needs to be prepared, updating skills and knowledge often. Effective knowledge management serves this purpose but efficiency is elusive. The costly remediation of information and education for organizations is an example of a difficulty

addressed by the educator as a leader of a community in the learning organization.

### **Directions for Future Research**

An integral part of the learning organization, leadership's role in knowledge management, needs to be revisited in light of the emerging field of authentic leadership. Peterlin, et al. (2009) raise interesting questions as to the nature and influence of authentic leadership in the cross-cultural learning organizations. Previous studies about transformational leadership do not address the complexity of individuals operating in learning organizations. Research about authentic leadership in cross-cultural learning organizations focusing on the individual's role as responsive to this type of leadership would provide useful information.

Following suggestions by Lam and Wong further study about the resistance of individuals as part of organizational culture in response to leadership, the impact and influence of resistance to learning organization concepts could be explored. A leader's influence on their organization's learning process and experiences is worth exploration.

Inspired by Hofstede's dimensions of culture future research is needed to investigate cultural dimensions of cross-discipline studies: Are there similar dimensions to organizational culture as evident in a department's culture? For example, in an academic environment are the organizational culture characteristics of a liberal arts department in contention with the characteristics of the mathematics department. The point is organizational cultures influence learning communities; thereby, determining interruptions in knowledge management.

Technology in a cross-cultural learning organization in regard to usage and implementation related to knowledge management as in how the information learned in trainings is utilized, warrants further study. Furthermore, would learning communities centered on technology in the organization improve knowledge management, thereby lessening the need and expense of professional redevelopment? Related is the validity of redevelopment. Future studies are needed to investigate the effectiveness of redevelopment as a technique to address gaps in knowledge management.

### **Conclusions**

Knowledge is a commodity often lost resulting in costly retraining and repetitive professional development. A challenge for educators and cross-cultural learning organizations is to develop an organizational culture which values knowledge management and practices effective training programs. Differences between individual ethnic cultures, organizational culture, rapid change of knowledge and the fluidity of knowledge management complicate the learning experience process prompting a new perspective of educators as leaders of knowledge systems. For educators working in a global environment professional development updates often; therefore, staying up to date with innovation is essential to serve students and to participate in a global community. Educators functioning as leaders share the challenge to develop a knowledge flow system in which individuals and organizations learn effectively.

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