

Knowledge management: A strategy for mentoring business educators in Nigerian universities

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined knowledge management as a strategy for mentoring business educators in Nigerian universities. The purpose of the study was to investigate how knowledge management could serve as a tool for mentoring business educators in Nigerian universities. This is because, knowledge management has become a catchphrase in most universities in recent times. This is occasioned by the evolving nature of institutional value from physical assets (tangible) to knowledge assets (intangible). Knowledge management has thus, taken a centre stage institution's ability to remain both relevant and competitive in the global scheme of things. Organizational knowledge includes both tacit and explicit knowledge. Tacit is the one an individual possesses about a product, system, and process; while explicit knowledge is codified in manuals, databases and information systems. The challenge of many institutions is how to manage both tacit and explicit knowledge and make sure that they are shared to other colleagues who may see it useful both in the present and future job requirements. The implication of this is that the exit of the senior and experienced business educators due to retirements or other extraneous factors will not create loss of memory that may affect university effectiveness and productivity. Business educators in Nigerian universities therefore need to appreciate the indispensable nature of knowledge management and then develop a mechanism such as mentoring to tap into the collective intelligence, skills and expertise of senior and experienced staff in order to create a greater knowledge base. It is against this background that this paper examines problems plaguing Nigerian universities, knowledge management, ways universities can influence it, the need for knowledge management in Nigerian universities, mentoring in universities, benefits of mentoring and KM as a strategy for mentoring in Nigerian universities. They arrived at logical conclusions and offers key recommendations.

Keywords: Codification, Explicit knowledge, Knowledge management, Mentoring, Personalization, Tacit knowledge

1. INTRODUCTION

Business education is among the various programmes offered in Nigerian institutions. The programme's main operators are business educators. In all levels of education, business educators make business education courses a reality. The primary goal of the business education programme is to provide individuals with the necessary skills, abilities, insight, and competencies to achieve a specified goal in the competitive business world, allowing them to become self-sufficient and self-reliant. The entire process of skills attraction and retention of the highly skilled business educators that will help to chart the direction of realizing this noble objective is contingent on knowledge management via mentoring in Nigerian universities. Again, "when mentoring focuses on the transfer of knowledge, it becomes a channel to give employees the hard skills they need to succeed in their current roles and prepare them to assume more advanced responsibilities over time. Some organizations also use this form of mentoring to ensure that long-tenured employees nearing retirement pass on the experience-based knowledge they have acquired over the course of their careers to the mid-career employees who will eventually take over from them" (Iyoha, 2021: 1).

Many times, intellectual capital development and learning, workforce management, and structured

development activities are all based on knowledge transfer mentoring. Some businesses believe that one-on-one engagement between mentors and mentees who work side by side for a length of time is the most effective means of transferring tacit knowledge, which lies in an expert's head and emerges in reaction to a circumstance or activity. In those situations, mentorship sometimes becomes a key component of the broader knowledge management (KM) and organizational learning strategy.

This explains why knowledge management (KM) mentoring is particularly common in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields where skills shortages compel organizations to accelerate the development of less experienced people to fill critical positions. KM mentoring therefore, is a key component of capacity building and workforce development strategy. It offers a number of mentoring initiatives to accelerate the development of employees' technical and engineering skills and to strengthen their soft skills in areas such as leadership, collaboration, innovation and communication. In recent time, University education in Nigeria has become so complex and challenging. This stems from the pressures occasioned by the changes in technology and globalization which have become the hallmark in the world affairs. Based on this, much is expected from the universities as training points for all levels of manpower. Education today is subject to the pressures of the market, where profound changes in competition have made institutions think like business organizations and behave like educational markets. This accounts for the need for universities management to be proactive in their administration and to adopt measures aimed at adjusting themselves to developing strategies for the purpose of benchmarking and internationalizing their curricula (Panjan & Khalil, 2007).

Accordingly, Akuegwu, Nwie and Agba (2008), assert that, universities in Nigeria however, appear to be distant apart from their peers elsewhere in meeting the challenges created by the present realities in global scheme of things. Perhaps, this accounts for their low ranking among other universities in the world. University education has been bedevilled by institutional inadequacies engendered by poor governmental support, curricula that fall short of the expectations of the labour market, dilapidated infrastructure, administration that is more interested in pleasing the powers that appointed them than fulfilling the mission of the university, poor staff morale and weak academic culture (Akuegwu, Nwine & Agba, 2008).

As a result, universities appear to be operating in such a way that their primary functions of knowledge generation, dissemination, and management are not being adequately pursued. Thus, it appears that universities exist in name other than in quality. The universities as knowledge-based institutions are expected to manage knowledge to ensure sustainable competitive advantage, growth and innovation in Nigeria. Most universities, however, are not investing much on research and development (R&D) (Akpochofa, 2009) and investment in research by government is irregular (Igwe, 1990; Donwa, 2006). The research fund is irregular and inadequate and to make it worse it is difficult to access (Olayiwola, 2010). Meanwhile, Krubu and Krub (2011) argue that some universities may not have embraced knowledge sharing and integrated it into their corporate culture since ICT which is a major tool of knowledge sharing is not adequately funded. Most university libraries are not well equipped for storing knowledge. They do not have recent and up to date books and journals and e-libraries are not well developed. The application of ICT resources in the Nigerian university libraries is seriously affected by inadequate funding by the government as well as epileptic power supply" (Krubu & krub, 2011). Consequently, knowledge generation and distribution are hampered.

Universities are citadel of learning. Hence, knowledge is acquired through education, mentoring, seminars, conferences and workshops. Therefore, it cannot be denied that academic and non-academic staff would have acquired knowledge overtime. The problem is that the knowledge may not be properly managed. Ohiorennya and Eboime (2014) contended that most of the Nigerian universities do not have knowledge management programmes in place probably because of inadequate planning and so control becomes very difficult. The aftermath is that a lot of staff retires and, in some cases, there is nobody to take over and so the universities have to advertise for top cadre jobs. The universities lose their knowledge valuable asset- through such retirement. It is against this backdrop that the need arises to adopt knowledge management as a medium for mentoring in Nigerian universities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptualizing knowledge management (KM)

To begin to comprehend what knowledge management entails, it is necessary to define knowledge. Knowledge

may be thought of as the effective use of facts and information, as well as the prospects of people's abilities, competencies, insights, gut feelings, convictions, and drives. The thirst for knowledge has grown further in today's highly competitive and dynamic corporate world, since the breadth and composition of knowledge has shifted considerably, often expanding beyond the corporation. People can grow their talents, proficiencies, and dispositions via mentoring/coaching, training, and schooling, which are all critical factors for organizations to obtain distinct competitive advantages today. In this knowledge-intensive age, knowledge is a fundamental driver for people's survival; more knowledge equals more power.

Typically, two forms of knowledge are considered across business and KM: explicit and tacit knowledge. The former relates to systematic knowledge, like those of that available in databases and texts, whereas the latter alludes to non-codified insights, that is sometimes influenced by personal encounter. It exists in the minds of individuals. It comprises highly technical knowledge, administrative skill, industry experience, and entrepreneurial judgment. The issue however for Nigerian universities have remained how to utilize the tacit and explicit knowledge as a tool for mentoring.

2.2. Knowledge management (KM) defined

Knowledge management is a series of procedures for identifying and utilizing an institution's intellectual assets. And more to do with locating, unleashing, exchanging, and ultimately profiting on an organization's most valuable reserves: people's experience, talents, intelligence, and ties. According to Kanagasabapathy, Radhakrishnan and Balasubramanian (2006), knowledge management implies a managerial activity which develops, transfers, transmits, stores and applies knowledge, as well as providing the members of the organization with real information to react and make the right decisions in order to attain the organization's goals.

Importantly, Horwitch and Armacost (2002), explain that knowledge management mean the creation, extraction, transformation and storage of the correct knowledge and information in order to design better policy, modify action and deliver. This definition presupposed that the essence of managing knowledge in organizations such as universities is to assist in taking a better action that can unleash positive result to the entire system. Bouthillier and Sharer (2002) opine that knowledge sharing is often a major preoccupation with knowledge management. It involves the transfer of knowledge from one or more persons to another one or more. Although, knowledge can be acquired at the individual level; to be useful, it must be shared by a community.

Universities, for example, have quite an advantage above other organizations because of their tendency to do just that. Mathis and Jackson (2010), assert that knowledge management is the way an organization identifies and leverages knowledge in order to be competitive. It is the art of creating value by using organizational intellectual capital, which is what the organization (or, more exactly, the people in the organization) knows. Knowledge management is a conscious effort to get the right knowledge to the right people at the right time so that it can be shared and put into action. It has however, been argued that knowledge management is a poor term because it cannot be managed. This is because knowledge lives primarily in the mind. Information management does not prove to be much of an improvement in terminology because it carries with it decades of baggage and preconceptions that focus solely on technology. Effective management of your definite assets requires a much broader focus that includes the philosophies, techniques and infrastructure components necessary to drive collaboration, innovation and business agility. KM focuses on utilizing new ways to channel raw data into meaningful information (Groff & Jones, 2003; Brikend, Nexhbi & Sadudin, 2013).

Some of the ways human resource management and perhaps universities administrators could influence knowledge management according to Armstrong (2006), may include the following:

- Help to develop an open culture in which the values and norms emphasize the importance of sharing knowledge;
- Promote a climate of commitment and trust;
- Advise on the design and development of organizations which facilitate knowledge sharing through networks and communities of practice (group of people who share common concerns about aspects of their work) and teamwork;

- Advise on resourcing policies and provide resourcing services which ensure that valued employees who can contribute to knowledge creation and sharing are attracted and retained;
- Advise on methods of motivating people to share knowledge and reward those who do so;
- Develop processes of organizational and individual learning which will generate and assist in disseminating knowledge;
- Set up and organize workshops, conferences, seminars and symposia which enable knowledge to be shared on a person-to-person basis;
- In conjunction with IT, develop systems for capturing and, as far as possible, codifying explicit and tacit knowledge (Armstrong, 2006).

3. BUSINESS EDUCATORS

Several different definitions can be found to business educators. One of the most notable would be that business educators oversee transforming business education curriculum into practical terms whatsoever stages of schooling. According to Osuala (2004), a business educator is any person who plays a critical role in making business education viable and visible in the community, plays the critical role of agent of change in business education, delivers high quality instruction in business education and is able to identify problems facing teaching and learning in the field as well as speculate solutions to such problems. The instructional responsibilities of business educators in the 21st century business world cannot be over emphasised because they are expected not only to expose students to current workplace practices but also to help them acquire skills to create business enterprises that are essential to the creation of a sustainable society.

Amoor (2010) notes that business education plays a significant role in economic development of any nation by providing knowledge and skills to the learner, thereby enabling them to adequately impart knowledge into others, and handle sophisticated office technologies and information systems. The goal of business education is primarily to produce competent, skilful and dynamic business teachers, office administrators and businessmen and women that will effectively compete in the world of work. It has as its primary aim, the preparation of people for roles in enterprises. Such roles could be as employees, entrepreneurs and employers or simply as self-employed. The achievement of the specified primary aim of business education programme depends on the quality of business educators. The quality and the future of business educators are summarily hinged on the knowledge management culture in the university.

To realise the full capacity of the goals and objectives of business education programmes in our institutions of learning the knowledge management system should be such that could attract as well as retain the knowledge possessed by talented Business educators in the universities. This is because they are the people who consciously or systematically administer the teaching-learning activities of the programme processes with the primary aim of assisting others to learn or attain their desired learning goals. Thus, business educators are key individuals responsible for the implementation of business education programme whose quality of training and level of knowledge attainment in business education discipline could mar or improve the educational outcome of the business education students.

According to Agbonaye and Akele (2017), business educators require adequate training to be able to create and use appropriate resources and instructional materials for effective teaching and learning processes. They added that, organising periodic training programmes for business educators is very necessary in order to update their knowledge in their work places. Cole (2012) opine that training is any learning activity that is directed towards the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills for the purpose of an occupation or task. Continuous education through training and retraining will engender effective planning and implementation of business education programme that requires a qualified and enterprising business educator who understands the learner's needs and their societal demands. This calls for assessment of business educators training needs so as to ascertain what they require most in their teaching endeavours (Agbonaye & Akele, 2017).

3.1. The need for knowledge management in Nigerian universities

Today's organizations, universities inclusive are faced with the problem of huge staff turnover and loss of knowledge in the process. Staff turnover is not only caused by people job hopping, but also by a number of experienced individuals reaching their retirement age and will be leaving the university. Thus, the university may be caught sleeping when events such as these happened and then realize that the knowledge of the staff

concerned has not in any way been tapped and hence no succession planning. Cranwell-ward (2004) as cited in Mavuso (2007), states that mentoring is an excellent development initiative to help address the challenge brought up by the knowledge economy. Through mentoring, knowledge will be shared both ways between mentors and protégé's, also ensuring that there is little or no knowledge lost when a member of staff resigns from the university. Effective knowledge management plan will ensure in transferring and sharing knowledge across through mentoring. By this universities are making sure that knowledge is retained at all times and there is no loss of the most valuable asset of the university.

3.2. Mentoring business educators in Nigerian universities

Mentor, a word for someone who teaches wisdom to or exchanges depth of understanding to a less knowledgeable person has been coined. It could also be compared to a smart and trustworthy advisor or instructor. According to Ekechukwu and Horsfall (2015), mentoring is the process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less experience (the mentee).

Thus, mentoring business educators in universities can loosely be described as the responsibility or task of an experience business educator in guiding another member of staff (business educator) who is less experience by way of sharing his expertise, knowledge and wisdom as social capitals and invaluable assets. Mentoring comes in different forms. Myburgh (2004) distinguishes between two types of mentoring: natural and planned mentoring. The natural mentoring occurs through friendship, collegiality and teaching. In planned mentoring, participants are selected and matched through a formal process. Benefits attributed to classical mentoring (i.e when an experienced or older person mentors an inexperienced and younger person) can translate to peer mentoring relationships, mainly when the academic mentor and the mentee have similar backgrounds, mentoring has benefits at three levels, the mentor, the mentee and institutional.

3.3. Mentor benefits include

- Contact with new academic staff and familiarization with current issues
- Additional learning acquired from the experience
- Satisfaction from helping someone else and seeing them succeed
- Opportunity for reflective space and increased career satisfaction
- Intellectual challenge of working on issues which may take them into unfamiliar territory
- Opportunities for increased collaboration.

3.4. Benefits to mentee

- Receiving help on how to work out what they want from their career and how to make appropriate choices
- Obtaining opportunities to network and advice on how to grow those networks.
- Increase in productivity across the academic spectrum and improved personal effectiveness in relation to managing available resources.
- Taking the opportunity to challenge their own thinking and that of the institution.
- Gaining insight into how the institution's culture operates, its values and its objectives.

3.5. Benefits to institutions (universities)

- Supports and feeds into succession planning.
- Increases awareness of opportunities for growth.
- Increase the profile of the institution as an institution that places a high value on support and developing its academic staff.
- Increase the reputation of the institution as a result of improved quality of research and teaching learning methodologies.

However Dietlind and Lydia (2000) note that mentoring relationship can be viewed from different perspectives; not only the potential benefit to the young teacher, but also the professional development of the

experienced teacher has to be taken into account. According to them, mentoring could empower the continuous and lifelong development of teachers (staff). The learning partnership of the two persons embodies a considerable advantage to promote a single school culture as well as personal and professional growth.

4. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AS A STRATEGY FOR MENTORING BUSINESS EDUCATORS

The need for KM as a tool for mentoring business educators in Nigerian universities have since been long overdue. The idea is all about getting knowledge from those competent business educators who possesses the knowledge and sharing it to those less equipped business educators who need it in order to improve on their delivery of their teaching and overall universities effectiveness. Knowledge management therefore involves transforming knowledge resources by identifying relevant information and then disseminating it so that learning can take place. Knowledge management strategies promote the sharing of knowledge via mentoring by linking people with people and by linking them to information so that they learn from documented experiences. According to Nonaka (1991), the two strategies or approaches to using knowledge management as a tool for mentoring which may also be applicable to business education include:

- The codification strategy
- The personalization strategy

In adopting codification strategy or approach of mentoring business educators, knowledge is carefully codified and stored in a database where it can be assessed and used easily by anyone in the university. Knowledge is explicit and codified using, People-to-Document approach. This strategy is therefore, document-driven. Thus, knowledge is extracted from the person who developed it, made independent of that person and re-used for various purposes. It will be stored in some repository for people to use and allow many people to search for and retrieve without having to contact the person who originally developed it. This approach relies heavily on information technology to manage databases.

Personalization strategy on the other hand, knowledge is closely tied to the person who developed it and it is shared mainly through direct person-to-person approach that ensuring that tacit knowledge is passed on. The exchange is achieved by creating networks and encouraging face-to-face communication between individuals by means of informal conferences, workshops, brainstorming and one-on-one sessions. The choice of strategy is however contingent on the organization. The university that predominately uses one of the approaches may choose to use the other as a support of their first choice. Myburgh (2004) identified the two operational dimensions of personalization as a tool for mentoring to include natural and planned mentoring. The natural mentoring occurs through friendship, collegiality and teaching and in planned mentoring, participants are selected and matched through a formal process.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding the significant issues described above, the accompanying suggestions are offered:

- Universities via Dean and HODs should intensify efforts in making knowledge mapping in business education a top priority.
- Business education should make adequate provision for knowledge management culture that will ensure expertise and skills passed to the less experienced staff.
- Business education unit should make it mandatory that every older/experienced lecturer should have a junior staff (lecturer) to mentor, provided that the older has the type of personality required for successful mentoring.
- HODs of business education should initiate modalities whereby stored knowledge and information can be easily accessed. This is crucial because knowledge and information that are not accessible is of no benefit to mankind.
- The government should create an enabling environment for knowledge management to thrive. This may be by way of providing infrastructures, financial support for the universities and business educators should be mandated to imbibe the knowledge management culture.

6. CONCLUSION

Knowledge management in this paper has been discussed as a strategy for mentoring business educators in the Nigerian universities. Organizational knowledge accumulates over time and enables universities to attain levels of understanding and perception that lead to academics astuteness and acumen.

Hence, knowledge management in an organization is usually concerned with capturing organization's know-that and know-how through generation, collection, storage, distribution and application. It requires identifying and harnessing the collective knowledge the business educators in universities gained via experiences and competencies from its top learned and competent staff. Mentoring on the other hand implies a purposeful open and mutual relationship which results in learning and development with mutual respect, acceptance and trust (Kroon, 1996). Knowledge management programme/intervention can be used in business education to manage succession planning and talent management; to make sure that there are enough intellectuals and capable hands to fill in the position of a retiring staff or when a business educator relinquishes his or her position for a better greener pasture.

Moreover, effective knowledge management strategy through mentoring will assist in minimizing the call back of retired staff (lecturer) to the university as a contract staff at an exorbitant salary to transfer the knowledge that should have been transferred while they were still very much in active service. By implication, knowledge management will serve as a medium of mentoring if business educators in universities create the needed enabling environment where knowledge sharing can thrive. It behoves therefore to mention that the impetuous to knowledge sharing in any organization is the function of the culture of that organization. Thus, one dimension critical to knowledge transfer that business educators must emulate is co-operation and collaborations; this implies that knowledge transfer will be impossible in business education in the universities except it displays a high sense of trust and cooperation.

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