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Relationship between Total Quality Management, knowledge Transfer and knowledge Diffusion in the academic settings

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Abstract

In the emerging knowledge economy, universities play a critical role in knowledge transfer and knowledge diffusion of their research findings to the industry. Using the Total Quality Management opens a new horizon in higher education settings in order to facilitate knowledge transfer process and institutionalize its diffusion in the industrial contexts. In doing so, the main purpose of this study is to investigate total quality management practices affecting knowledge transfer and knowledge diffusion in the academic settings. The method used in this study is a correlation method, and structural equation modeling (SEM) are utilized to analyze the data by means of the path analysis. The research instrument is the questionnaire. The study's participants are a sample of all graduate students, PhD student and Professors of three departments at Shiraz University, Iran; of which 169 persons randomly selected as examples of expertise. The findings of the study indicated a significant relation between learning, Autonomy, as the TQM practices and knowledge transfer, and between knowledge transfer and knowledge diffusion. The study also pointed out that among the TQM practices, learning and Employee Fulfillment, have the significant correlation with knowledge diffusion

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1. Introduction

Broadly speaking, knowledge has been regarded as the very source of achieving, maintaining, and sustaining economic growth and competitive market advantage (Courtney and Anderson, 2009). Modern societies, and generally modern life, are heavily regulated by knowledge, which from a strategic perspective, provides innovation capacities for firms to secure competitive advantages in rapidly developing economic markets (Lazzeretti and Tavoletti, 2005). Meanwhile, the expansion of knowledge-based economy and the increasing need for innovation have resulted in new operational challenges for universities, urging them to take new roles, besides their traditional educational functions, and to initiate associations with industries (Etzkowitz and De Mello, 2003).

One of the important facets enabling universities to take part in industrial activities is technology transfer and commercialization activities. In fact, university-industry knowledge transfer activities involve various institutional/organizational interactions, along with governmental participation, that help create and promote firm competitiveness using an effective generation of knowledge (Wang and Lu, 2007). The majority of advanced economies have witnessed developments in the size and scope of university-industry knowledge transfer activities, especially over the past two-three decades (Rossi, 2010). Universities, as the most important knowledge-generating institutions, are the center of attention for academics (Lazzeretti and Tavoletti, 2005). Although knowledge management seems to be a relatively recent topic for business firms or organizations, the topic has always been a central concern for academia (Gururajan and Fink, 2010). Knowledge generation and knowledge application can only be practically incorporated if effective knowledge transfer is promoted between universities and the industry (Wang and Lu, 2007). As higher education institutions, universities offer centers that generate and distribute knowledge, while their activities should not be limited to mere education or research. In contrast, they will need to prepare for taking new functions in the expansion of national economy (Etzkowitz, 2006).

Incorporating the possible links between TQM practices and KM constructs can help unfold the areas that affect the strategic capacities of organizations (Colurcio and Mele, 2006). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) contend that TQM practices provide the foundation of competitive advantage, because such practices make it possible to generate and share knowledge among the members of an organization (Ooi, 2014). TQM, for instance, represents the crucial factor in winning long-term competitive advantage (Yang et al., 2003).

Despite this research variety, few studies have investigated the relationship between the key practices of TQM and KM, although the links between these notions, as mentioned earlier, is important. The qualities of their relationship, one could say, are still far from a universal agreement (Molina et al., 2004). A trend of study could concentrate on the TQM constructs and those of KM, creating an integrative whole enabling firms to implement effective strategic competence (Mele and Colurcio, 2006). For instance, Molina et al. (2007) investigated the relationship between quality management (QM) and knowledge transfer in 197 companies in Spain. Their findings confirmed the significance of QM practices in the internal/external knowledge transfer. Using a structural analysis paradigm, Ooi (2014) scrutinized the multi-dimensional relationships between TQM and KM in services/production companies in Malaysia. The research found that strategic planning and human resource management had a positive and significant relationship with KM elements. Furthermore, process management was found to have a significant effect on knowledge acquisition/distribution. Considering the importance of TQM and Knowledge transfer in the academic environments, the present study seeks to create a ground for understanding TQM and its facilitating role in knowledge transfer, explaining how TQM can enhance the transfer and distribution of knowledge in academic settings.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Total Quality Management

TQM can be regarded as a holistic approach to management that tries to maintain sustainable improvement in the total performance of an organization. Yet, to gain TQM, the notion of *total quality* has to be considered in diverse aspects of an organization, such as the acquisition of resources or customer service after the sale (Kaynak, 2003). Previously, however, TQM was generally perceived as a mechanism through which an organization could enhance its performance. Nowadays, of course, the competitive environment has brought about a new understanding of the

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