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Knowledge Management as a Predictor of Organizational Effectiveness: The Role of Demographic and Employment Factors

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine how the demographic and employment-related factors affect the knowledge management process in higher educational libraries in Qatar. The study is based on a wider research conducted to determine the relationships between organizational culture and knowledge management. The survey covered 122 employees from 16 higher educational libraries in Qatar. A descriptive and quantitative research design was employed to determine the significance of difference in knowledge management activities with respect to demographic and employment-related factors of the respondents. The results of the study revealed that knowledge management activities are not affected by the demography of the respondents. However, it is affected by employment-related factors especially in the type of institutions. The findings are significant and have implications for library directors, especially those from government institutions who need to take necessary measures in order to succeed in knowledge management efforts and achieve organizational effectiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management is a process that helps organizations find, select, organize, disseminate and transfer important information and expertise necessary for activities such as problem solving, dynamic learning, strategic planning and decision making (Gupta, Iyer, & Aronson, 2000, p 17). Although there is no single clear definition for organizational effectiveness, it is widely perceived as the efficiency with which an organization or establishment is able to meet its aims and objectives (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1981). Denison (1997, p. 31) describes that organizational effectiveness involves five important elements such as leadership, decision making, systems, processes and the culture within an organization. Several researches have established a strong connection between knowledge management and organizational effectiveness and shown how various factors like culture, leadership, systems and processes affect the effectiveness of an organization (Cameron, 1980; Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Grusky, 1963; Jian & Triandis, 1997; Lee & Choi, 2003; Price, 1972).

Higher education in Qatar is driven by public and private universities established by both the government of Qatar and foreign universities that have established branch campuses. Qatar is also one of the countries in the region with a large expatriate population. When employees leave a job, they take away valuable knowledge about the systems and

procedures that they had established and core technical knowledge with them. Knowledge management offers the best solution to mitigate problems and manage tacit knowledge more effectively. Nonetheless, the education sector in general and libraries in particular have failed to take advantage of the benefits of knowledge management. A review of the literature did not yield any results of a study that has been conducted in this field especially in Qatar. In hindsight, a research was conducted in October 2013 to examine the relationship between organizational culture and knowledge management activities in higher educational libraries in Qatar, using Competing Values Framework, to determine the various factors and their effects on knowledge management. The current paper fills the crucial gap in the literature by presenting the results of the study. It tries to find if the demographic and employment related factors of employees working in higher educational libraries in Qatar affects knowledge management processes.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT & ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Knowledge management (KM) is basically process based and there are two major aspects of this process – information management and people management. Viewed from this perspective, knowledge management is about information, on one hand, and people, on the other. Although information management is manageable, it is most challenging to manage people, especially when it involves the management of tacit knowledge that resides inside the heads of people. In the beginning, knowledge management was placed mostly in the information

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technology domain, and the emphasis was knowledge-based systems, tools and techniques (Grover & Davenport, 2001). It was after many of these initiatives failed that researchers started to look at the other side of knowledge management (Grover & Davenport, 2001; Koulopoulos & Frappaolo, 2000). Researchers have now come to agree that knowledge management is more than mere storage and manipulation of information, but a process that requires the commitment to create and disseminate knowledge through the organization (Marshall, Prusak, & Shpilberg, 1996; Parikh, 2001).

Since tacit knowledge is highly individualized, the degree and facility by which it can be shared depends to a great extent on the ability and willingness of the person possessing it to convey it to others (Uriarte, 2008). Yet, the success of knowledge management and organizational effectiveness depends immensely on people willing to share tacit knowledge.

Organizational effectiveness is “the degree to which an organization realizes its goals” (Daft, 1995). Attaining a high level of organizational effectiveness will be the ultimate aim of any organization. Organizational effectiveness involves people’s perceptions of how effective an organization is in pursuing its goals (McAdam & Bailie, 2002). Knowledge management has been regarded as contributing to enhancing organizational effectiveness.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Qatar has a large expatriate population, and many of them lend their expertise to establish top class libraries. When employees leave a job, they take with them valuable knowledge about the systems and procedures that they had established and core technical knowledge. Organizational effectiveness is a process of fundamental change in an organization’s culture. With a large population of expatriates in the higher educational libraries, cultural transformation takes place when people leave or take up jobs, which in turn, affects the organizational effectiveness. Understanding the relationship between the various factors that affect knowledge management is crucial in bringing about organizational effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive & quantitative research design. The survey population includes all the employees of higher educational libraries in Qatar that are grouped under three categories. The first group is “Qatar Foundation” which is a non-profit organization that has many foreign universities within its campus; the second group includes private universities again from other countries but out of the ambit of Qatar Foundation and the third group is the state sponsored government universities and institutions. At the time of the survey, there were 20 higher educational libraries affiliated with various universities & institutions in Qatar and 195 full-time employees worked in these libraries. All the 195 employees were taken as a sample, and an electronic questionnaire was designed in the website SurveyMonkey.com and sent to them. A total of 136 responses from 16 higher educational libraries were received, out of which 14 responses were either incomplete or did not begin the survey at all, and hence, they were dropped. No responses were received from 4 libraries leaving 122 fully completed usable responses for analysis at a return rate of 62%.

The questionnaire consisted of two instruments, a knowledge management assessment instrument (KMAI) developed by Sheron Lawson (2003) and an organizational culture assessment instrument (OCAI) developed by Cameron and Quinn (1999). The respondents were asked to give their assessment on how they related to each of the statements in the questionnaire to their library. The responses were then exported to SPSS statistical package for analysis. Both the instruments used a five-point Likert scale to measure the responses, with 5 being ‘strongly agree’ and 1 ‘strongly disagree.’

The following null hypotheses were tested and analyzed.

NH₀₁. There is no significant difference between knowledge management and the employees’ demography in higher educational libraries in Qatar.

NH₀₂. There is no significant difference between knowledge management and employment related factors of the employees in higher educational libraries in Qatar.

ANALYSIS & RESULTS

The research hypotheses were tested and analyzed using quantitative research methods. Quantitative analysis provides the means to distinguish and separate a large number of confounding factors that often obscure the main qualitative findings. It also allows the reporting of summary results in numerical terms to be given with a specified degree of confidence (Abeyasekera, 1997).

The demographic details from Table 1 reveal that more than half of the respondents (68.9%) were women, and less than half of them (31.1%) were men. A little less than half of the respondents (44.3%) were in age group 40–49, and a little over one-fourth (27%) were in age group 31–39. 11.5% of them were in the age group of 50–59, and 9.8% were in the age group of 30 years or less while 7.4% were 60 years or older.

It is also clear that more than 50% of the respondents (61.5%) had a master’s degree while less than one-fourth of them (23%) had a bachelor’s degree. A mere 5.7% of the respondents had an associate’s degree and high school diploma, and 4.1% of the respondents had a doctorate. It is also clear that a mere 13.1% of the respondents were nationals and more than three-fourths of the respondents (86.9%) were expatriate employees.

It is clear from Table 2 that a majority of the respondents (32.8%) were from the middle management that includes the librarians, followed by a little over one-fourth of them (29.5%) from the technical staff that included the library technicians and library specialists. Less than one-fourth of them (18.9%) were support staff and 12.3% of them from senior management that includes the Assistant/Associate Directors of libraries. A meager number of respondents were from the top management (6.6%) which includes the Library Directors or head of the libraries.

Regarding job tenure of the employees, it can be said that close to half of them (44.3%) had 6–15 years of experience followed by over one-fourth of the respondents (30.3%) with 5 or lesser years of experience. A fewer number of employees (13.9%) had 25 or more years of experience, and a mere 11.5% of the employees had 16 to 24 years of professional experience.

Regarding institution type, more than half of the respondents (59%) were from higher educational libraries based in Qatar Foundation.

Table 1
Demography – gender, age, education and nationality.

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	38	31.1
	Female	84	68.9
Age	30 or less	12	9.8
	31–39	33	27.0
	40–49	54	44.3
	50–59	14	11.5
	60+	9	7.4
	High school diploma	7	5.7
Education	Associate’s degree	7	5.7
	Bachelor’s degree	28	23.0
	Master’s degree	75	61.5
	Doctorate	5	4.1
Nationality	National	16	13.1
	Expatriate	106	86.9

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