

Knowledge Management: A Case Study of the Citizen Foundation

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Abstract:

This report has identified and presented details action-plans for TCF to work on in the quest of improving its knowledge management practices. It has catered several areas that includes from strategic, middle, to bottom levels management. This report is literature driven and hence incorporated the framework of Holsapple and Joshi's (2004) and identified elements that influence knowledge management practices of TCF and illustrated a detailed plan of how these can be tackled, activities that need to be implemented and how these will be implemented to flourish the right practices, and finally what resources are needed to achieve the given goals and objectives.

Introduction:

The Citizens Foundation (TCF) is a non-profit organization in the field of education based and operated in Pakistan. It was built in 1995 by the citizens and today it is one of the leading organizations in the world in its field providing education for the less privileged. It contains 17,000 employees and providing education to about 230,000 students. Its vision is, "to remove barriers of class and privilege to make the citizens of Pakistan agents of positive change". Its mission is, "through the power of quality education enabling moral, spiritual, and intellectual enlightenments". Its values are, "integrity", "ownership", and "continuous improvement". There are ten departments of TCF that includes, (i) Education & Training, (ii) Quality Assurance, (iii) Volunteer & Alumni, (iv) Marketing, (v) Finance, (vi) Human Resource, (vii) Supply Chain, (viii) Resource Management Development, (ix) Information Technology, and (x) Engineering.

TCF structure is geographically stretched over the whole country where there are 1441 schools, 52 areas and 6 regions. Each school is comprised of 160 students, each area has undertaken about 28 schools and each region contains about 9 areas. Finally, one head office administers the whole countries' operations.

The identification of new schools development is on the basis of certain criteria. The criteria is that the area should be underprivileged and rural where there is no any school and that contains the population of at least 5000 people. The maintenance of current schools also lie in this sphere. This is done by areas, regions and head office teams, school teams are not involved.

Students' performance is assessed on the basis of their class performance, exam grades, attendance and extracurricular activities. This is carried out by the school teams.

Teachers' performance is mainly conducted on the basis of their content knowledge and communication skills. Principals' are assessed by their leadership styles and overall school performance. Principals' assessment is done by the head office team directly.

Community involvement includes the extended stakeholders of the society that includes organizations, entrepreneurs, and government officials. Their involvement is ensured through the structured volunteering programs, such as, *Rahbar (supporter)*, in which volunteers spend seven Saturdays with the designated students to provide them vision and inspiration in life. These activities are organized by area teams and administered by regions and head office accordingly.

Supply chain's operations include to make all the resources available in time, such as, chairs, tables, boards, uniforms, books – to name a few. In this regard, each school provides an annual plan that areas collect and send to regions where regions compile by comparing and contrasting then forward to head office where final actions are taken. In logistics it includes only transportation, TCF owns about 1000 pick-up vans for teachers. Area team manages each school's vans with regards to their routes development and other related issues. This is administered by regions and head office accordingly.

Another important domain is of donations. Since the only source of funding is through donations therefore a designated team works to identify potential donors and manage the current ones. This is operated at the head office only.

Framework:

"Knowledge management involves the creation of value from an organization's intangible assets" (B. Rubenstein-Montano, 2001).

"...is a formal structured initiative to improve the creation, distribution, or use of knowledge in an organization. It is a formal process of turning corporate knowledge into corporate value" (Davenport & Prusak 1998).

“The knowledge-based perspective postulates that the services rendered by tangible resources depend on how they are combined and applied, which is in turn a function of the firm's know-how (i.e., knowledge)” (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). This study has developed a roadmap of strategies where TCF can take action to improvise a new action plan for effective implementation of the proper knowledge management practices. In doing so, this report has incorporated the Holsapple and Joshi's (2004) knowledge management framework. In this context it was studied from several angles; factors that affect the organization for knowledge management and how exactly those factors can be handled, the policies that can influence, what kind of activities might induce open and right culture to achieve the objectives of mainly generating a culture of knowledge generating, sharing, and storing, and then what is the role of resources and how resources can be managed and handled for the same purposes.

Factors influencing knowledge management		Knowledge activities		Knowledge resources		
Managerial Influences	govern	Knowledge selection, acquisition, use, transfer, and internalisation	create	Intellectual capital	achieve	organisation learning & projection
Resource Influences				Culture		
Environmental Influences				Infrastructure		

Figure 1: Holsapple and Joshi's (2004) knowledge management framework

Factors Influencing Knowledge Management :

Financial or economic factors

Financial factors significantly impacts TCF to maintain its knowledge management. Reason for this is its dependency on external donors. It most impacts on the staff, who are paid less than the other organizations who pay higher for the same scale of employees. Hence, turnover ratio is extremely high, which is about 30%. In this situation, the transfer and adoption of firm's values, norms, and sustaining the whole culture is very difficult. There can be two possible solutions for this challenge. One, to increase funds through joint ventures with the corporate sector and public private partnerships. Second, to increase internal seminars and workshops based on describing and implementing the firm's culture and value. In this, role play activities can be incorporated and also each new employee should spend two months full time with senior employees in different departments. In this way, it will ensure that even if employees stay for not-so-long in TCF but as long they stay they will understand and practice the values of this organizations.

Knowledge sharing culture

Knowledge sharing culture is established well at TCF, however transferring tacit knowledge into explicit concepts is not managed properly. One of the reasons might be the socio-political environment where TCF operates, as it operates in an environment where political, cultural and educational factors are not so esteemed. This impacts on their overall knowledge sharing and transformation process strategy. To ensure knowledge sharing culture top management's role is crucial here. They need to build an encouraging environment and specific reward system for this purpose. So that people could highlight and deliberately involve in this act to flourish and sustain such a culture. It will aid in transferring tacit knowledge into explicit concepts that would be understood over the board and will result in divergent thinking and innovations in what TCF believes in; to provide highest possible quality of education to the underprivileged children.

Control and governance of knowledge management practices

TCF applied and practiced good management practices over the operations and control measures; however there was no specific and explicit control system of knowledge management practices. Each school, area, and region was practicing their own ways and practices for knowledge management. It got to be standardized and integrated. For several reasons, such as, since we talked that turnover ratio is high so new employees joining TCF will not face difficulties in understanding its knowledge management practices if its centralized, and another reason is that it will let TCF to exert more control and keep proper records. In doing this, TCF first needs to set-up a proper procedure at the head office and plan the most optimal practice. Then it needs to slowly incorporate the regions and areas. Initially resistance will be expected because change is not easily accepted. So, it need to make it very clear to the people about their questions of whys regarding this change. It should be very clear that each region's and area's interest must be integrated in implementing the new practice.

Strategy formulation

It is the framework for organizations to achieve their set goals and objectives. It is the plan of action that considers all the possible challenges and their solution and present a roadmap with clearly defined roles of each person in an organization who contributes to achieve that particular goal. TCF should keep knowledge management issues on significant levels while formulating strategies and planning to achieve goals. It should consider the questions who, how, and what kind of knowledge will be managed in order to achieve that particular goal. Furthermore, in the context of those objectives for which the strategies are formulated, what kind of knowledge generation is important and how it will be shared, and how will it be used that will have its usefulness for the organization, especially in terms of creativity and innovation.

Knowledge Manipulation Activities:

Communication processes

The communication at TCF are both direct and indirect communication within the organization and to the external stakeholders. The common methods used at this organization to communicate are emails, face-to-face, SKYPE, and telephonic conversations. However, there is a need to handle the tacit knowledge communication. Despite the presence of the necessary communication tools, most people at TCF lacks in transferring the tacit knowledge.

This results in great loss when a person leaves this organization without transferring what he knows and which is important to organization as well. To cater this problem, proper training for communicating tacit knowledge should be provided time-to-time in the organization and processes should be in to detect knowledge resources and needs. As Weidner and Rahman (2000) stated that, “mapping knowledge flows, needs and resources enables an organization to determine what knowledge is needed by whom; what knowledge an organization has in what format; where it is (in people, libraries, or system repositories); what knowledge is missing and the best ways to obtain it”.

Communication infrastructure

Technology is a very important component to ensure effective knowledge management practices especially in an organization like TCF where operations are geographically well spread, this was also signified by Groff & Jones (2003). Therefore, it's important to understand TCF employees' perception about technology usage. Hence, it's necessary to more effectively integrate technology into the processes at TCF. Since, TCF's schools are in highly underprivileged areas therefore their staff is also from the surrounding community, which is actually not so tech-savvy. Therefore, they are not so comfortable with the technology with regards to communicating. To cater this issue, TCF needs to either incorporate the traditional technology or train employees at different levels for the modern communication ways. Furthermore, TCF may also create an easy interface for their people through which they could conveniently communicate. As according to Srinivas (2005), organizations should make their communication technologies simple to use so that it should be largely and effectively implemented within employees to use for maximum communication.

External knowledge processes: collaboration and networking

It is crucial for TCF to obtain the external knowledge, given their firm's structure and operations, and that is primarily attained through networking and collaboration. But, this is a complex process because TCF's stakeholders are diverse and spread over a large geographical area. They include donors, partners, government sector, and beneficiaries – to name a few. TCF needs to generate team work and networking skills within their employees, especially those who regularly interact with these stakeholders. Holmen (2002) proposed the same method for a diverse and geographically spread Not-for-profit organizations, in which he highlighted the significance of networking skills among employees.

Knowledge Resources:

Intellectual capital

Intellectual capital is undoubtedly one of the most crucial assets of an organization, which should be managed carefully and encouraged actively. As TCF does not have a formal structure or robust strategy that contain the elements of knowledge management, therefore it also does not entail policies or procedures to manage or flourish intellectual capital at a conscious levels of the organization. For this reason, the intellectual capital of an employee can never be capitalized, shared, or applied until not encouraged to do so. Moreover, given the high turnover ratio of TCF, many of the employees' intellectual capital die the day they leave the organization. This is a great loss for the organization. They need to provide incentives and create a proper system of giving incentives for motivating employees towards the generation and dispersion of intellectual capital. Organizations that do such practices tend to be at greater advantage in growing their organizations (Demarest, 1997).

Culture

Open and sharing environment does prevail at the TCF, where employees interact and share information openly without hesitation through different means of medium. Consequently, this environment can be taken as a valuable asset for TCF. If right mechanisms and proper system of knowledge management is implemented in such an environment it will definitely flourish and grow. Yet, it can improve on their current environment through small changes. In their head office about 500 people work under one roof and all have separate closed cubicles or offices. If they open them up and create

open workstations where everyone can see everyone and a central tea/ coffee area at each floor then this would result in significant increase of an informal environment to share knowledge and transfer this intellectual capital effectively.

Conclusion:

TCF needs to be active and upright in creating an open culture of knowledge sharing and an environment where people could easily communicate and share their intellectual capital with the rest of the organization so that such information could also be stored and used for future purposes. Furthermore, there should be a separate unit under human resource development with the name of knowledge management strategy that would continuously ensure critical elements and empower staff to create and share such knowledge. It will also work on to map and track knowledge flows, identify finest practices and promote innovations.

Furthermore, since TCF has a decentralized knowledge management system so it has its own challenges that TCF must consider before going forward. One solution to such challenges is to introduce a rigorous set of framework for knowledge management that will also be included explicitly in the overall strategic plans of the organization. In this way, separate funds and teams will be allocated that will solely work on these lines.

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