

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN ESOTERIC MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Knowledge Management (KM), which builds learning organisations by making learning routine and stimulates cultural change and innovation, is one of the key elements of successful management. Managing explicit knowledge is only the surface of knowledge management as it focuses more on transferring tacit knowledge - embedded knowledge we can call- into explicit knowledge. As tacit knowledge due to its being subjective in its nature is hard to codify and has difficulty operationally setting out in tangible form. Transferring tacit knowledge within organisations is the main concern of knowledge management. Knowledge sharing as one of the steps of knowledge management is encouraged in knowledge management. However, on the other hand, knowledge is taught to, limited to or understood by members of a special group in Esoteric Management. Thus, knowledge management and esoteric management principles seem contradictory in literature. This paper aims at clarifying this traditional notion by tracing the similarities between esoteric knowledge and tacit knowledge and demonstrates that in esoteric management, knowledge is not kept, transferred but within some rituals. This paper tries to draw attention and to create awareness that esoteric way of transferring knowledge is also a type of knowledge management and presents a newly coined term and concept, “esoteric management of knowledge that could be used in literature. Esoteric management of knowledge will no longer be an oxymoron. How knowledge management is achieved and conducted in esoteric management will be defined for the first time in literature with the contribution of this paper. The study bears implications for researchers and managers who wish to understand and employ the concept of knowledge management in esoteric management.

Keywords: Esoteric Management, Knowledge Management, Knowledge Transfer, Tacit/Implicit Knowledge, Explicit Knowledge, Esoteric Knowledge, Learning Organisations

1. INTRODUCTION

KM is becoming a growing concern in management research as it enhances working life quality of knowledge workers, who actually are contributors to intellectual capital of organisations (Wang & Yang, 2016; Bergeron, 2003). Managing intangible assets such as intellectual capital is where knowledge management comes into scene. KM with its aim to create value for the organisation tries to find many ways to obtain knowledge in the era in which knowledge is the fundamental means of gaining competitive advantage.

Knowledge sharing is an important concern of knowledge management. Knowledge should be transferred for a continuous improvement of an organisation. Today's learning organisations are the ones that achieve knowledge sharing with a perfectly applied KM. As employees rarely admit what they do not know, the flow of knowledge should be managed carefully as there are many challenges in selecting the wright knowledge (Smith, 2001).

It is aimed at tracing to what extent esoteric issues colour management discipline, as the postmodern era is full of esoteric associations in daily life, such as films full of vampires, people fond of reading star signs etc. (Brinzeu & Szönyi, 2011)

There are many ways of sharing knowledge in an organisation and many communication methods are used. Determining esoteric element used in organisations is of great importance for a successful KM. This paper aims at contributing to literature which lacks knowledge on esoteric management.

2. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

With its simple definition, it is "*leveraging intellectual assets to enhance organizational performance*" (Stankosky, 2008) and "*the art of creating value from an organisation's intangible assets*" (Beijerse, 1999). Zaim (2006) presents a broader definition of KM: "*It is the systematic management of all activities and processes referred to generation and development, codification and storage, transferring and sharing, and utilization of knowledge for an organization's competitive edge*".

KM is a bottom-up, on-going process and an integrated KM cycle consists of knowledge: 1-sharing and dissemination, 2-acquisition and application and 3-capture and/or creation. Dalkir (2011) makes a synthesis of knowledge sharing processes as knowledge capture, creation, contribution, filtering and selection, codification, refinement, sharing, access, learning, application, evaluation, reuse and divestment. Knowledge sharing and transfer is one of the most important concerns of KM (and KM tries to eliminate the obstacles of knowledge sharing. People may not tend to share knowledge somehow. There are several reasons for this. First, reward comes to individuals for what they know, not what they share, which makes knowledge sharing difficult then. Another reason for not sharing knowledge could be not being sure about the accuracy of knowledge. Organisational culture and climate may not be encouraging for knowledge sharing as well. In literature, it is observed that many researchers focus on finding incentives for knowledge sharing (Hicks, et. al, 2007).

There are three types of knowledge; explicit, implicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is the knowledge that is set out in tangible form; a knower can make explicit via verbal statements, therefore easy to identify, store and retrieve. Implicit knowledge is the knowledge that is not set out in tangible form but could be made explicit. Tacit knowledge is the one that one would have extreme difficulty operationally setting out in tangible form. It is largely personal experienced based and often resembles intuition. It does not have words, It is like riding a bicycle, knowing what do to without thinking too much. Embedded knowledge refers to the type of knowledge locked formally or informally.in processes, rules and cultures. Embodied tacit knowledge and embedded knowledge should not be mixed. (Koenig, 2012; Davies, 2001) In this paper tacit knowledge and embedded knowledge are used interchangeably due to their similarities.

Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) in *The Knowledge-Creating Company* focused on knowledge conversion and proposed a matrix on four modes of knowledge conversion. The idea behind this model is knowledge sharing with no matter what type of knowledge it is, explicit, implicit or tacit. In his matrix, it is seen that each type of knowledge can be converted. Transferring tacit knowledge in one person to tacit knowledge in someone else is called socialisation, which means direct interaction to have shared experience. Externalisation is the process in which tacit knowledge is made explicit by using analogies, metaphors, ideas or images presented in words using mostly dialogues among individuals in a group. Documents, e-mails, data bases are examples of transferring explicit knowledge into explicit knowledge again, which can be called combination. When you absorb explicit knowledge and turn it into tacit knowledge, internationalisation process starts. Some researchers, on the contrary, believe that explicit knowledge cannot be turned to tacit knowledge.

This paper rather focuses on the enablers of knowledge sharing and transfer than the types of knowledge. Those enablers are vision, strategy, structure, system and staff, which create organisational culture. It is organisational culture that makes knowledge sharing possible or not. Some organisational cultures are open to knowledge sharing while some others are not that willing to do so or do it but in an esoteric manner.

Knowledge transfer is a process causes many complex, causally ambiguous set of routines in new settings in organisations. Although knowledge transfer and sharing is possible through interaction, dialogue or documentation, it not that easy as knowledge is "sticky. This adjective "sticky" to describe knowledge chosen by Szulansky (2003) is due to hesitation and unwillingness of the sharer to make knowledge understandable

by the sharer. A wise knowledge source may be unwilling to do so for fear of losing wisdom, his power and position. On the part of the share, he/she may not be attentive. What is more, he/she may underestimate what is transferred or shared. Or his/her capacity could not be adequate or ready to sort out the knowledge shared. Those are the potential barriers between the sender and the recipient of knowledge. The source of knowledge and the context of the transfer process and the characteristics of the receiver all matter in knowledge transfer and affect the stickiness of knowledge. Knowledge factors such as ambiguity, absorptive capacity, and reliability are as important as the motivation of the share in transmission phase. To overcome this tantamount to difficulty in knowledge sharing is one of the concerns of KM. (Kahveci, Gündüz & Yozgat, 2010)

3. ESOTERIC MANAGEMENT

Esoteric, which comes from a Latin adjective “*esoterikos*” that means “belonging to an inner circle” is defined as “*intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with specialized knowledge or interest; belonging to the few*” or something “*private, secret or confidential*”. Esotericism, seen as the New Age’s religion by Hanegraaf (1998), is “a philosophical doctrine or the like” intended to be revealed only to the initiates of a group” (The Oxford Dictionary; The Merriam Webster Dictionary). Greek rationality and Biblical beliefs have always been a great interest in Western culture whereas there is an increasing recognition of esotericism as a third element. This third element esotericism, considered as inner enlightenment is about bringing of knowledge of one’s self (McCalla, 2001). Esotericism is of course not only a philosophy interested in the way how knowledge is shared. It also represents a group of religious doctrines that are similar to Pantheism in philosophy. Esotericism is both an issue of religions and philosophy (Clark, 2015). Esoteric religions are different from exoteric religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc which are in search of only one *Truth* and dogmatic. By contrast, esoteric path in terms of religion is a mystical, symbolic, hidden and initiatory way (Levin, 2008) and it is related with mysticism or occult (mystical supernatural and magical powers) as well by some authors. The groups that follow esoteric principles have secret and obscure rituals such as initiation, which is as old as earliest civilizations. The Latin word *initiare* means commencement. It is a sort of “rebirth” and “transformation” enabling formal entrance or acceptance into a group or society (The Merriam Webster Dictionary) after a kind of metaphorical journey that makes someone mature. The aim of this study is not to give encyclopedic details on esotericism, but just to make it understood with its some doctrines relevant to esoteric management and knowledge management.

As it is understood from the definition, in esoteric management, knowledge is shared with a limited group of people who deserve it. It is the point of view and an action type that favors keeping special knowledge secret and sharing it only with a small group in the organization. It is a sort of protective shell created by the management (Kazancı, 1995). The issue of esotericism is of far an old, antiquarian interest, rather a modern hot issue in business administration. Some managers prefer not to share knowledge, keeping it as a secret, or only to transfer it to a limited group who they believe are in the right path that reaches to the organization’s aims and vision. This sounds like esoteric underpinnings. Is it possible to make knowledge the “powerful knowledge” of the “knowledge of the powerful” (Young, 2013) by this way? This is what esoteric management focuses on and aim at.

4. ESOTERIC MANAGEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

“Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?” (T. S. Eliot- 1934)

This paper is mostly interested in managing tacit- embedded knowledge due to its nature of being a kind of hidden knowledge and this type of knowledge is the interest area of esotericism. Due to the nature of tacit knowledge, it is recommended in literature that knowledge sharing should be encouraged by placing employees working together closely to create pooled expertise and having passion and interest to work with others and to share knowledge (Smith, 2001) and by using some knowledge sharing methods such as peer assist, after action review, storytelling, mentoring and coaching.

Esoteric knowledge is also classified as an element of “high culture” and the élite and it is said to have a role in perpetuating cultural and social hierarchies (Beck, 2013). In literature, some writers use the practice of concealing his/her deepest thoughts and feelings from most of the public, keeping them to only to attentive readers to create more philosophical literacy in esoteric reading, a sort of genre used in literature, which enables them to understand the greatest authors (Melzer, Shaefer, 2015).

KM, perceived as burden, has evolutionary stages towards knowledge (Fig.1). As seen in Fig. 1, a climate and culture that fosters knowledge sharing is highly preferred in KM. If it is encouraged to make people who tend to come to work together and share in KM, the procedure here seems quite similar to the doctrine of esoteric

management, which is based on being a small group.

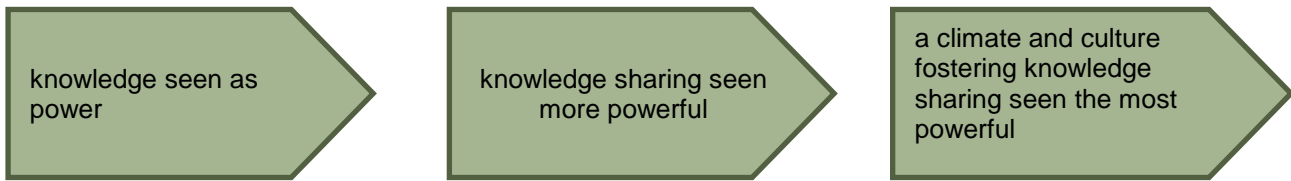


Fig. 1. KM Evolution

Esotericism does not mean being against knowledge sharing. In esotericism, groups gathering are not “secret” groups. They come together to share knowledge, but just within some procedures. In Islamic Sufism, for instance, the intensification of Islamic faith and practice, all the secrets and teachings of the prophet are shared and conveyed by an authorized person to those who take his hand as a teacher. So, “giving hand” is a special ritual to guide followers and students to mastery of their lower selves. Sufism theory is an academic exercise and only shared with the ones who desire to attain the knowledge in Sufism in the way to reach God. Although it seems that the authorities leaders keep knowledge, they share it, but with the ones who are dying to learn.

In philosophy also, a strong emphasis has been put in wisdom as knowledge is not seen only a thing or a substance, but rather a process. Aristotle links wisdom to intellect including rationality and scientific knowledge, technique, character and ethics. In addition to this Avicenna developed a notion of knowledge based on wisdom consisting of intellect, imagination and practice, which could be used to understand prophethood (Kahveci, Gündüz & Yozgat, 2010).

Esoteric management of knowledge term could be coined then due to the fact that esoteric managers also try to share and transfer knowledge but with their way. The knowledge they carry may not be esoteric as in esotericism, but the way they follow seem quite overlapped with esoteric doctrines. Their knowledge may not be esoteric, but esoteric managers might be esoteric in believing some forms of knowledge are higher than others (Hanegraaf, 2002).

Esoteric management is questioned from an ethical point of view and its negative effects are underlined in literature (Mengü, 2005). Hiding knowledge could seem as being unethical. However, what is skipped here is that, some people enjoy sharing knowledge with people they feel comfortable with. When managers share knowledge with only people who deserve it, this knowledge may arouse interest and attract more people. The more managers make knowledge wisdom, the more motivated the recipients become. With the knowledge kept the managers could be seen wiser which could be a motivator to affect followers.

5. CONCLUSION

The ways knowledge moves in organisations, its transfer types, the maximisation of knowledge to attain competitive advantage are therefore of vital importance for KM. Esoteric management may sound that knowledge is being hidden by managers and is not shared. However, it is used just to arouse more interest among employees and make them work harder to be closer to have that knowledge. Knowledge is given step by step only to the ones who are believed to work for the organisations’ objectives. The manager here becomes someone as not only the owner and holder of knowledge, but someone wise. He becomes the owner of wisdom, thus power and authority. This way, employees’ motivation can increase and they many become more ambitious in search of knowledge needed for the organisation’s success.

For further studies, emic studies can be conducted to evaluate which cultures favour esoteric management and which ones do not since types and ways of knowledge sharing is something cultural.

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