



KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: A STRATEGY FOR MENTORING IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

In recent times, there seems to be a paradigm shift in organizational value from physical (tangible) assets to intangible assets that are knowledge based. This is because knowledge has become a critical factor affecting an organization's ability to remain both relevant and competitive in the global scheme of things. Organizational knowledge includes both tacit and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge has to do with what an individual possesses about a product, system and process; while explicit knowledge is codified in manuals, databases and information systems. The concern of many organization; especially, the university system, is how to manage both tacit and explicit knowledge and making sure that it is utilized to benefit other colleagues who will appreciate its usefulness both in the present and future job

requirements. The hallmark of this scenario is that the exits of the senior and experienced staff emanating from retirements and other extraneous factors will not result in organizational loss of focus/control that may affect university effectiveness and productivity. Nigerian Universities therefore need to recognize the relevance of knowledge management (KM) as an indispensable tool that can be modeled towards developing mentoring mechanisms towards tapping into the collective intelligence, skills and expertise of senior and experienced academic staff in order to create a greater knowledge base. It is against this background the paper examines the Nigerian Universities knowledge management (KM) issues, ways universities can influence KM, the need for purposeful mentoring through a strategic Knowledge-based management in Nigerian Universities. The paper concludes with relevant recommendations.

Keywords: Universities, Knowledge management, Strategies, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

When mentoring focuses on the transfer of discipline 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.

Many times, knowledge transfer mentoring is hinged on knowledge management (KM), learning and development, workforce planning or succession management initiatives. Some organizations feel that tacit knowledge, which resides in an expert's head and surfaces in response to a situation or action, can be exchanged most effectively through one-on-one interaction between mentors and mentees who work side by side for a period of time. In those situations, mentorship- sometimes becomes a key component of the broader KM and organizational learning strategy.

Knowledge transfer (KT) mentoring is particularly common with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields where skills shortage compel organizations to accelerate the development of less experienced people to fill critical positions. Knowledge management (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 world affairs; especially in the post COVID 19 era. Based on this, much is expected from the universities as the 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 (Panjan and Khalil, 2007). In short, “Edupreneurship” is gradually taking the centre state in most educational institutions. This accounts for the need for universities to be proactive in their administration where institutional leaders adopt measures aimed at adjusting themselves in developing strategies for the purpose of benchmarking and internationalizing their curricula of instruction.

Universities in Nigeria however, appear to be miles away from their peers elsewhere in meeting the challenges created by the present realities in the global scheme of things. Perhaps, this accounts for their low ranking among other universities in the world. University education has been bedeviled 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 (Akegwu, Nwine and Agba, 2008). Thus, the universities seem to be operating in such a way that their core missions of generating or creating knowledge, disseminating knowledge and engaging in knowledge management, have left much to be desired. It appears therefore, that universities exist in name other than the much expected quality.

The universities as knowledge based institutions are expected to manage knowledge to ensure sustainable competitive advantage, growth and innovation in Nigeria. Most of them however, are not investing much on Research and Development-R&D (Akpochofo, 2009) and investment in research by the government is irregular (Igwe, 1990 and Donwa, 2006). This 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 developed. Therefore, the application of ICT resources in the Nigerian university libraries have been seriously affected by inadequate funding by the relevant agencies as well as epileptic power supply and some

owners of the private universities are not excluded in this decay (Krubu and Krub, 2011). Thus, the knowledge generation and dissemination has been generally impeded.

The universities are a citadel of learning as is evident in their Knowledge based activities 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 have been properly managed. Ohiorenoya and Eboreime (2014) contended that most of the Nigerian universities do not have knowledge management programs 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 thereby suffer a huge setback in their knowledge base - a 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.

Knowledge concept

In order to understand what constitutes knowledge management (KM), it is important to start by defining knowledge. Knowledge can be thought of as the full utilization of information and data, coupled with the potential of people's skills, competencies, ideas, intuitions, commitments and motivations. In today's dynamic and complex business world, the desire for knowledge has increased even more with the scope and content haven changed dramatically, often spreading outside the organization. In the present day, knowledge remains an important factor for organizations to gain distinctive competitive advantages; through mentoring/coaching, training and education, people can develop their skills, abilities and attitudes. Knowledge is a key driver for people to survive in this knowledge intensive age. There is no gain-saying the fact therefore that, more knowledge means more power. Within business and KM, two types of knowledge are usually defined, namely explicit and tacit knowledge. The former refers to codified knowledge, such as that found in data bases and documents; while the latter, refers to non-codified and often personal/experience-based knowledge. It exists in people's minds. It includes scientific or technical expertise, operational know-how, and insight about industry and business judgment. The challenges however for Nigerian universities have remained how to utilize the tacit and explicit knowledge as a tool for mentoring.

Knowledge Management Concepts

Knowledge management is the set of practices aimed at discovering and harnessing an organization's intellectual resources. It has to do with finding, unlocking, sharing and altogether

capitalizing on the most precious resources of an organization: people's expertise, skills, wisdom and relationships. Knowledge management, according to Kanagasabapathy, Radhakrishnan and Balasubramanian (2006) 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. To Horwitch and Armacost (2002), knowledge management means 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 results to the entire system. Bouthillier and Sharer (2002) opined 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. The ability of organizations such as universities to do this is what places it in a position of having an edge over others. Mathis and Jackson (2010), asserts 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 organization intellectual capital, which is what the organization (or, more exactly, the people in the organization) know. 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 not a powerful 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 and Jones, 2003) in (Brikend, Nexhbi and Sadudin, 2013).

Influencing knowledge management in the Universities

Some of the ways human resource management and perhaps university administrators could influence knowledge management 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).

The Need for Knowledge Management in Nigerian Universities

Today's organizations 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. It can also be of student's extortion and the likes which may lead to a colossal loss of valuable knowledge at an unexpected time. Thus, the university may be caught sleeping when any of the events mentioned above 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) in Mavuso (2007) stated 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 staff member resigns from the university. Effective knowledge management plan will ensure transferring and sharing knowledge across through mentoring. By this, universities are making sure that knowledge is retained at all times and that there is no loss of the most valuable asset of the university.

Mentoring in Nigerian Universities

Universities are institutions of higher learning which offer courses both at the under-graduate and postgraduate levels and where courses are studied and researched in-depth and degrees

are awarded. By doing this, the universities engage in some forms of mentoring. Unfortunately, these lofty efforts have not yielded required outcomes.

Mentorship has been adopted as a term, meaning someone who imparts wisdom to or shares knowledge with a less experienced colleague. It can also be seen as a wise and trusted counselor or teacher. 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 in universities can loosely be described as the responsibility or task of an experience staff (academic and non-academic staff) to instruct and guide another staff that is less experience and sophisticated with knowledge by way of sharing his expertise, knowledge and wisdom which is a social capital and invaluable asset of an organization. Mentoring comes in different forms. Myburgh (2004) distinguishes between two types of mentoring as *natural* and *planned* mentoring. The natural mentoring occurs through friendship; collegiality and teaching. While 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 inexperience and younger person) can translate to peer-mentoring relationships. This becomes valuable when the academic mentor and the mentee have similar backgrounds. Mentoring has benefits at three levels: the mentor, the mentee and the Institution.

Mentor benefits include:

- Contact with new academic staff and familiarization with current issues;
- Additional learning that is acquire 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.

Mentee benefits include:

- Being given help 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 objectives.

Institutions' (universities) Benefits include:

- 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 (Wikipedia).

However, Dietlind and Lydia (2002) noted that mentoring relationship can be viewed from different perspectives; not only from the potential benefits to the young teacher, but also the professional development of the experienced teacher has to be taken into account. According to this view, 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's culture as well as personal and professional growth.

Knowledge management (KM) as a strategy for mentoring

The necessity for knowledge management as a tool for mentoring in Nigerian universities cannot be overemphasized. The bottom line is all about getting knowledge from those who have it and distributing it to those who need it in order to improve 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 include:

- i. The codification strategy
- ii. The personalization strategy

In codification strategy or approach, 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 ensures 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/alternative to 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. While in planned mentoring, participants are selected and matched through a formal process.

CONCLUSION

This paper x-rayed Knowledge management as a strategy for mentoring in the Nigerian universities. It noted that organizational knowledge accumulates over time and enables universities to attain levels of understanding and perception that lead to academic astuteness and acumen. The paper also noted that knowledge management in an organization is usually concerned with capturing organization's know-that and know-how through generation, collection, storage, distribution and application of relevant information. It requires identifying and harnessing the collective knowledge the university gained via experiences and competencies from its top erudite and competent staff.

Mentoring as seen from this perspective implies a purposeful open and mutual relationship which results in learning and development with mutual respect, acceptance and trust. Therefore, knowledge management programmes/interventions can be used in our universities 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 staff 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 universities create the enabling environment where knowledge sharing can thrive.

It suffices therefore, to conclude that the tenacity, with which knowledge sharing in any organization is to be anchored, lies on the function/culture of that organization. Thus, one dimension critical to knowledge transfer is co-operation and collaborations; this implies that

knowledge transfer will be impossible in an organization such as the university except it displays a high sense of trust and cooperation between staff and management, among peers and between mentors and mentees.

WAY FORWARD/ RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the discussion so far, and in order to put the concept of knowledge management in proper perspective, the paper puts forward the following:

1. To ensure that there are enough intellectuals and capable hands to fill in the positions of retiring senior staffers or when a staff relinquishes his or her position for a better or higher responsibility, knowledge management programmes/interventions should be vigorously utilized in our universities to manage succession planning and talent management.
2. Going forward from above perspective, Empirical studies could be carried out on knowledge management as a strategy for mentoring in Nigerian universities as well as other tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
3. Finally, evaluating the impact of knowledge management on job performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions could also be explored as a way forward.

Based on the critical issues discussed and the way forward above, the following recommendations are made:

- Universities through the Deans and HODs of various departments should intensify efforts in making knowledge mapping a top priority;
- Universities should make adequate provisions for knowledge management culture that will ensure that expertise and skills are passed to the less experience staff;
- Universities should make it mandatory that every older/experienced lecturer should have a junior staff (lecturer) to mentor, provided that the older colleague(s) has the type of personality/charisma required for successful mentoring;
- Universities via the HODs should initiate modalities whereby stored knowledge and information can be easily accessed. This is crucial because knowledge and information that is 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/facilities; financial supports for the universities, so as to encourage the universities to imbibe an enviable knowledge management culture.

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