

KNOWLEDGE SHARING PRACTICES AT THE ZIMBABWE ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION AND DISTRIBUTION COMPANY'S WESTERN REGION

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Abstract

The study sought to establish the knowledge sharing practices used at the Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company and how these practices enhance performance. The study was conceived from a literature angle that knowledge is not shared voluntarily. Using a case study approach on a purposively selected sample data was collected through interviews, questionnaires and document analysis. The findings of the study indicated that the management and supervisors use meetings, notice boards, memorandums, apprenticeship and face to face interactions for knowledge sharing. The study also established that lack of incentive and reward systems demotivates employees to share knowledge. In view of these findings it is recommended that ZETDC should develop a knowledge sharing policy that will facilitate knowledge sharing practices to enhance performance at ZETDC. The study concluded that effective knowledge sharing practices requires a conducive organisational culture and structure which should be backed by top management support.

Keywords: Explicit knowledge; Knowledge Sharing; Knowledge Transfer; Tacit knowledge; Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company

1. Introduction and background to the study

Many organizations recognise the role that knowledge sharing plays in ensuring their survival and the ability to remain competitive and many organisations are beginning to manage organizational knowledge (Yusofet *al.*, 2012). Knowledge management (KM) through knowledge sharing has positive spin-offs for organisational performance and service delivery (Cong and Pandya 2003; Kok 2004; Riege, 2005; Vong, Zo and Ciganek 2014; Yusofet *al.*, 2012). The performance of an organisation is enhanced when it achieves its business objectives in a cost effective manner. However, knowledge is not shared voluntarily. There is a need to investigate how organisations share knowledge in a context. Using the Western Region of the Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (ZETDC) as a case study, this study investigated knowledge sharing practices at the electricity transmission and distribution utility. The knowledge created and owned by the employees of ZETDC is important and needs to be shared and used at a specific time or place before it loses its value. Knowledge sharing activities are likely to improve access to information, “enable easy communication with colleagues, and encourage participation in learning and decision-making communities” (Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, 2005).

2 Enablers of knowledge sharing

Enablers are factors that influence the successful sharing of knowledge. Knowledge sharing enablers include organizational culture (Najibullah, Darren and Muhammad 2013; Al-Alawi *et al.*, 2007), communication (Al-Alawi 1997; Riege, 2005; Husted and Michailova, 2002), reward system (Oliver and Kandadi, 2006; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000), knowledge supportive culture (Wiig, 2004) organisational structure (Frost 2010; Hseih, 2007; Al-Hawamdeh, 2003:105), leadership (Al-Hawamdeh 2003:105; Jong and Hartog, 2007). McDermott and O'Dell, 2001; Carmeliet *al* 2011; Carmeli, Gelbard and Palmon 2013:100).

3 Knowledge discovery tools and ICTs that facilitate knowledge sharing

In knowledge management resource discovery tools assist a wider community of e-learning practitioners allowing users to find out what resources are available (Clarke, 2016). Resource discovery tools are a powerful means of accessing a wide range of information relevant to learning, accessing websites and weblinks. Using knowledge management technologies such as knowledge discovery tools organisations hope to enhance the information and knowledge utilization process (Al-Hawamdeh, 2003). Knowledge resource discovery tools that can be identified in organisations may be static or dynamic and may exist for a short period of time, or may be persistent. Knowledge resource discovery tools may contain information, such as a document, a database. Alternatively a resource may also be a service, such as the query engine to an World-Wide Web indexer. In knowledge management finding and retrieving relevant resources to the user of the system involves locating resources and presenting these to the user as a possible solution of the challenge or problem at hand. ICT tools that facilitate knowledge sharing can also be taunted as online strategies for knowledge sharing and even technical mechanisms that enable successful knowledge sharing if used appropriately. These include websites, discussion forums, email listservs, telephones, cellphones, fax, databases, electronic bulletin boards and virtual conference rooms (Omona, Van der Weide and Lubega (2010) Tsui (2006)

4. Statement of the problem

From a literature angle knowledge is not shared voluntarily (Wang and Noe 2010), in fact it is not easy to share. Poor knowledge sharing practices affect organisational performance and result in knowledge loss. The following specific objectives were formulated to address the research problem:

- What are the enablers of knowledge sharing at ZETDC?
- What strategies does ZETDC use for knowledge sharing?
- Is there a knowledge sharing policy at ZETDC?
- What knowledge discovery and ICT tools are in place to facilitate knowledge sharing?

5. Research method

Using a qualitative study data was collected through face to face interviews of top managerial staff, questionnaires and institutional document analysis. Key informants were employees with management positions and senior supervisors. The collected data was then analysed using SPSS version 18.

6. Results

6.1 Enablers of knowledge sharing at ZETDC

One of the objectives of this study was to identify the knowledge sharing enablers such as leadership, trust at ZETDC. Majority (64%) of respondents indicated that leadership style at ZETDC was democratic, followed by 36% respondents who suggested that it was authoritarian and 7% suggested it is laissez faire.

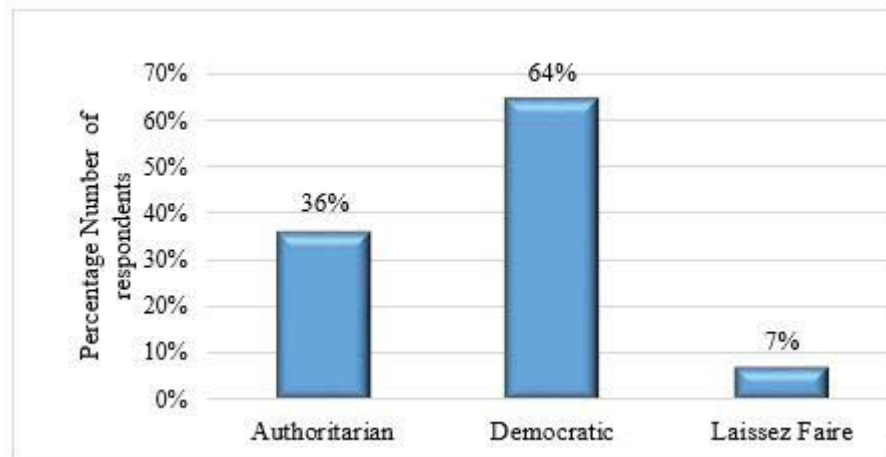


Figure 1: Leadership styles present at ZETDC

Leadership is a huge factor to consider for successful knowledge sharing amongst supervisors and managers.

6.2 Organisational culture

Rewards and incentives motivate employees to share knowledge. Respondents were asked to identify rewards or incentive systems that existed in ZETDC if any to encourage knowledge sharing. Majority identified award. Top management and staff are motivated to share knowledge by different things, management by business benefits, whilst staff by personal benefits (Bartholomew, 2005).

6.3 Knowledge sharing strategies at ZETDC

The other objective was to ascertain the knowledge sharing strategies at ZETDC. Circulars, memorandums and staff meetings emerged as the commonly used practices to share knowledge at ZETDC. Circulars and memorandums also emerged as the most effective practice to share knowledge between different sections. An interview with one of the management revealed that notice boards in office corridors and in the elevator were other commonly used knowledge sharing practice. Thus knowledge is shared in public places as well (Dewah, 2012). Face to face interaction and apprenticeship practices were also identified as other commonly used knowledge sharing practices. Workshops, conferences, quarterly newsletters and mentorship programmes are infrequently used.

6.4 Knowledge sharing policy at ZETDC

A knowledge sharing policy supports an organisation's need to share knowledge. Asked if there is a knowledge sharing policy in place at ZETDC majority (78%) respondents said there is no knowledge sharing policy in place at ZETDC, 11% said there is a knowledge sharing policy while 11% did not respond to the question. The 78% identified the authorised personnel responsible for releasing information through notice board or meetings, an ICT policy that dictates that all computer users at ZETDC linked via email to enable easy sharing of knowledge and information as well as sectional and departmental meetings that are mandatory together with the induction of new employees. Interviews further revealed that long service awards, retirement ceremonies Christmas and farewell parties are some activities in place that enable to interact freely outside the workspace environment.

6.5 Knowledge discovery and ICT tools that facilitate knowledge sharing

Participants were asked about the knowledge discovery and ICT tools that facilitate knowledge sharing at ZETDC. Data collected revealed that all respondents (100%) use E-mails, 96.4% use telephones, 75% use cell-phones, 39.3 % use fax machines, 32% use websites, 7% use electronic bulletins, 29% use databases and 7% use virtual conference rooms. Communication amongst employees in different geographical locations was through e-mails, telephones and cell phones. Modern communication technologies like video conferencing were used by executives. Databases though rarely used enable instant and multiple accesses to information and knowledge enabling easy sharing.

7. Conclusion

The study established that knowledge sharing practices enhancing organisational performance are present at ZETDC, though lack of incentives demotivates employees to share knowledge. ZETDC mainly practised KS by way of meetings, telephone, email, circulars and memorandums. The study concluded that effective knowledge sharing practices require a conducive organisational culture and structure, which should be backed by management support and adequate reward systems. Effective implementation of sharing strategies can enhance organisational performance. KS policies should be developed. The study recommends research on how organisational culture affects KS at ZETDC.

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