KNOWLEDGE SHARING STRATEGIES FOR CAPACITY BUILDING AMONG NIGERIAN ACADEMICS IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

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Abstract

This paper is focused on knowledge sharing strategies for capacity building among Nigerian academics in the digital and knowledge economy era. Using current literature, it defines knowledge the practical knowhow and intuition stored in people's heads and documented to effect positive change. Knowledge sharing is described as a set of practices and actions that help the better exchange of acquired information among personnel with their organizations and being able to reduce the time spent on problem solving, while increasing efficiency among personnel. Capacity-building is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world. Capacity development is important for skills development and abilities to discharge the assigned and statutory responsibilities as expected and for innovation and transformation. Contemporary knowledge sharing strategies for the digital era include community of practice, knowledge mapping, mentoring, institutional repositories, twinning, collaborations, etc. The challenges associated with the use of knowledge sharing for capacity building among Nigerian academics include absence of knowledge sharing policies, mistrust, inadequate digital literacy skills, lack of incentives, etc. The paper recommends the drafting of institutional knowledge sharing policy, application of reward mechanism, provision of knowledge sharing tools, etc., to address the challenges identified, and reposition knowledge sharing among Nigerian academicsfor capacity building that would result to sustainable development

Keywords

Knowledge Sharing, Capacity Building, Nigerian Academics, Digital/Knowledge Economy

Introduction

The 21st century is regarded as the knowledge and digital economy. It has gained so much relevance that even a developing country like Nigeria has now acknowledged this reality by creating a Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy. This shows that information and knowledge must be properly communicated with contemporary digital technologies to drive sustainable national development. To compete globally, it is expected that a nation should harness the potentials of its knowledge base using digital technologies. One of such knowledge bases is the academic environment (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education and technology) whose main focal points are learning, teaching, research, and community development. They also involve in knowledge creation/production for adoption and utilization in the society.

In academic institutions, faculty members rely heavily on information and knowledge to discharge their statutory duties of teaching and research, whose products are also knowledge in tacit, explicit, and implicit forms. This will help them build the necessary capacities to engage in academic

activities, career progression and delivering their mandate of providing a sustainable framework for societal development. As the knowledge economy expands, so do the requirements for proper engagements in academic activities enlarge. This leads to proportionate increase in the challenges associated with the demands of the job. New models of professional practice in different fields are springing up, and the academic community needs to keep pace with these challenges with adequate knowledge in these areas on their hands.

The academic community is saddled with the provision of teaching, learning, researching and subsequently, development. Development is a multidimensional and sustainable elevation of an entire society or social system to a better level or more civilized life (Akanwa, &Okorie, 2020). It is further explained as a qualitative increase in capability that deals with the activities undertaken to prepare organisations, institutions, establishments and even employees to perform additional duties and assume higher positions in organisational hierarchy. Development, according to UNESCO (as cited in Mbashir& Alabi, 2013), is summed up as societal growth and change which involves materials, mental, psychological, physical, instructional and organisational innovations. It is the process of change at all level of economic, political, and socio-cultural transformation that results to general improvement in welfare of people living in a defined, or the general society.

Going by the need to ensure that the Nigerian academic system needs to be repositioned for the challenges of the global knowledge-based economy in order to attain its desired development level, it is important to examine how academics can engage in knowledge sharing practices for building the right capacities needed by the members of the academic community, especially faculty members. This paper therefore seeks to identify the knowledge sharing strategies for capacity building among Nigerian academics in knowledge economy.

Definition of Knowledge

Today, knowledge is seen as one of the most significant resources in any organization (Rad, Alizadeh, Miandashti, Fami, & 2011). Knowledge extends beyond data and information. It also includes the judgment and experience needed to take action, to run a clinic, design a behaviour change campaign, or serve a client. While some knowledge is written down, most consists of the practical know-how and intuition stored in people's heads. Like written knowledge, this "tacit" knowledge, too, can be managed to increase organizational performance (United States Agency International Development, 2004). Knowledge is a tactical resource that gives an organisation a viable advantage over its competitors if properly managed (Halawi, Aronson, & McCarthy, as cited in Eiriemiokhale, &Idiedo, 2020). Knowledge is recognised the most significant resource for competitive advantage and the key to enhancing innovation (Al-Hussein, &Elbetagi, 2015).

Knowledge has always seen as one of the key strategic resources that can produce sustained long-term competitive advantage. Knowledge is the ability of individuals and organizations to understand and act effectively, and perform their tasks efficiently. Having knowledge supports to cope with daily routine works and it can also set up everyone to deal with new situations and utilize when needed (Gaál, Szabó, Obermayer-Kovács, & Csepregi, 2016). The society is increasingly recognizing knowledge as the greatest resource and currency for human capital development and organisational growth due to its capacity to improve the decision-making skills of one who posses it.

The above definitions emphasise the place of knowledge in improving efficiency at individual and organisational levels, enhancing creativity and innovation, facilitating result-oriented decision making and imparting positive change among those who possess it. It has not just earned its place as a resource that facilitates growth and fundamental change, it is a basic component of development and

continuity required by every institution to sustain the delivery of its services and compete favourably.

As the society becomes more complex, the need for knowledge increases. And as solutions to such complex matters are found, more knowledge is created, leaving pace for those who do not possess such knowledge to meet up with.

Conceptual Explanation of Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing refers to a set of practices that involves the exchange of acquired knowledge among personnel with their organizations also being able to really reduce the time spent on problem solving, while increasing the quality of work among personnel (Dave &Koskela, as cited in Rad, Alizadeh, Miandashti&Fami, 2011). Knowledge Sharing is a subset of Knowledge Management. The concept of Knowledge Sharing (KS) refers to the exchange of knowledge between two or more parties such as individuals, organisations or parts of an organization (Maiga, 2017). Paulin and Suneson (as cited in Moghavveni, Sharabati, Klobas, & Sulaiman, 2018) state that knowledge sharing is defined as the interchange of knowledge between individuals and organizational units, groups, and the organization itself.

Knowledge sharing is the process by which an individual imparts his or her expertise, insight, or understanding to another individual, so that the recipient may potentially acquire and use the knowledge to better perform his or her tasks (Rad, Alizadeh, Miandashti, &Fahmi, 2011). Janus (2015) explains that knowledge sharing is a subset of knowledge management encompassing the exchange of knowledge (information, skills, experiences, or expertise) within and across organizations. Although it can be one-directional, knowledge sharing in most cases is a two-way or multilateral exchange in which the parties learn from each other. Knowledge sharing is more than mere communication, because much knowledge in organizations is hard to articulate. Knowledge sharing can be defined as a social interaction, involving the exchange of employee knowledge, experiences, and skills as well as the provision or receipt of task information, know-how, and feedback regarding a practice or procedure (Cummings 2004).

Fundamentally, the basic idea behind knowledge sharing is to obtain experience from others. It is explained by AbdurRazak, Pangil, MdZin, Yunus, and Asnawi (2016) as the practice of exchanging and disseminating the ideas, experiences, and knowledge with others in order to ensure that the knowledge that facilitates the attainment of organisational goals continues to be possessed by the members of the organisation, and sustains the organisation for competitive advantage. As noted by Al-Hussein and Elbeltagi (2015), knowledge sharing (KS) is considered to be a building block of efficient performance within higher education environments and plays a key role in enhancing the innovation of universities. Knowledge sharing, unlike information dissemination is not just a one-way process, it is a deliberate and planned exercise targeted at improving the knowledge base of individuals and groups in the society with the main goal of achieving the target goals of individuals and organisations which engage in knowledge sharing practices.

While the Sharing of knowledge can improve competitive level, the lack of sharing knowledge can lead to serious problems for the organization (Abdollahpour, & Naji, 2016). Individual abilities, knowledge and skills do not exist in a vacuum; instead, they must be effectively and interactively shared (Li-Ying, Paunova, & Egerod, 2016). By interacting and sharing knowledge with others, an individual may enhance his or her capacity to define a situation or problem, and apply his or her knowledge so as to act and solve the problem (Nonaka, Von Krogh, & Voelpel, 2006). Knowledge sharing therefore cements its place as the vehicle that provides the opportunity for the systematic exchange of knowledge among individuals and organisation members with the sole aim of

improving productivity and organisational efficiency through the improvement of the skills, capabilities and capacities of the members of organisations and institutions.

Definition of Capacity Building

The United Nations Development Programme (as cited in the World Health Organisation, 2019) defines capacity as the ability to perform functions, solve problems, and achieve objectives at three levels: individual, institutional and societal. Capacity building has typically been defined as the development and strengthening of human and institutional resources. Capacity-building is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world (United Nations Academic Impact, 2019). Capacity building is an ongoing process through which individuals, groups, organizations and societies enhance their ability to identify and meet development challenges. Capacity building involves man-machine interfaces in organizations to enhance operating efficiency, expertise and skills of personnel towards the achievement of organizational excellence (Sarmah, 2014).

Capacity building has also been defined as the acquisition of abilities, skills, understandings, attitudes, principles, associations, practices, incentives, means and conditions that enable individuals, organizations, networks and broader social systems to function and accomplish development objectives over time (Obasola, Alonge, Oladele, &Eyers, 2014). Capacity building has been described by Ballantyne, et al (as cited in Ogunmodede, &Mafelu, 2012) as the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies develop abilities (individually and collectively) to perform functions; solve problems and set and achieve objectives.

Capacity building can therefore be seen and understood as the strategic steps and well-coordinated efforts taken to expand the features, strengths, skills and means available to a particular system and its human resources with the objective of enhancing efficiency in services delivery as established by the mission and mandate of such systems or organisation. It goes beyond just getting facilities in place. It also involved the extension of the qualities of the facilities and the capabilities of the human resources managing such facilities for the betterment of the organisation and institution they serve.

Rationale for Capacity Building among Academics through Knowledge Sharing

Among academics, we have learners and tutors. While professors, readers and senior lecturers are at the higher cadre, younger academics like graduate assistants and young lecturers are still learning their way up the ladder, as such they need to be taken along in practice. Danaher, Davies, George-Walker, Jones, Matthews, Midgley, Arden, Baguley(2014) note that effective knowledge sharing is crucial to the long-term capacity-building of learners, in order to ensure the sustainability of individuals, teams and communities. Higher education in Nigeria has come under severe criticisms in recent times due to poor quality of its products. There is therefore an urgent need for academic institutions in Nigeria to catch up with innovations in educational practices in developed economies (Anasi, 2012). The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA, 2005- 2015) (as cited in Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015) states that capacity building includes sustainable technology transfer, information exchange, network development, management skills, professional linkages and other resources. Capacity development needs to be sustained through institutions that support capacity-building and capacity maintenance as permanent ongoing objectives.

Capacity building and skills development are integral to harnessing the transformative potential of the ongoing development and increasing sophistication of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Hansen, 2018). Since the present era is the digital era, academic institutions must ensure that their human resources posses the skills that align with the demands and challenges of the digital economy that can make them compete favourably globally. Capacity building involves acquiring skills and knowledge. It also enables one to be "aware of new possibilities and empowered by gaining new skills and upgrading their old skills and having continuous access to information resources, materials and equipments (Mabawonku, as cited in Ogunmodede &Mafelu, 2012).

In the knowledge economy, capacity building can therefore be said to be based on the following rationale for academics and the environments:

- (a) Sustainability: If academics do not build capacity, several tasks usually performed by those at the top of the ladder will become redundant as they would have retired with their capacities. Unavailability of certain groups of the academic community can stall continuity in projects and services delivery.
- **(b)** Innovation: Capacity building helps to integrate new ideas and inject contemporary practices in academia.
- (c) Transformation: With innovation, the status of academics, especially in Nigeria will witness transformation in practice and results.
- (d) Teamwork: Capacity building through knowledge sharing will help build team contribution and help every member of the academic community have a sense of belonging by contributing their quota to the system. This in turn will help build mutual understanding and respect among faculty members.
- (e) Unity of direction: When capacity is built through proper knowledge sharing, there will be common goals and results. Conflicts in managerial and academic processes will be reduced due to effective communication among members of the academic community.
- (f) Efficiency: Capacity building through knowledge sharing will facilitate improved efficiency in services delivery as abilities will not be one-sided. Members will always be ready to get involved and resolve issues surrounding services delivery without necessarily waiting for certain members who may be discharging other duties as assigned.

Since knowledge itself improves the technical know-how and efficiency of those who possess it, knowledge sharing is bound to effect the same positive changes when shared. It provides those who possess it with new abilities to discharge their assigned and statutory responsibilities as expected. By properly facilitating knowledge sharing practices among professional colleagues, academics can fill occupational gaps without having to incur extra expenditures.

Contemporary Knowledge Sharing Strategies for Capacity Building among Academics in the Knowledge Economy

Knowledge sharing is expected to be a formally planned and meticulously executed process if it must yield the required results for those who adopt it. The following are identified strategies for knowledge sharing among academics:

• *Coaching*: This can be adopted between senior and junior academics in order to give them guidelines on teaching methods and executing other professional duties. Adequate time

should be provided for new and young academics to learn from senior ones in order to learn some tacit knowledge in practice by watching the delivery of services directly.

- Communities of practice: A community of practice is a group of people with common interest and common goals coming together to share ideas. They rely on face-to-face interactions and web-based interactions to operate and carry out discussions and deliberations. Community of practice helps to bridge the gap that would naturally have existed among different cadres and hierarchies of academics. Since it is topics of interest that brings the participants together, the issues of seniority may not influence the learning process, and as such, important ideas could be generated from the most unlikely sources.
- Knowledge maps: A knowledge map is a visual aid that shows where knowledge can be found within a group or organization, and how to find those with the most expertise. Often referred to as an "inventory of knowledge", these maps are organized using various interconnected nodes to make it easy to find out where to look for information (MindManager, 2021). This will limit the stress associated with physical contacts and help eliminate the fears of losing self-esteem while seeking for knowledge.
- Mentoring: Mentoring is also used among senior and junior colleagues whereby a junior colleague is attached to monitor the academic activities of a senior colleague and see how tasks are carried out. Mentoring can never be outdated because it offers the simplest hands-on experience learning process between the experienced and the less experienced.
- Storytelling: Storytelling sounds informal but when adopted as a strategy, it makes knowledge sharing easier and more comprehensive. It takes away the rigors and formal strictness associated with other formal methods of knowledge sharing. Storytelling helps internalize and relate experience with expectations. It helps to prepare for challenges and how to address them.
- *Twinning*: This can be used when colleagues of same level but of different academic prowess are merged to carry out different tasks in coursework or research work. Allocating courses and duties to people of the same rank or designation gives them the opportunities to be less rigid when sharing ideas.
- *Workshops*: Workshops can be organised to teach colleagues on current practices in the field (National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools, 2011).

According to Ekere (2008) avenues for human capacity building in a technological era such as ours include short and advanced courses, seminars, conferences, workshops, membership of professional associations, staff exchange and visiting programmes etc. Other contemporary means of knowledge sharing include:

- . *Institutional repositories*: The hosted website and knowledge repository where the grey literature of an academic institution can be made available for global visibility can also serve members of the same academic community and even beyond in similar disciplines to be able to adopt and incorporate innovative practices and adapt them into their own immediate environment. Because of the absence of institutional barriers, institutional repository makes it convenient for academics to learn from different climes.
- . Workshops: Workshops can be organised for colleagues on contemporary practices in order to demonstrate innovative practices to them. Workshops are very importance in practical oriented disciplines where hands-on activities are required.
- . Collaborations: Collaborations, especially in academic publications, research works and teaching and learning activities can be used to ensure that capacities are developed. Knowledge shared

through collaborations can form new knowledge. Collaborative works help build mutual respect, understanding and evaluation of shared ideas.

- . Seminars, Conferences and Presentations: Virtual conferences, seminars and presentations are now contemporary concepts, especially in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. It has brought about easier ways of communicating scholarly ideas and deliberating on them even in inter-institutional basis. This helps bring disparate ideas together, compare and contrast, before rating and adopting the best practices.
- . Social media forums: Social media forums are now used among professional academic bodies within and outside institutions in order to facilitate seamless, borderless and timely sharing of ideas on new discoveries, inventions and contemporary practices. WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger, Telegram groups are now facilitating this with very little costs. The advantage of social media knowledge sharing is that it is borderless and requires no physical space.
- . *Public Lectures*: Public lectures are veritable strategies adopted by academic institutions globally. They are usually offered in universities with a wide range of attendees on a specific subject. It gives them the opportunity to attend lectures and gain multidisciplinary experience and knowledge. They provide a valuable opportunity for citizens to learn about new research. Public lectures can also be virtually delivered via Zoom and other contemporary digital methods. Public lectures provide access to life-long learning and opportunities to explore new topics and ideas.
- . *Training*: Training on the job is another means of knowledge sharing. It involves practical handson experience that is very vital in building capacities through tacit knowledge sharing. The training can involve on-the-job advanced or short term courses, either self-sponsored or by the institution.
- . *Colloquium*: A colloquium is usually an academic meeting at which specialists deliver addresses on a topic or on related topics and then answer questions relating to them. It presents younger scholars with opportunities to learn from experts on a topic of discourse.

Challenges and Prospects of Knowledge Sharing for Capacity Building among Nigerian Academics in the Knowledge Economy

A lot of factors affect knowledge sharing, subsequently, limiting the possibilities of enhancing capacities through knowledge sharing in developing countries. Sharing is a common activity for everyone, but knowledge sharing within an organization is a complex and complicated issue (Gaál, Szabó, Obermayer-Kovács, & Csepregi, 2016). Alsuraihi, Yaghi, and Nassuora (2016) argue in support of the above assertion by stating that lack of knowledge sharing in universities and among the academics in universities are more dominant in developing countries. Karim and Abdul Majid (2018) notes that barriers to knowledge sharing include individual capacity, inadequate organizational capability, fear of knowledge revelation, knowledge nature, poor attitude towards knowledge sharing, inadequate awareness, trust, subjective norms, attitude, rewards & incentives, technology, and organizational climate, functional organizational structure, individualism, working in isolation, opposing ideologies, unwillingness among academics, time constraints, lack of management support, inadequate communication mediums, lack of training on IT tools, unwillingness to use technology, job security, national culture, lack of policy and priority, lack of collaborative environment, lack of language competence, inadequate technological/ IT skills. Some of the challenges are further explained below:

Absence of an organised Knowledge sharing system: Lwoga and Sife (2006) pointed out that many university libraries in developing countries including Tanzania do not have systematic approach of managing knowledge to support the core functions of research,

- teaching and learning. This situation creates a difficult situation for faculty members making the system haphazard and leads to loss of untapped knowledge.
- Inadequate digital technologies for knowledge sharing: Technology facilitates and encourages knowledge sharing because it is an important intercession in knowledge sharing as, it is used to connect partners, and facilitate interaction and access to data which supports their daily activities (Bulan & Sensuse, 2012). However, observed trends in Nigeria have shown that so many Nigerian academic institutions lack basic ICT facilities to facilitate knowledge sharing.
- Inadequate digital literacy skills: To navigate through some of the digital technologies for contemporary knowledge sharing, adequate knowledge of the technologies is required. Absence of the requisite digital literacy skills in Nigeria has adversely affected knowledge sharing for capacity building among Nigerian academics.
- Absence of an official institutional knowledge sharing policy: Several Nigerian tertiary institutions do not possess a written policy or framework for knowledge sharing. This makes the entire knowledge sharing haphazard and unorganised.
- Distrust among colleagues: Due to unhealthy competition, Nigerian academics have shown distrust towards their fellow faculty members by hoarding knowledge. While some feel threatened by the career progression of others, others feel they may not be acknowledged for sharing their knowledge since some of the knowledge is tacit. This leads to knowledge hoarding, which refers to deliberate hiding of knowledge by faculty members.
- Poor communication gap due to rank divide: Younger scholars often feel more comfortable to share and learn from their peers. The informal discussions among scholars are often stratified.
- Poor reward system for knowledge sharing: Faculty members who regularly share knowledge due not get the adequate acknowledgement for their knowledge shared. This motivational factor affects knowledge sharing to a great extent and leads to knowledge hoarding.

Conclusion

Academic environments require innovative and updated ideas to properly function for contemporary services delivery, therefore updated knowledge is required to build capacities among academics through a well-planned knowledge sharing model. Unfortunately, literature and observation have shown that there is no systematic knowledge sharing policy or model established among academic institutions in Nigeria, either at the institutional level or at the inter-institutional level. This, among other challenges serves as great challenges to the achievement of sustainable development through capacity building among members of the ivory tower. It is expected that with adequate measures in place, this unfortunate narrative can be corrected and the Nigerian academic system can be repositioned for the challenges of the digital and knowledge economy.

The following recommendations are hereby put forward to address the challenges noted:

Drafting of institutional knowledge sharing policy. Institutional policies that will contain the
guidelines, rules, procedures, tools, systems and strategies for knowledge sharing should
be drafted for advanced knowledge sharing practices in tertiary institutions in order to
ensure consistency and uniformity in practice.

- Application of reward mechanisms in knowledge sharing. Incentives should be introduced
 for sharing knowledge among academics. This will be a motivational factor for
 knowledge sharing among the academics in tertiary institutions.
- Provision of knowledge sharing tools and resources. Digital technologies that facilitate
 knowledge sharing should be provided by institutional heads. This is a key factor that
 will enhance knowledge sharing. Without critical factors like power supply and ICT
 tools, knowledge sharing will not be possible.
- Sensitisation of faculty members on the societal and individual benefits of knowledge sharing. This will help curb knowledge hoarding.
- Organisation of digital literacy training for faculty members with bias for knowledge sharing and knowledge management in the contemporary. It will be difficult to share the knowledge one cannot manage digitally using same digital technologies.

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