

Challenges Facing Knowledge Management in Public Organizations in Arab Countries

Aya Maher¹, Heba Samir² and Nashwa Ghoneim³

¹The American University in Cairo, Egypt

²Modern Science and Arts University, Egypt

³Alexandria University, Egypt

ayamaher@aucegypt.edu

hebasamir186@gmail.com

nashwaghonei@aucegypt.edu

DOI: 10.34190/EKM.20.063

Abstract: The objective of this theoretical study is to investigate in depth the challenges facing knowledge Management (KM) in public organizations in the Arab countries in an effort to offer some recommendations to deal with these challenges. The significance of this study lies in the fact that knowledge is power and is considered an intangible asset for organizations. Experts have agreed that people, process and technology are among the key components for KM. The study is timely in the Arab countries due to the significance of KM in enhancing the performance of public organizations which suffered after the Arab Spring. The study discussed the concept of KM, its significance, challenges facing KM in public organizations with cases from some Arab countries and the suggested framework from review of the literature followed by the discussion and conclusion.

Keywords: Knowledge management (KM), public organizations, KM challenges, Arab countries

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the millennium, knowledge management has become a critically emerging topic of discussion in the management literature. Despite its great potential, it is widely recognized that the application of KM in the public sector for the provision of public services is not yet widespread (Arora, 2011). It is believed by the business and the academic communities that organizations can enhance their long term competitive advantage through leveraging knowledge. For organizations to be able to make the best use of knowledge, researchers have found it valuable that organizations should understand the difference between data, information, and knowledge. Information is a refined, organized and analyzed data, while knowledge is perceived as meaningful information (Bhatt, 2001). We can say that the quality of the knowledge largely depends on the accumulated prior knowledge (data, feedbacks, procedures, rules and operations) learnt by experience and practice in order to generate a meaning that can be properly interpreted according to various paradigms (Marakas, 1999).

The broad field of meaningful knowledge management offers new possibilities for a competent public administration that is capable of providing effective public services and functions that are coherent with the public agenda, preparing a society and citizens who can act as effective policy partners, and leveraging commercial and public intellectual capital (Wiig, 2002).

2. Concept of Knowledge Management

Knowledge management can be defined as “a process that drives innovation by capitalizing on organizational intellect and experience” (Duffy, 1999). Knowledge is not just pursuing the existing knowledge, rather it is the intention to develop and support new knowledge that creates innovation which is a necessary ingredient of organizational success (Duffy, 2000). As noted earlier, the triple set data/ information/ knowledge are associated with the capacity for action and eventually decision making and they are correlated as follows: information is generated by selecting and analyzing data, and knowledge is produced by selecting and combining information, then a decision can be made and actions can be taken (Webb, 1998).

Several outstanding organizations such as British Petroleum, Dow Chemical, Hewlett Packard, Skandia Assurance, and Texas Instruments issued their descriptive case studies that show successful knowledge management initiatives. Such success stories encouraged the researchers to recognize the increasing needs for knowledge management in organizations and to identify the key challenges and success factors for effective