Knowledge Management: As a Mechanism for Large-Scale Technological and Organizational Change Management (E-learning and ERP) in Israeli Universities

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Abstract

*Organizational and Technological changes in Israeli universities are taking place without a clear and well-planned model for managing those changes. Universities must adapt to daunting social and educational challenges, in which technology is playing a bigger role than ever before. The model we propose is implementing knowledge management strategies for achieving change management at universities in order to facilitate university's transformation. By doing that, we are establishing a **well planned** mechanism for managing large-scale technological changes, **previously non-existent**, and devising a **new mechanism** based on **existing processes** in the university's organizational and environmental practices.*

Introduction

Over the last decade higher education has had to face numerous pressures and changes (globalization, mass education, large-scale university rivalry – local, private and foreign – budget cuts, demands for greater accountability and increasingly sophisticated technologies) (Hanna, 2003; Scott, 2003; Waterhouse, 2005). Universities, the world over, must adapt to daunting social and educational challenges, in which technology is playing a bigger role than ever before – both in inducing changes as well as in providing the means to cope with them. This technology decade had had an impact on almost every aspect of learning and work in academia: research, instruction and administration. Indeed, leading researchers had pointed out that the introduction of any new technology is bound to involve significant changes in work processes and organizational structures, even to the point of reshaping the university's future (Bates, 1999; Duderstsadt, 2000; Guti-Rosenblit, 2005; Kiernan, 2002; Scott & Wagner, 2003, p1). The role of technology in reshaping the university's very essence is pivotal in helping fulfill academia's role as an agent of social and cultural change. Achieving this goal demands, on the one hand, a thorough evaluation and understanding of prevailing practices of change management, and on the other hand, establishing a well planned change management mechanism. Such a mechanism would provide the means whereby decisions will be made regarding organizational and technological shifts that are to determine the university's ability to survive and attract prospective students and staff, particularly in view of the traditional reluctance in some academic circles to embrace changes (Smith, 1999)

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Objectives

This study presents a cross-section examination of two overall organizational changes introduced into the work processes of Israel's higher education system during the past seven years: E-learning environment and ERP technology. The aim of this work was to describe the manner and method by which technological changes such as E-learning and ERP had been dealt with in universities and with in the Higher education system.
This research uses the "grounded theory" as its methodology.

Method

The research used in-depth interview as its main tool. The main target audience was Academic managers, technological managers and academic stuff. Managers from higher education regulation organization have been interview to this research as well.
The study focuses on methods for enhancing initiatives for large-scale technological changes, both inside and outside the university, their formation, progress, and management, including repercussions that any one university's decisions have on other universities. This study sets out to clarify what, if any, models and methods are devised for managing, navigating and adjusting academia in an ever-changing environment, while considering its unique functions and culture.

Conclusions

One of the main findings was that overall organizational changes in Israeli universities are taking place without a clear and well-planned model. Moreover, there are no methods or guidelines, nor so much as a know-how tank in any of the regulatory systems inside or outside the universities. There is large understanding in the universities regarding the change agents, change components, change leaders, nature and subjects, but very little understanding regarding to the change mechanism and process.
The research data yielded that there is a sort of a mechanism (not pre-conceived) for large-scale technological and organizational change management in Israeli universities. This mechanism acts within universities or in close proximity to universities as a CoP (community of practices) and is influenced by other universities' decisions. Information which reaches the CoP of professionals (a forum in which every university has one representative) serves as a change catalyst. In the process of receiving and processing information, CoP's members are addressing all relevant issues: difficulties, problems, misgivings. They thoroughly map all information while looking at different options to solve particular problems (Drawing on experience accumulated in Israel and abroad). After consolidating their decisions they push for implementing various changes in their own institutions or in the higher education system, as a whole. They do so by lobbying, sharing and promoting the change benefits and providing guidelines. Any implementation of a given decision could in turn set the whole process in motion again.

The study in fact established that this process was rather non defined and diffused as far as methods or pre-conceived goals were concerned. It emerged rather as a Knowledge Management process. On the basis of this understanding, it would seem imperative to devise a pre-conceived and well-planned model that would enable efficacious large-scale organizational and technological change management. The model we propose is facilitating knowledge management strategies and process for achieving change management:

KM-M-CM: (**K**nowledge **M**anagement as a **M**echanism for **C**hange Management).

The model draws on existing processes (mostly partial) and sets out to formulate them in a methodical, rationally-sound, and pre-planned framework. This model will achieve two targets: firstly, establishing a **well planned** mechanism for managing large-scale technological changes, **previously non-existent**. Secondly, devising a **new mechanism** based on **existing processes** in the university's organizational and environmental practices.

The implementation of this model will facilitate transforming the university from "a know-all organization" into a "learning organization". It could be accomplished once Israeli higher education policy makers fully grasp the need for a permanent mechanism for change management and are willing to adopt the suggested model.

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