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Knowledge Management As A Reform Mechanism In Public Sector Administration

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Knowledge Management As A Reform Mechanism In Public Sector Administration

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A research submitted to the Faculty of Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public and Development Management).

November, 2004

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore Knowledge Management (KM) as a reformist strategy for public service administration. KM as a conceptual approach to reforming organisational practice has been widely researched and discussed in a private sector context, with little attention paid to its implications for the public sector. With the comments made by the Public Service Commission in its state of the public service report, 2002 – '*One of the major challenges of democratisation has been to change the nature of our state and its public service to become developmental and service oriented* ' – setting the stage, the report will investigate how a KM approach to reform might contribute towards changing the modus operandi of the public service to meet this critical goal. The qualitative research focuses on the human or social component in public service organisation and will work from the premise that reformist management approaches must be located within a wider transformation agenda in the public sector. Within this wider agenda, therefore, the research develops a perspective on reform based on a knowledge-driven organisational strategy using the Treasury as a medium of study. Key findings of the research indicate that although knowledge management approaches are beginning to be identified at the National Treasury, they are in the main isolated and not integrated into a wider knowledge-driven strategic approach that is conceptualised at the leadership level and uniformly implemented by means of 'knowledge champions' across the departmental divisions.

Declaration

I declare that this report is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public and Development Management) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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Rachel Browne
November 19, 2004

Acknowledgements

Distance has the same effect on the mind as on the eye

Samuel Johnson (1709-84)

The assembling of this report and its presentation, marks a milestone on a journey, one that has been sustained by colleagues and friends who have offered support, guidance and various ears along the way. I would like particularly to acknowledge Na-iem who has travelled steadfastly beside me, and my lecturers at P&DM who have afforded me direction, and who have helped me change gear at various stages. My deepest thanks to Cecile, my supervisor who added fuel when the tank was running dry. Thank you Cecile for your insights, suggestions and understated direction that has provided me with much needed sustenance during the working process. The report would not have been possible without the generous contributions of those I interviewed at the National Treasury, I thank them all equally. And last, but not least, I acknowledge the consideration offered to me by the Director-General and the Chief Director of human resources at the National Treasury, who allowed me entry into the department.

The road continues and it beckons.

Knowledge is a resource that can longer be locked up in the minds of some, but shared and disseminated for the benefit of all in organisation. To be able to unlock knowledge, frameworks of understanding and mechanisms of management will have to be developed that will respectively help us understand what it is we need to do and how we need to do it. Knowledge management therefore is about taking what we already know and reformulating it for the benefit of the collective whole. It is about creating new ways of being in organisation and new ways of seeing, so as to shift attitudes, mindsets and behaviour.

This report is dedicated to my mother and my father, my primary resource.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER	1	Introduction	1
CHAPTER	2	Literature Review	5
	2.1	Networks: An evolution	
	2.2	The evolution of organisational innovation in context	
	2.3	Management and the public sector, post modernity	
	2.4	New Public Management in the developing world	
	2.5	Knowledge: A key resource	
	2.6	Information technology (IT) and organisational reform	
	2.7	The knowledge organisation and organisational reform	
	2.8	Knowledge management: A framework	
	2.9	Locating the role of knowledge management in public sector reform	
	2.10	Reforming back office practices	
	2.11	Addressing the management of knowledge in Public Service Administration	
	2.12	The role of the middle manager in implementing knowledge leadership	
	2.13	The role of knowledge value chains: Creating intelligent organisation	
	2.14	Communities of practice	
	2.15	Conclusion	
CHAPTER	3	Research: Context and Methodology	37
	3.1	Presenting a context for research	
	3.2	Research question	
	3.3	Research methodology	
	3.3.1	Qualitative research	
	3.3.2	The research form	
	3.3.3	The case studied	
	3.3.4	The research process	
	3.3.5	The research amended	

3.3.6 Findings design
3.4 The National Treasury: A background
3.5 Participants
3.6 Limitations of the research
3.6.1 Research administration
3.6.2 Access
3.6.3 Language
3.6.3 Conclusion

CHAPTER 4 Research Findings and Results 53
4.1 An overview of the chapter
4.2 The National Treasury: Knowledge repository and benchmark public service organisation
4.3 The bureaucratic legacy
4.4 Strategic approaches
4.4.1 Top down strategy and operations
4.4.2 Knowledge-centred management strategy
4.5 Building knowledge capital: The relational approach
4.5.1 The tacit knowledge domain: building organisational intelligence
4.5.2 A knower-centred approach
4.5.3 Developing administrative capability (in line with a knower- centred management strategy)
4.5.4 The contextualised knowledge environment
4.5.5 Initial conclusions

CHAPTER 5 Toward Building A Knowledge Organisation 81
5.1 Redefining the internal environment, an introduction
5.1.1 Reorienting the bureaucratic environment
5.1.2 The role of middle management in a reoriented environment
5.2 Embracing new norms and values
5.2.1 Introducing post bureaucratic thinking into the workplace

5.2.1.1 Division A
5.2.1.2 Division B
5.2.1.3 Division C
5.2.1.4 Division D
5.2.1.5 Division E
5.2.1.6 Division F
5.2.2 Developing the intelligent organisation
5.3 Key Findings
5.4 The Knowledge organisation, working in intelligent environments

CHAPTER 6 Conclusions and recommendations 105
6.1 Conclusions
6.2 Implications for knowledge management reform for public service administration
6.3 Recommendations
6.4 Recommendations for further research

APPENDIX I Letter to chief director human resources 116
APPENDIX II Letter to respondents e-mail questionnaire 118
APPENDIX III Letter to respondents from chief director human resources 121
APPENDIX IV E-mailed Questionaires, X & Y 123
APPENDIX V Face-to-face questionnaire for levels 8,9,10 127
APPENDIX VI Face-to-face questionnaire for levels 11,12,13,14 130
BIBLIOGRAPHY 134

Abbreviations

CD	Chief Director
CoP	Community of Practice
DDG	Deputy Director General
DG	Director General
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
KM	Knowledge Management
NPM	New Public Management
NT	National Treasury
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCIP	Pacific Council on International Policy
PDP	Personal Development Plan
PSC	Public Service Commission
SARS	South African Revenue Service
SMS	Senior Management Services
WPTPS	White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service