

CROSS-CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS IN INDIA

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(A case study of Sri Venkateswara University, Andhra Pradesh, India)

ABSTRACT

To be consistent with WTO promulgations at Cancun 2003 meet, India as one of the founding members has made open to foreign and private universities to enter into India to do trade in higher education services from January, 2005 onwards. To withstand this imminent competition, the author in this survey based research article tries to suggest traditional Indian universities to transform themselves into business like organizations and adopt cross-cultural knowledge management concept as one of the techniques to increase their competitive advantage.

As modern universities in India are very much also like business organizations with a lot of business activities on the "educational market", any method of increasing their competitive advantage might be very useful and interesting for them. This claim give a good strategic sense in the context when WTO has brought trade in educational services under the purview of GATS in 1995, followed by its reasonable negotiations in Doha (2001), Seattle (2002), and Cancun (2003) meets, based on which India as a founder member of WTO has passed a bill in its parliament to allow foreign and private universities into India from January, 2005 onwards to do trade in higher educational services.

India being the fifth largest education system in the world (198 universities, 14,150 affiliated colleges with a teaching faculty of 4.3 lakh; with 9.4 million of student enrollment in 2004 (84% in commerce, science and engineering, and 16% in professional courses) with large potential market for educational services, cross-cultural knowledge management in its universities seems to be one of reaching leading technologies that could help protect themselves from foreign universities in the years to come.

What is cross-cultural knowledge management (CCKM)?

Cross-cultural knowledge management applies systematic approaches to find, understand, and use

knowledge to create value across cultures. It is also the formalization of and access to experience, knowledge, and expertise that create new capabilities, enable superior performance, encourage exchange knowledge across core-culture and sub-cultures in an organization.

Relevance of CCKM in Indian universities

University environment seems to be by its nature especially suitable for the application of cross-cultural knowledge management principles, methods, and tools for the following reasons:

- conventional (state) universities possess faculty from across local cultures, while central universities recruit faculty from various cultures across India.
- universities usually possess a modern information infrastructure.
- to share their knowledge with others is very natural for professors and teachers in general, and to acquire knowledge from accessible sources as fast as possible is a natural desire of students who come from across cultures.
- there is usually a trustful atmosphere at universities, no one is hesitating nor being afraid of publishing or otherwise disseminating her or his knowledge.

Applications of CCKM in Indian universities

In this paper the author is trying to present a couple of arguments in favor of this opinion in various situations

across cultures at a university campus. There are three basic possibilities how universities can exploit the cross cultural knowledge management ideas and principles:

- to use it for its management decision support, from strongly interrelated groups of decision makers in a university environment as, a) university management, b) professors (teaching and research), and c) students, to improve the internal document management and exploitation, to increase the level of information and knowledge dissemination, etc.
- to make use of it for a qualitative change in the educational process itself.
- to teach these parties in a suitable study program.
- to support the process of student's orientation in the university practices, resources, by an intelligent and tailored dissemination of information and knowledge relevant to his or her study programs, individual modules, practical programs, and other similar activities.

Objectives of the study:

- To study the cross-cultural traits of university faculty across study variables.
- To examine the impact of cross-cultural traits on knowledge management in the university.
- To suggest measures to improve the cross-cultural knowledge management.
- To list out the achievements already made by the sample university in this regard.

A case study of Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, A.P.

Sri Venkateswara University Campus, Tirupati, established in 1954, has been running 58 departments (37 arts, 16 science, and 6 engineering); running 71 post-graduate courses (36 arts, 24 science, and 10 engineering); with a strength of 5,320 students (2600 arts, 2,100 science, 300 engineering, and 320 M.Phil./Ph.D.), 370 professors, 320

computers (130 to professors, 15 to distance education directorate, 20 to administration, 5 to library, and 150 to students), with internet connection to 230 computers (120 to students and 110 to professors) and with a library of 3 lakh books and 360 periodicals and collection of 400 micro films on various subjects. Presently NAAC has given four star status to this university for the academic year 2004-2005.

Sampling:

Particulars	Arts	Science	Engineering	Total
1. No. of professors	173	140	57	370
2. Ratio of associate/professors	93:80	75:65	30:27	370
3. Ratio of male/female/professors	150:23	128:12	50:7	328:42
4. Sample taken	10% (18)	10% (14)	10% (6)	10% (38)

Table 1: Sample selection

Findings:

Based on the primary data, the cross-cultural characteristics, as are listed in Table 2, are reflected among professors and top management in the form of their behavior, ethics, work culture, beliefs, perceptions, communication levels, perseverance, group dynamics, reference groups, inter-personal relations, and co-operation and co-ordination in their work environment, and hence their conspicuous impact on the process of knowledge management.

Cross-cultural factors of professors	Affected elements knowledge management process		
	Knowledge generation	Knowledge storing	Knowledge dissemination
1. Faculty (Arts/Science/Engg.)			
2. Age, and designation			
3. Gender (Male/ Female)			
4. Perception and motivation			
5. Individualist/collectivist culture			
6. Work culture			
7. Social class (OC/BC/SC/ST)			

Table 2: Proposed Cross-cultural matrix for knowledge management of university professors

1. Majority of the professors belonging to sciences, engineering, and management are relatively more prolific, work-cultured, receptive, assertive, empirical, and more disciplined when compared to arts and commerce teachers. Hence they vary in their capabilities in their knowledge process.
2. The age, designation, and length of service influences KM in the sense that majority of the senior professors and administrators are rule-minded, work-cultured, highly matured and experienced as against many younger teachers who are very volatile, deciduous, not so devoted to their job, easy going nature, and living marginally in their job. However, the younger generation is more creative in their knowledge management process.
3. Individualist culture tend to accept people who place personal goals (fame, wealth, business, family, etc) ahead of the goals of collective (departmental goals , or university goals as a whole), whereas collectivist cultures tend to reject such people and to encourage subordination of personal goals to those of the collective as shown in Table 3. Accordingly, to be consistent with this notion, in many cases, in the university the knowledge is not shared or used, instead it is hoarded and the knowledge professors look suspiciously upon others.
4. Culture affects decisions only when activated. Collectivist professors have emphasised compromise, while others endorsed sacrifice in so far as goals for knowledge acquisition.
5. Emotional appeals have a differential effect on the persuasion process and the mechanism underlying the persuasion effects of emotional appeals on KM across cultures.
6. Perception and motivation skills are more with senior professors. However, learning capabilities are better

Particulars	Individualist	Collectivist
1. Source of success or failure	Success comes from personal effort, failure comes from external factors	Success due to help from others, failure due to personal faults
2. Major goals	Self-defined, unique personal potential to compete with other	Defined by others, belonging, and be like others
3. Personal Identity	Separate from others	Connected to others
4. Emotions	Ego-focused	Other-focused

Table 3: *Individualist Vs collectivist culture*

- with junior as they have been equipped with IT skills, hence better KM.
7. Information-processing differs across cultures. Collectivists are tolerant of information incongruity, while individualists solve the problem by elaborate thinking. Science and engineering faculty are more individualists, as they generate and store knowledge within the four walls of their laboratories, while arts, commerce and management faculty are more collectivists as they go around the society for knowledge generation.
 8. Gender differences play as a hurdle in knowledge management process especially in knowledge generation as they cannot make a move to other places since they are more preoccupied with familial responsibilities.
 9. Social class of professors will have it's impinge upon all the stages of knowledge management by virtue of their varied levels of economical, political, and networking circumstances.

Suggestions:

1. A knowledge group, across cultures in the campus, has to be developed and promoted by extending recognition and extra monetary incentives for the professors who focus more on qualitative publications and projects. To say, KM is costly.
2. Effective cross-cultural KM requires hybrid solutions of people and technology. Hence step-wise transformation of all the important documents into the electronic form (PDF) and development of their

collection in a large document repository, accessible through the university intranet.

3. Cross-cultural KM is highly political and hence the astute vice chancellor should cultivate politics for the use and value of knowledge and in finding and cultivating opinion leaders across cultures as early adopters of KM approaches.
4. Stepwise development of an intranet based university information system with all the necessary information about students, teachers, subjects, study programs, etc is mandatory.
5. Sharing and using knowledge across cultures are often unnatural acts. Hence, they have to be motivated through time-honored techniques - performance evaluation, and compensation.
6. If real improvements are to be made in cross-cultural KM, improvements must be made in key processes like teaching technology, research and development of innovative courses, patent rights, virtual university, and pricing of courses, etc.
7. Stepwise development and introduction to the practice of changes in the organizational culture of the university, reflecting the necessity of contribution and sharing the knowledge of all persons possessing "expert knowledge".
8. Election to the university teachers association should be banned in order to wipe out the differences and to facilitate sharing of knowledge among faculty of different cultures. Also, the appointment of VC, registrar, and professors should be free from political affiliations, so that acculturation across hierarchy gets speeded up to enable effective cross-cultural KM.
9. Hamel and Prahalad suggested that core competences have to be looked at in the context of building competitive advantage. This in turn would

require the business strategy to be broken down into a comprehensive list of key business drivers (KBD) and the identification of the cross-cultural knowledge assets (*K-sets*) required to achieve KBD, and then to analyze the gap in between the required knowledge score and the current knowledge score, called *K-Gap analyzer*, as was christened by Ganesh Natarajan and Sandhya Shekhar (APTECH).

The total knowledge score can be computed as follows:

$$\text{Total knowledge score} = \sum_i \sum_j (K_{ij}),$$

which gives the total knowledge scores of all knowledge entities across cultures K_{id} ($i=1$ to m) across all organizational activities j ($j=1$ to n).

The *K-Gap* = Knowledge score required - current knowledge score.

9. There should be a cross-cultural knowledge partnership groups promoted to exchange the concepts, technology, models between the branches (arts, science, and engineering) to come out with new solutions for the research problems, and projects.

Difficulties in cross-cultural KM

1. The claim, that universities in general have a good IT infrastructure may be true locally. It is true in the case of our faculty of business school, mathematics and computer science, and engineering while other cultural domains such as law, humanities, social and behavioral sciences fall behind.
2. Attitude among many senior professors towards knowledge is set as "my knowledge" instead of "our knowledge" though they are to work for their university for NAAC accreditation. Many teachers opine that a dissemination of knowledge electronically would eliminate "competitive advantage" of the faculty member. Hence they do not contribute their expert

knowledge to the organizational memory with the goal to make their knowledge accessible for other people.

3. Teachers are being separated based on their sub-cultural traits by virtue of elections to the university teachers associations and hence making it difficult on the part of administration for effective cross-cultural KM.

Some achievements in cross-cultural KM at SV University:

1. Internet, along with its website www.svuniversity.ac.in, is being provided to many teachers to access the information. It may take one more year to make it a full-fledged provision.
2. A knowledge group of 42 potential teachers from within the campus, who are dexterous and knowledgeable in their fields, have been identified across cultures to assign some responsibilities in such university knowledge management activities as exams,

research, statistical techniques, projects, industry-university interaction, fund raising from UGC, media, syllabi, IT, hostels, etc., by delegating some authority to create faster and high quality CCKM decisions.

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