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COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY AS LEARNING ORGANISATION

by

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"We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge"

- John Nasbitt

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SUMMARY

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY AS LEARNING ORGANISATION

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Communities of Practice have been utilized with great success by organisations in the business and manufacturing sectors to help in the management of their knowledge. Not much research have been done on their application in learning organisations such as academic libraries, however. The aim of this study was therefore to determine how knowledge can be managed through Communities of Practice in a learning organisation such as an academic library.

The investigation was build around the concepts knowledge management, learning organisations and Communities of Practice and the interrelationship between these concepts. The role Communities of Practice play in the management of knowledge in a learning organisation is investigated as well as the development stages in the implementation of Communities of Practice to support knowledge management. This is followed by an investigation of the factors critical to the success of Communities of Practice in a learning organisation.

The investigation consisted of a literature study to help define the key concepts and to lay a framework for the research design, and is followed by an empirical study where interviews were held with some of the staff members of the Academic Information Service (AIS) of the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

In conclusion it was found that the AIS was considered a learning organisation and that the AIS was in the beginning stages of knowledge management. A number of Communities of Practice in the AIS were identified that existed internally and externally, and the small number of internal Communities of Practice in the AIS were linked to

specific inhibiting factors. The study also showed that Communities of Practice can be found in learning organisations, and that learning organisations are characterised by knowledge management. Knowledge managed through Communities of Practice was also shown to help in the development of learning organisations. Communities of Practice in the AIS were shown to be in the beginning stages of development. The role of management, incentives and rewards for participation, information technology/tools, attention to newcomers, knowledge capturing/sharing techniques, trust and a proper knowledge management framework were shown to be essential for the success of Communities of Practice in the AIS.

Key terms

Academic library, Academic Information Service, Communities of Practice, knowledge management, learning organisation, tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge, cultural knowledge, organisational knowledge.

OPSOMMING

"Communities of Practice" is met groot welslae deur organisasies in die besigheids- en vervaardigingsektore gebruik om te help met die bestuur van hulle kennis. Daar is egter nog nie veel navorsing gedoen oor die toepassing daarvan in lerende organisasies soos akademiese biblioteke nie. Die doel van hierdie studie was dus om te bepaal hoe kennis bestuur kan word met behulp van "Communities of Practice" in 'n lerende organisasie soos 'n akademiese biblioteek. Die ondersoek het gewentel rondom die konsepte kennisbestuur, lerende organisasies en "Communities of Practice", asook die inter-verwantskap tussen hierdie konsepte. Die rol wat "Communities of Practice" speel in die bestuur van kennis in 'n lerende organisasie is ondersoek, sowel as die ontwikkelingsfases in die implementering van "Communities of Practice" ter ondersteuning van kennisbestuur. Dit is opgevolg deur 'n ondersoek na die faktore wat krities is vir die sukses van "Communities of Practice" in 'n lerende organisasie.

Die ondersoek het bestaan uit literatuurstudie om die sleutelkonsepte te help definieer en om 'n raamwerk daar te stel vir die navorsing, wat weer opgevolg is deur 'n empiriese studie waar onderhoude met enkele personeellede van die Akademiese Inligtingsdiens (AI) van die Universiteit van Pretoria, Suid-Afrika gevoer is.

In die slotsom tot hierdie studie is bevind dat die AI beskou word as 'n lerende organisasie en dat die AI hom in die beginfases van kennisbestuur bevind. 'n Aantal "Communities of Practice" in die AI wat intern en ekstern bestaan is geïdentifiseer, en die klein getal interne "Communities of Practice" in die AI is toegeskryf aan sekere remmende faktore soos afwesige bestuur, probleme met inligtingstegnologie ensomeer. Die studie het ook gewys dat "Communities of Practice" gevind kan word in lerende organisasies, en dat lerende organisasies gekenmerk word deur kennisbestuur. Die studie het verder getoon dat kennis wat met behulp van "Communities of Practice" bestuur word kan lei tot die ontwikkeling van lerende organisasies. Daar is ook bevind dat die "Communities of Practice" in die AI in die beginstadiums van ontwikkeling is. Die rol van bestuur, insentiewe en belonings vir deelname, inligtingstegnologie/-gereedskap, aandag aan nuwelinge, kennisvaslegging/-delingtegnieke, vertroue en 'n behoorlike kennisbestuursraamwerk is uitgewys as essensieel vir die sukses van "Communities of Practice" in die AI.

Steutelterme

Akademiese biblioteek, Akademiese Inligtingsdiens, Communities of Practice, kennisbestuur, lerende organisasie, versweë kennis, eksplisiete kennis, kulturele kennis, organisatoriese kennis.

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