

## **PUTTING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT INTO PRACTICE**

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What do you think of this African proverb which says: “If your friend is more handsome than you are, admit it and praise him.” By so doing, he will be happy and you will be happy, too. But if you envy him and try to denigrate him, what will happen?

Ghana cannot compare herself to Singapore at all in terms of socio-economic and technological advancement using ICT. But Ghana is larger, richer and older than Singapore in terms of land area, natural resources and political independence. What both countries have in common is their colonisation by Britain at one time in their history.

The point of this piece is to scratch the surface of this relatively new concept of Knowledge Management (KM) and see how countries like Singapore are putting it into practical application for the prosperity of their citizens. It is the belief of this writer that Ghana, too, can do the same or even better because she has the human and material resources. The problem, however, from my point of view, seems to be lack of sustained vision, focus and misplacement of priorities. I may be wrong though.

#### **What is Knowledge Management (KM)?**

Knowledge is said to be power! This has been a mantra from the day God first opened His/Her mouth and said: “Let there be light! And there was light!” God has the knowledge and so has the power to create. Not so? So if God created man in His own image and breathed into the nostril of man and man became a living soul, it implies that man also possesses some knowledge with which he can also create. Not so? All right!

At the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, knowledge and management experts have been able to establish the fact that those who have information and knowledge can navigate their way to the economic kingdom. This is what brought about the term knowledge economy. It has also been established that for the last 15 years or so, economic, social and technological changes, especially ICT have changed the workplace and the way we work.

How come a country like Singapore, a miniature island with a population of less than 5million souls, and with no natural resources whatsoever, is able to become a world leader in technology and moving economically at a pace beyond comparison? I will answer my own question because I know what I am talking about.

Singapore is just putting Knowledge Management into practical application. In July 2004 this writer happened to be in Singapore to do a short training course in E-Government. The course took place at Nanyang Polytechnic. In Singapore, that polytechnic is one of the educational institutions where professionals like engineers, nurses, computer scientists and others are trained.

At the Nanyang Polytechnic one particular room called Knowledge Management Centre is reserved purely for knowledge management and experience sharing. The school has

one particular senior lecturer who is responsible for that Centre. What is done in that room is to invite experts in various fields of speciality to come and share their knowledge and experiences with students of the polytechnic.

Day in day out, retired educationists, engineers, media practitioners, physicians, nurses, cooks, agriculturists, administrators, artists, dancers, musicians, accountants, and what have you, are called upon with respect and dignity to come and interact with adolescent learners. As long as the person has some knowledge in a particular field and has worked successfully in life until he or she went on retirement, that person is qualified to come to the Knowledge Management Centre to impart his or her knowledge to the younger generation.

Do we have something like that in Ghana? If yes, where is it? If no, why not? Don't we have knowledgeable retirees in Ghana? How do they document their knowledge and expertise for the future? What happens to their knowledge when they pass through transition? This is why African traditional experts in herbal medicine and even some modern trained specialists enter their tombs with all their knowledge and experiences. Who is the loser?

Currently at the Institute of System Science (ISS) of the National University of Singapore, where this writer recently underwent another short training course in IT strategic management for Chief Information Officers (CIOs), a new concept of Knowledge Management has evolved. It is known as Data, Information, Knowledge and Wisdom (DIKW).

DIKW is explained in this way: That Data is structured facts, values of parameters and measures. Information is data plus contextual references of meaning. Knowledge is that which guides humans in their use of information and data to make judgements, decisions and to do work. And finally, Wisdom is said to be proven confidence in one's knowledge or decision making, usually gained through experience.

The DIKW concept is simplified to mean that Data and Information are what get processed and Knowledge and Wisdom are how they get processed in the first place. This is where it was explained that there are two types of knowledge: They are Tacit Knowledge and Explicit Knowledge.

Explicit Knowledge is that which can be written down or expressed verbally. It is said that 20% of knowledge is easier to replicate and contribute to efficiency. On the other hand, Tacit Knowledge is that which resides in the minds of the individuals and is surfaced in response to a situation or action. And 80% of knowledge is said to be hard to steal. That it leads to competency, but hard to articulate or transfer and has high competitive advantage.

There is no doubt that a lot of Ghanaians know about what is being discussed here. But as to whether that knowledge is being put into practical application for the advancement of

our society for the socio-economic prosperity of our citizens like Singapore, is what one is tempted to ascertain.