

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN THE NIGERIAN LEGISLATURE: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

By

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Abstract

The emergence of knowledge-based economies placed great significance on effective knowledge management system in every organization and the legislature is not an exception in this regard. Knowledge management is now a critical component for organizations in the 21st century in their effort to ensure sustainable organizational development. Organizations need to have strategies to create, adapt, and manage knowledge so as to enhance their sustainability. Through knowledge management, an organization seeks to acquire or create potentially useful knowledge and make it available to its members so that it can be used at the right time and in the right place to have a positive impact on the organization's activities. The legislature is a body fueled by knowledge, both tacit and explicit knowledge. Therefore to help them harness the benefits of the knowledge contained therein, there is a need for effective knowledge management in the legislature. This paper discusses the concept of knowledge and knowledge management processes. It also dwelled on knowledge management in the Nigerian Legislature, challenges of knowledge management in the Nigerian Legislature, as well as the way forward.

Keywords: Knowledge; Knowledge Management; Knowledge Management Processes; Nigerian Legislature

Introduction

In today's knowledge economy, knowledge is the most vital factor in the long-term success of an individual or organization. Such knowledge resides in databases, knowledge bases, file cabinets and people's minds, which were to be shared right across the organization, (Oyedokun, Laaro, Oyewumi, and Akanbi, 2018). It can be created through face-to-face and virtual communication, Training, seminars and workshops, (MSaid and Apriliyanti, 2022). Knowledge is the experiences, insights, understandings, and practical know-how that people have and they can transfer to another person either directly or indirectly. Davenport and Prusak (1998) as cited in Omotayo (2015) define knowledge as "A fluid mix of framed experience,

values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers”.

There are two types of knowledge, according to Tripathy (2022), and these include tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the knowledge that is difficult to write down, visualize or transfer from one person to another. This is personal knowledge, which is in the human mind and difficult to formalize and also difficult to communicate. It is very difficult to manage such knowledge and it often goes away with the employee. The second one, which is explicit knowledge, includes any written data, which can be recorded, codified, transferable, taught to others, achievable and manageable in the knowledge management system. Nonaka (1991) defines explicit knowledge as knowledge that is “formal and systematic, which can be easily communicated and shared with a high degree of accuracy. It can be captured and written down in documents or databases. It includes patents, instruction manuals, written procedures, best practices, lessons learned and research findings”. Knowledge is regarded as an organizational asset and the ability to effectively manage it has the potential to enhance operational processes, development, sustainability and innovation.

Knowledge management facilitates the processes by which knowledge is created, shared and used in organizations. Management of knowledge entails the identification, creation and sharing of knowledge (Ganguly, Talukdar, and Chatterjee, 2019). Knowledge Management is the concept or a strategy of systematic and constructive management of vital knowledge and its associated processes of creating, gathering, organizing, diffusion, use and exploitation. Knowledge Management holistically is concerned with extracting value from an intellectual repository and sharing such value/knowledge with various stakeholders of the organization

(Jimoh and Oyelekan, 2017). The goal of Knowledge Management is not to capture all knowledge, but rather manage the knowledge that is most important to the organization. It is difficult to capture and transform elements of Tacit Knowledge, like direct experience and insight, into Explicit Knowledge. The process requires total interaction and interchange of information between colleagues to ensure the dissemination, sharing and appropriation of knowledge.

Knowledge management is starting to play an increasingly important role in organizations across various industries. While using and sharing knowledge with every member of the organization, this knowledge will grow and increase and be useful for the progress of the organization and individuals within the organization, (Msaid and Apriliyanti, 2022). Knowledge is a dominant source of every activity of the legislative process in the Parliament. It is created during the legislation formulation process, through the accumulation of knowledge and perspectives of many diverse actors participating in it, such as members of the legislature and parliamentary employees.

The legislative arm of government is in charge of law-making. The legislature makes the laws, that define the rights and obligations of the people and of various arms of government, and defines rules of conduct for various actions and functions affecting the well-being of the collective good of the society (Odalonu, 2020). The primary function of the legislature is law-making but for the sake of good governance in the country, they also perform oversight functions to checkmate the activities of the other arms of government. In simple terms, the legislature performs three basic roles namely: lawmaking, representation and oversight (Odalonu, 2020). To effectively carry out these functions, it is imperative that the legislature is well-informed and quite knowledgeable. Also, the nature of the work in the

legislature requires that a lot of knowledge is being created daily in the form of motions, bills, votes and proceedings, order papers, etc. There is also a lot of tacit knowledge being held in the hallowed chambers and among the staff of the legislature which could be of immense use to the legislature and the country at large. This implies that adequate care is taken to ensure that the knowledge being created in the legislature is adequately managed to ensure efficiency and improve output in the legislature.

Knowledge management Processes

Knowledge management processes can be defined as the means by which individuals, teams and organisational sub-systems interact, create, acquire, store, share, retain and effectively use knowledge (Sanchez and Palacios, 2008).

Knowledge Creation: Knowledge is directly or indirectly continually being created in any group since the very interaction among people generates knowledge. One of the primary aims of knowledge management is to capture the knowledge that is produced during such interactions. The creation of new knowledge will make the organization more productive and competitive. The ability to create new knowledge is often at the heart of an organisation's competitive advantage (Frost, 2014). As users practice, interact and learn, they create more knowledge in the organisation and prevent loss of knowledge by sharing it with colleagues.

Knowledge Acquisition: Knowledge acquisition is the process of extracting knowledge from experts and structuring this knowledge in a readable form. It involves the development and obtaining insights, skills and relationships either from internal or external sources (Frost 2014). The external sources include attending conferences; hiring consultants and new staff; monitoring economic, social and technological trends; collecting data from customers and competitors; forming joint ventures and collaborating with business partners and other

organisations. At the same time, organisations acquire knowledge internally by tapping into the knowledge of their staff, learning from experiences and implementing continuous process improvements (Nemani, 2010). Nemani (2010) further expresses that knowledge acquisition has three main roles: to codify explicit knowledge; convert tacit knowledge into an explicit form and codify it; and acquire tacit knowledge as explicit meta-knowledge (knowledge about knowledge).

Knowledge Sharing and Application: Knowledge sharing is probably the most crucial element. It is during the process of sharing that knowledge is usually refined and enriched. Knowledge can be through memos, guidelines, circulars and instructions, through group discussions and internal meetings, as well as through attending seminars and workshops. The operational objective of knowledge management is to ensure that the right knowledge is available to the right person(s) at the right time for performing their knowledge activities (Ramohlale, 2014). Knowledge sharing ensures that every unit (person/organisation) is affected by the experience of another and that such experience is manifested through changes in the knowledge. Knowledge sharing enables organisations to re-create a complex, causally ambiguous set of routines and knowledge in new settings, keep it functioning and facilitate learning (Frost, 2014).

According to Bloom (Tung, 2018), the application of knowledge is to use knowledge to solve problems in everyday life. Knowledge applications at the individual and organizational levels that seek to apply or reuse knowledge will play an effective role in discovering, understanding, and utilizing organizational knowledge. In knowledge applications, individuals and organizations can access various knowledge applications in various places such as offices, shops, schools, libraries, and other

Knowledge Retention: According to Kirsch (2008), knowledge retention is the act of focusing on the critical knowledge that is at risk of being lost, prioritising what is at risk based on potential knowledge gaps and their impact on overall organisational performance and then developing actionable plans to retain that knowledge. The most effective approach to retaining intangible assets or experts' knowledge is by implementing strategies such as education, training, communities of practice and the use of advanced technology to capture work processes (Wamundila & Ngulube, 2011), mentoring and apprenticeship, storytelling and leveraging retirees (Chigada, 2014:58–59; Frost, 2014). Other strategies include support of formal and informal knowledge networks (social areas, social media, meetings, company functions, knowledge fairs, expertise locator, etc.), conducting exit interviews; job rotation; company procedures/processes manuals and succession planning (Lahaie, 2005; Liebowitz, 2011). In the absence of knowledge-retention strategies, organisations lose tacit knowledge when employees leave for other organisations and due to other forms of attrition.

Knowledge Management in the Nigerian Legislature: The Importance of Knowledge in the legislature cannot be over-emphasized. In a globally connected world, knowledge has become a key strategic asset to organizations (Bostjan, Majewski and Damij, 2014), and parliaments are not excluded from this reality. Parliaments, by virtue of their constitutional mandates and functions, are information resource-intensive organisations and this means that information and knowledge are at the core of their business processes, functions and activities, (Boltman and Bankole, 2017). Members of the Legislature require knowledge to make policy decisions, understand current social contexts and envision future trends and challenges. Citizens on the other hand need the knowledge to be able to participate and debate in politics, exercise their rights and vocalize demands. These are diverse and demanding audiences that require a

comprehensive and flexible knowledge management strategy. Young people, senior citizens, legal experts, and social organizations.

The Nigerian Legislature is still a traditional organisation, in the sense that they largely rely on parliamentary tradition. On the other hand, we are witnessing the evolution of contemporary societies, partly due to digital transformation exercises, migration and climate change, just to name a few prominent examples. Hence, the legislature as the law-making body needs to respond adequately to ongoing societal changes and related technological challenges. Otherwise, they risk losing information and not making well-informed decisions within the institutional system

Knowledge management will shun silo thinking in the legislature and encourage the sharing of knowledge across the arm of government. Knowledge management will not easily take root unless there is a paradigm shift within the legislatures. It requires sector-wide change management and the inculcation of a culture of knowledge generation and sharing. In order to make the most of its knowledge management initiatives, there may be a need to conduct an environmental scan to determine its human capital and systems readiness. Knowledge sharing will also contribute to the creation and retention of legislative knowledge. The retention of knowledge entails the preservation of knowledge when employees and members leave. Within the context of a knowledge economy, knowledge is a very crucial asset. In the legislative sector, knowledge is the main contributor to the work of the members. The potential movement of the researchers and other professional support staff to the private and public sectors threatens the intellectual capital asset of the legislative sector. Each Chief Whip and Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee has to regularly deal with the threat of losing staff, members and the knowledge base. It is therefore essential for the legislature to ensure that knowledge is

preserved by encouraging the staff and members to use Knowledge management tools in sharing information.

Developing and implementing knowledge management in the legislature is important for democracy and economic growth as it improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the legislative processes. Knowledge Management, as a strategic tool, has benefits for the Parliament that apply it (Kraft and Donoso, 2012). The strategic benefits include the competitive advantage that can result from proper and systematic management of the organization's knowledge. Through knowledge management, the organization can turn knowledge into a strategic asset and create an ever-learning organization. By capturing relevant experiences and making them readily available throughout the organization, the entire organization can learn from itself, (Uriarte, 2008:67) The effective use of knowledge management helps the parliament of Sri Lanka to use knowledge as a means of gaining a competitive edge, and also to assist employees to render their services in a lean manner, (Ahamed, Wathmanel, and Amarakoon, 2015). They found the benefits of knowledge management in the legislature to include: increased knowledge sharing; improved worker efficiency; improved skills and knowledge of employees; help add in new processes/services; improve corporate and organizational memory; and improve involvement of workers in the workplace activities. It is therefore expected that a successful knowledge management strategy in the legislature will: re-orientate their culture by opting for an optimal knowledge-sharing strategy; improve decision-making through facilitated access to expertise and leading practices; increase efficiency and productivity by reducing cases of “reinventing the wheel”; create links between people and improve innovation through wider and borderless collaboration; reduce loss of know-how by capturing explicit and tacit knowledge (Mikulecky & Lodhi, 2000). This

will also create opportunities for evidence-based policymaking and citizen participation in the legislative process.

Most of the parliaments of other countries such as Finland, Chile, Sri Lanka, South Africa, etc. have realized the importance of knowledge in the legislative context and implemented knowledge management initiatives. According to Huang, Siau & Wei (2005), the parliament of Finland has commenced implementing KM projects. (Huang, Siau & Wei 2005; Kraft and Donoso 2012; Ahamed, Wathmanel, and Amarakoon, 2015; Boltman and Bankole, 2017). Each year, a huge amount of money is allocated and spent on acquiring and preserving knowledge of the legislative procedures and processes which is one of the core objectives of the Parliament as found by Ahamed, Wathmanel, and Amarakoon, (2015).

Challenges of Knowledge Management in the Nigerian Legislature

As a result of the nature of the legislature, there are challenges of knowledge management in the legislature. Ahamed, Wathmanel, and Amarakoon, (2015) reported challenges of the retirement of officials as it affects knowledge retention, the issue of employees leaving for better jobs, and staff relocations as factors which affect knowledge management adversely. They also highlighted the challenges of loss of experienced staff and barriers to communication among those engaged in the legislative process.

One of the major challenges of knowledge management in the Nigerian Legislature stems from the fact that the legislative processes are mired by intra-institutional violence..., resulting in a crisis of confidence among the legislators (Muheed, 2016). This implies that the harmony that makes room for knowledge sharing and knowledge acquisition activities are affected.

Also, knowledge among the Legislators mostly tends to be tacit/informal/not recorded, and therefore, not easily accessible to those who need it. The knowledge gathered by members through experiences and their natural abilities count under here. It is often difficult to manage this type of knowledge without an appropriate knowledge management framework, which the Nigerian Legislature probably lacks at the moment.

Although some publications are available such as standing rules, votes and proceedings, order papers, motions, bills, indexes, handbooks, and other publications related to events at the Nigerian legislature, some staff members maintain personal written documents that are not published officially though they carry useful pieces of knowledge relevant to the legislature. There is a website providing access to information on the parliament, but it is mostly not regularly updated. The legislature maintains a record room in order to preserve documents containing information but access to the room is restricted. Again, occasional attempts by the legislature to breathe life into their internal rules and constitutional powers often pitched them against the executive and the confrontation often leads to fragmentation of the legislatures, culminating in legislative crisis and hampering knowledge sharing and acquisition activities in the legislature. Furthermore, the turnover of the legislature after every election year in Nigeria is often high, both at the national level and the state level, thereby starving the legislature of the benefit of experiences and knowledge retention.

Finally, the Nigerian legislature is often divided along party lines and some of those knowledgeable staff do not like to impart knowledge of parliamentary activities to the new members of the legislature (problem of knowledge hoarders). Even among the staff members, bureaucracy and bottlenecks prevail in the parliament, and the lower-level staff are not getting an opportunity in order to share their knowledge.

Way Forward

All organizations deal with knowledge in their daily operation and the Nigerian legislature is no exception to this. However, only a few institutions or organisations have a systematic and formal way of dealing with this knowledge being created. The consequence of this is that when people leave the organization, they take their knowledge with them resulting in the loss of valuable organizational assets and resources (Uriarte, 2008). If the Nigerian legislature is to surmount the challenges they are currently facing in terms of knowledge management, then there are certain measures that need to be put in place.

Firstly, a Knowledge Management System needs to be put in place in the Nigerian legislature. This is by adopting a few or several knowledge management tools to help the legislature manage knowledge effectively. In this ICT age, it is imperative to acquire an IT system that stores and retrieves knowledge, improves collaboration, locates knowledge sources, mines repositories for hidden knowledge, captures and uses knowledge, or in some other way enhances the knowledge management process in legislature.

Also, documents are the most common repository of information and knowledge in any organization and the parliament is not an exception to this. So it is imperative that a document management technique is put in place. Documents are produced for almost everything: from bills to Hansards, order papers, votes and proceedings, and others. As a result of the great variety of the types and lengths of documents that the legislature produces in the course of duty, the systematic tools and organized management of these documents can save the legislature considerable effort and money. Document management has two key functions: first, it provides content; and second, it facilitates content management and access. These two functions will have significant positive impacts on the efficiency of the Nigerian legislature.

Again, there is a need to provide and maintain a common portal where members of the legislature and their staff can access for easy and timely access to knowledge. This portal will serve as an important tool for knowledge management at the legislature, since it envisaged making it easier to share knowledge in an organization. In essence, the knowledge portal will serve as the central point for sharing knowledge. Through this portal, users can contribute information to the corporate pool of knowledge, access information, and collaborate with other experts and their peers. Since one of the goals of this particular portal is to enhance the legislative process, it is essential to populate the portal with information related to the parliament of the highest quality in order to ensure that members have access to quality information.

Furthermore, the creation of a knowledge directory and accessing it online through the portal on the corporate intranet of the legislature will definitely be beneficial to the proposed initiative. This is a knowledge management tool that deals not only with documents but also with information about living experts who provide advice and share their expertise with colleagues. In the legislature, people are the most valuable assets, and managing their skills, capabilities, interests and experience is critical. A skills management system is a web-based tool that supports this in a distributed way, spreading the workload over the whole organization. All employees of the legislature can update their own skills (adding new skills or changing skill levels) and interests, and use the tool to locate people with particular skills

Finally, it would help in no small measure to create Communities of Practice (CoP), as it is no doubt an excellent means to share knowledge among people who have a common interest. The proposed CoP for the members of the Nigerian legislature will serve as a tool in the implementation of a knowledge management system within the legislature. It is common

sense that people working together on a project perform better as a team if they often communicate on a shared platform. In modern-day society, Legislators often work at different physical or departmental locations. Communities of practice will be an appropriate avenue to provide a virtual place where they can exchange ideas, knowledge and experiences.

Conclusions

The Legislature can benefit from decades of accumulated knowledge, but this knowledge needs to be preserved, assessed and properly logged and structured. A multitude of recently developed concepts and technologies may help towards this goal. As new parliamentary actors emerge after every election period in Nigeria, the choice of the right development mix becomes even more critical. Knowledge Management could be another tool to help the Nigerian legislature guarantee the quality of its democratic system, fight social inequality and include all citizens in the process of governance. This will benefit not just the Nigerian democracy but also that of our neighbouring nations.

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