

THALEC: A MODEL FOR INTERNAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

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SUMMARY

Knowledge constitutes a key factor to obtain a Public Administration able to improve the service offered to the citizens continuously. Knowing how to manage it and how to put it into action for a better fulfilment of the organization's mission and vision must be the challenge of any Public Administration.

In this sense, the aim of this paper is twofold:

-On the one hand, to come to a confirmation or refinement from a model already proposed by the authors for the internal knowledge management (THALEC), integrated by six elements or drivers: Information and Communication Technologies, Human Resources Policy, Work Climate, Leadership, Structural Design and Organizational Culture.

-On the other hand, to know the current situation of the Spanish Public Administrations, to turn them into organizations able to learn. From this diagnosis, we suggest and propose new developments and lines of actions, considering the governmental function of these organizations like main contingency factor.

There is no doubt that Knowledge Management is nowadays one of the hottest topics in the European agenda. In 2000, the leaders of the European Union launched the Lisbon strategy "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth, with more and better jobs, and greater social cohesion". Public Administrations are also part of this strategy, facing the challenge to be reformed order to become organizations able to learn continuously, as the way to provide better and better services to citizens and contributors.

KEYWORDS: Knowledge Management, Public Management, Organizational Learning.

1.-THE INTERNAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: PROPOSAL OF A MODEL

Usually, when a project of Knowledge Management (KM) is initiated, organizations do not adopt a uniform direction. A multitude of approaches exist, which include those from documentary to competencies management; from the commercial information management to the information systems for strategic decision making; from the implantation of corporate communication systems to organizational learning.

With regard to the last topic mentioned, it is clear that knowledge and learning are bound, like two sides of the same coin: knowledge is the resource and learning is the capacity to obtain or create it, in order to finally use it. Both are inseparable. Therefore, the learning action can be understood to be a process that, in a general sense, takes knowledge as an input to generate new knowledge. It is a concept that can be applied to people (personal or individual learning), to teams (group learning) and to organizations (organizational learning), by tools or mechanisms able to turn individual and team knowledge into collective knowledge.

From this initial reflection on the diverse focuses used in KM initiatives, as specialized literature has shown, we consider that a suitable combination of the three following approaches has to be looked for and achieved: technological, human and organizational.

The TECHNOLOGICAL APPROACH allows analysis of the different available solutions, with the purpose of making a good choice and a suitable use of them. From this approach, the Technology Management becomes a powerful tool for KM.

The HUMAN APPROACH notices that the people, their capacities, their attitudes and behaviours, the factors that determine their personality, the mechanisms and processes of generation and assimilation of knowledge, their relationships with other people, their reactions, etc. are aspects to be considered to manage knowledge in organizations. Really, organizations must learn to use their human resources (HH.RR.) better and, more concretely, to use to the maximum the knowledge and talent possessed by their people. Therefore, human resources managers must stimulate the employees' contributions and increase their motivation to generate a favourable attitude towards the creation and transmission of knowledge within the organization, and to do it in line with organizational objectives (strategic nature). Designing and applying a HH.RR. Policy based on

competencies (competencies management) arises as a useful tool from this perspective.

Finally, from the ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH we noticed that the study of the organizational factors affecting the learning process becomes necessary. This is why Change Management, Innovation Management, Uncertainty Management, Creativity Management, Diversity Management, Teams Management, Trust Management and Will Management are some tools that can help to carry out an effective KM.

With the aim of proposing a model for internal knowledge management, we consider appropriate, firstly, to identify those elements that can help us in this mission. We have denominated them learning DRIVERS, as a consequence of the approaches and tools previously underlined. Their abbreviations have taken to us to name it as THALEC model: Technology (Information and Communication Technologies –ICT-), Human resources policy, Ambience or work climate, Leadership, organizational design or Structure (“Estructura” in Spanish) and organizational Culture. The model architecture combines, then, approaches, tools and drivers.

As a result, we next summarize the conditions that, in our opinion and as a result of the theoretical framework checked in this study, must occur (normative model) in each one of the organizational learning drivers, which we will use as the foundation of the empirical research carried out.

TECHNOLOGICAL APPROACH

Technology (T)...

T1	easy to use;
T2	as flexible as the work requires;
T3	able to store, treat and to interpret a great amount of data, accessible to any potential user according to his/her needs;
T4	saves time in the execution of tasks;
T5	optimises communications within the organization;
T6	favours team working and coordination.

HUMAN APPROACH

Human Resources Policy (H)

H1	Affectation process based on the individual learning capacity.
H2	Welcoming programs to indicate where the organizational knowledge is and how to get it.
H3	Offering interesting and useful opportunities of learning.
H4	Professional development based on knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences.
H5	Payments must compensate the acquisition and application of knowledge and skills in the workplace, stimulate team working and reward the contribution of new ideas.
H6	Evaluation which looks for improvements and not for the person at fault. It measures the behaviour shown in addition to the results achieved.

ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

Ambience or Work Climate (A)

A1	Humanism and fellowship.
A2	Preoccupation about the achievement of established objectives.
A3	Eagerness for constant improvement.
A4	Commitment towards the organization and active implication.
A5	Physical comfort in the workplace.
A6	Friendly and constructive contrast of ideas.
A7	Non acceptance of habits for inertia or convenience.
A8	Everybody takes on his/her own responsibilities.
A9	Team working.

Leadership (L)...

L1	takes care of communications in all directions/levels;
L2	is committed to and excited about his/her work;
L3	knows, values and takes advantage of his/her collaborators' knowledge;
L4	maintains good relations with his/her collaborators;
L5	is concerned with learning and encouraging collaborators to learn;
L6	delegates tasks, authority and responsibility;
L7	is willing to experience and to promote changes;
L8	promotes the team work and the communities of practice;
L9	takes participative decisions;
L10	is close, accessible and trustworthy.

Organizational Design or Structure (E)

E1	Flat, with few hierarchic levels.
E2	Multifunctional teams.

Organizational Culture (C)

C1	Change is considered to be natural and necessary.
C2	Organizational and individual learning is a constant preoccupation.
C3	An opening to the environment.
C4	Fair deal for everybody.
C5	Collaboration and team working.
C6	Dialogue and listening to all the opinions.
C7	Errors are tolerated and taken as an opportunity to learn.
C8	Looking for a guilty person is not the focus when solving a problem or a difference.
C9	Employees are allowed to take initiatives in their jobs.
C10	Creativity and new ideas are fostered.

2.-RESEARCH FOR THE CONFIRMATION FROM THE MODEL PROPOSED AND DIAGNOSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE SPANISH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

2.1.-OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

With this research we try to cover two aims:

- To come to a confirmation or refinement from the model proposed for the internal knowledge management in public administrations, through the scrutiny of the drivers of this process previously identified, synthesized in the abbreviation THALEC. For this purpose, in 2004 we formed a panel of seventy (70) experts, all of them senior managers working for (or who worked for) Spanish Public Administrations at different levels (national, regional and local). Through a questionnaire based on the guidelines described in the THALEC model, for each of the organizational learning drivers, we asked them for their degree of agreement or disagreement with their normative characteristics, in a scale of seven points where value 1 corresponds with the greatest degree of disagreement and value 7 with the greatest degree of agreement.

- To evaluate the current situation of the Spanish Public Administrations as organizations able to learn. From this diagnosis, we will suggest and propose new developments and lines of action, considering the governmental function of these organizations as their main contingency factor. With this intention, in the second part of the questionnaire we asked the panellists for their opinions on to what extent the organizational learning drivers described in THALEC model occur in their Public Administration, using the same scale of seven points.

2.2.-FINDINGS

- MODEL CONFIRMATION

As a result, we can conclude this section, oriented to the validation of the THALEC model, with its confirmation as it was defined in the previous epigraph, with the only reservation of the E1 item, in which, perhaps, a certain refinement would be required, as a consequence of the bureaucratic character of the organizations analyzed.

- DIAGNOSIS OF THE SPANISH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

From the analysis of the data collected, when asking if the learning drivers occur in the Spanish Public Administration, we identified the strengths and weaknesses of this sector facing to turn into an organization able to learn.

ICT (T) and Leadership (L) are emphasized as strong points, since almost all their items have been identified by most of the experts. However, it is possible to indicate the existence of room for improvement in the flexibility of technological solutions to be adapted to different positions requirements (T2) and to favour team working and coordination (T6). The same can be said with respect to the capacity of leaders to foster team work and the formation of communities of practice (L8), to delegate tasks and responsibilities (L6), and to question what it is established, experience and promote new forms of thinking and doing (L7). On the contrary, the capacity of the technologies used to save time in the executions of tasks (T4) and the leaders' capacity to maintain, in general, good relations with their collaborators (L4), are underlined as main strengths.

As far as the Human Resources Policy (H) is concerned, we can affirm that it is the great "pending subject" in the way of the Spanish Public Administrations towards the organizational learning. Most of the

experts agree when scoring negatively all the elements analyzed. However, we could save the item referred to the training activities offered to the employees (H3).

With regard to the Organizational Design or Structure (E) of the organizations under study, it is possible to conclude that it is not adapted to facilitate the organizational learning. Neither of the items considered were sufficiently identified. This is, then, another "pending subject", even more difficult to act on because of the bureaucratic and public nature of these organizations.

Finally, we cannot draw clear conclusions from the diagnosis made to the Ambience or Work Climate (A) and to the Organizational Culture (C), since in most of the items the answers are concentrated around the central value (neither in agreement nor in disagreement) of the scale implemented. However, concerning the ambience, the physical comfort in the workplace (A5) is emphasized as a strong point, whereas the personal assumption of responsibilities (A9) stands out as a weak point.

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