Leadership And The Knowledge Ecosystem:

Revisiting And Reconceptualizing The KMBOK Model

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the idea of the Knowledge Ecosystem as developed from and around the Knowledge Management Body of Knowledge (KMBOK) model and concept by McFarlane (2008). The author explores the KMBOK and reconceptualizes the model as representative of the total body of knowledge and practices constituting the field of Knowledge Management (KM) in organizations or knowledge communities and shaped by cultural, political, economic, and legal factors to create a Knowledge Ecosystem reflective of the increasingly interconnected global economy or business ecosystems in which organizations and individuals operate. The author maps out and defines the Knowledge Ecosystem diagrammatically and explains its link to organizational systems, structures, and processes, and explores the roles and functions of leadership as a major factor in leading the knowledge organization through effective understanding and application of an Organizational Knowledge SWOT Analysis (OK-SWOT-A) in organizational knowledge building and development. The concepts of value, quality, efficiency, effectiveness, organizational learning, and competitive intelligence are also examined in relation to the knowledge building and development process.

Keywords: *Knowledge management, KM body of knowledge, Knowledge ecosystem. Knowledge leadership*

1. Introduction

The development of a Knowledge Management Body of Knowledge (KMBOK) to adequately define and provide a structure and foundation from which to map and understand Knowledge Management (KM) as a field of study, delineate its subject matter exactitude, philosophize and apply the disciplinary contents, including theories propounded and emerging ideas, is a significant step toward managing knowledge as a productive resource in organizations, and as a tool which can be effectively developed into a system for leaders to use in shaping the process orientation of their organizations and bring their organization into a future less characterized by risks and uncertainty because their workers are knowledge workers and their systems, knowledge systems that have the right approach and right response to changes in the macroenvironment (McFarlane, 2008a). Simply knowing how to manage knowledge and reward knowledge workers is not enough for the organization of the future or the competitive and changing global knowledge economy of today. Leaders must become knowledge leaders who are able to effectively envision an organization in which expert power is possessed by the majority of workers, employees, or followers. Leaders must increasingly see themselves as leading individuals who are more educated and skilled; individuals who are true knowledge workers or knowledge followers in the very literal sense of the word, especially as we are living in what McFarlane (2010) calls the School Economy. Further consideration must be given to visualizing and arranging the KMBOK as a Knowledge Ecosystem which encompasses the entire organization and directs its activities, systems, and processes, its members and relevant players as interdependent and interrelated parts of a full knowledge organization.

While there is a still a strong need for agreement on what constitutes effective knowledge management leadership, or what Ichijo and Nonaka (2007) call leading through expert power on an organizational-wide basis, there is enough understanding of Knowledge Management and a convergence of knowledge streams to recognize that global interconnectedness provides the platform from which to develop organizations that are effective knowledge leaders in the 21st century. Furthermore, increasing interconnectedness among business organizations and stakeholders, a narrowing global world, and increasing linkages between information and knowledge systems through advancing and emerging technologies have brought about the idea of business ecosystems (de Kluyver & Pearce II, 2009) as the viable ports through which organizations are enabling their survival and success in the global knowledge economy. Leadership is very important in propelling Knowledge Management as the key strategic approach to managing and leading 21st century organizations. This is confirmed by Cavico, Mujtaba, and McFarlane (2010) who argue that "The rapidly changing business environment of the 21st century has given rise to the demand for well-rounded business professionals and experts who are able to work and lead organizations through economically and politically turbulent times" (p. 18). Neither leadership nor the organization can function in a vacuum and the KMBOK is designed as an open system whose interdependent elements and interaction with the global economy and macroenvironment foster the development of an organizational or community ecosystem where knowledge is a value creating force defining the value and quality of labor and the potential to drive organizational success and performance.

2. Revisiting And Reconceptualizing The KMBOK Model

The Knowledge Management Body of Knowledge (KMBOK) is similar from a disciplinary conceptual perspective to what Mentz, King, Thong, Leo, and Mataev (2005) refer to as the PMBOK or Project Management Body of Knowledge, and which McFarlane (2008a) describes as a "body of knowledge (PMBOK) [that] formulates the entire integrative framework of skills, tools, and knowledge that managers need to effectively and efficiently achieve project goals and objectives in order to accomplish organizational mission" (p. 1); and Mentz, et al (2005) refer to as "the sum of knowledge within the profession of project management, which is generally accepted" (p. 9). McFarlane (2008a) developed a KMBOK Model reflecting four major branches of the Knowledge Ecosystem in which leaders must effectively coordinate knowledge resources to develop organizational competitive advantage: Knowledge Systems Knowledge (KSK); Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK); Leadership

& Managerial Knowledge (LMK); and Organizational System, Structure & Process Knowledge (OSSPK) (McFarlane, 2008a, p. 1). These represent the sum of knowledge within the knowledge management discipline and together these constitute the Knowledge Management Body of Knowledge (KMBOK) or framework around which organizational social, cultural, political, economic, and legal forces must revolve in order to effectively function in an interconnected and sustainable micro-medium known as the Knowledge Ecosystem, which itself is only a small part of the broad macroenvironment of living and non-living systems defining life, work, play, growth, and progress. The *Knowledge Ecosystem* is the active, progressive, and changing environment in which the KMBOK elements operate to meet organizational and leadership mission and vision as they are shaped and determined by individual and group culture, economy, politics, and law and regulated by constantly evolving conceptions of value and quality, efficiency and effectiveness to foster organizational learning and yield competitive intelligence for survival as visualized in *Figure 1* below. The major factor which directs the Knowledge Ecosystem of an organization or community is the leadership which has evolved or is put in place to govern the KMBOK elements or factors.

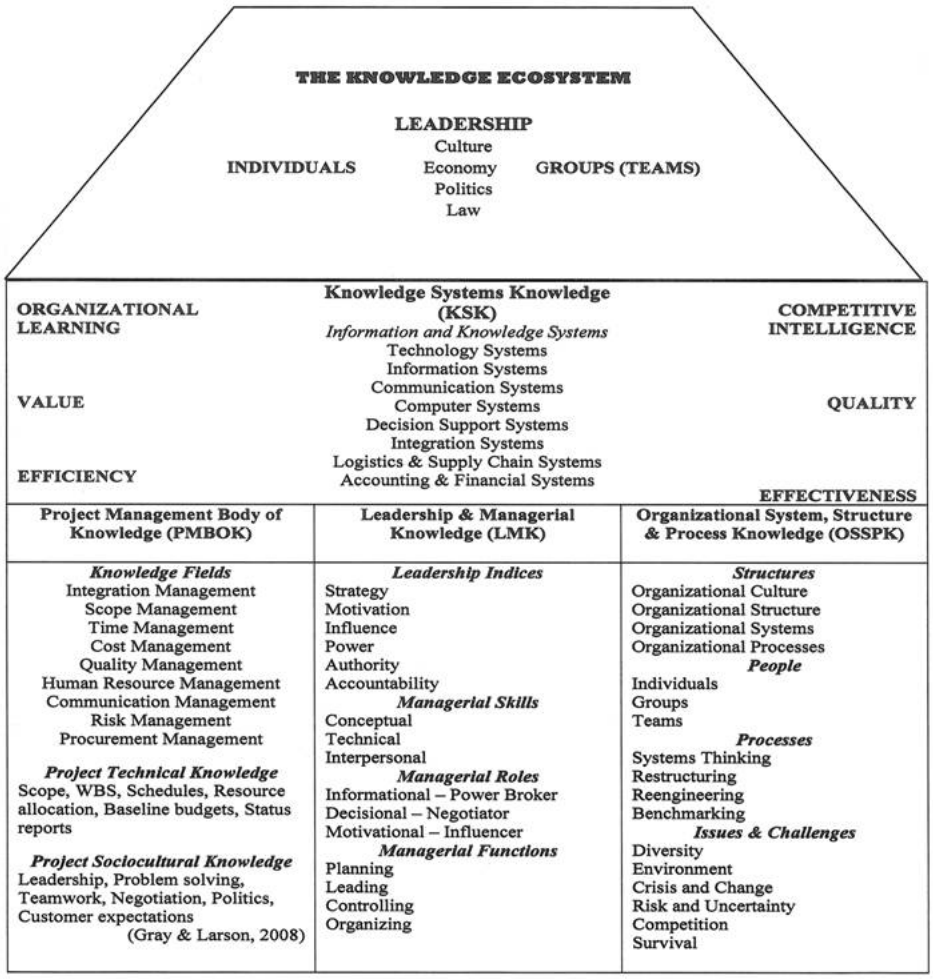

Figure 1: The Knowledge Ecosystem

3. Mapping And Defining The Knowledge Ecosystem

Value, quality, efficiency and effectiveness are the factors driving the leadership of knowledge systems within organizational and environmental contexts where these four concepts determine success on large and even smaller scale. If organizational leaders manage knowledge workers, systems, and the knowledge environment effectively and efficiently, they create value and increase the quality of products and services that the organization offers to its customers and stakeholders. This is what we call business success in the global economy; managing these factors to yield desired results where efficiency is about dollars, amount, quantitative

measures, effectiveness is about how well and skillfully we achieve this, and value is what we create and quality what we offer to our customers in the bid to build competitive advantage and emerge as market drivers rather than market driven entities or followers (Mujtaba & McFarlane, 2007). The reader will notice that The Knowledge Ecosystem is illustrated in the form of what resembles a pyramid-house with a flat top (*Figure 1*). The top of the Knowledge Ecosystem is flat because this ecosystem is existing within and functioning within a larger or mega-ecosystem where the global knowledge economy and macroenvironment exert influences beyond the power and reach of the leader and the organization, and these influences in turn shape the many organizational elements or KMBOK constituencies to determine or modify the Knowledge Ecosystem existing. Knowledge Ecosystems like real natural ecosystems are open systems that are shaped by exogenous forces and intervening influences. Thus, the Knowledge Ecosystem grows and changes according to the forces in the external environment of the organization or community, and how the leadership, whether by individuals or groups chooses to interpret and integrate these changes to meet organizational mission and vision. The Knowledge Ecosystem never "peaks off" or reaches its zenith because knowledge is dynamic and changing and organizations exist in a changing environment where the future is perpetual comparable to any leader's ability to shape the organization indefinitely.

As our conceptions and understanding of value, quality, efficiency and effectiveness evolve, we probe the external global or macroenvironment for opportunities to increase organizational performance, and search out competitive advantages to survive a global economy where companies have found an arena of equality from which to develop and launch innovative ideas. The leadership difference is what many organizations count on to distinguish themselves as brand leaders or market drivers in the marketspace and marketplace. The Knowledge Ecosystem is a process model idea which will enable organizational leaders to engage in what Kjaergaard and Kautz (2008) describe as sound knowledge management practices and systems in 21st century organizations. Leaders are able to view themselves as the major drivers of the Knowledge Ecosystem as they influence and motivate knowledge workers or knowledge followers to work as individuals and groups to work with knowledge systems, partners, and other stakeholders to maximize value creation in the organization. As McFarlane (2008b) states, the knowledge worker is a product of education, technological marvel, and modern development in organizational practices and theories; thus, they are individuals with expert ability or power to make change and shape the overall direction of the organization as they apply interpersonal, conceptual, and technical skills they have acquired in schools, corporate training, or work and life experience, or a combination thereof to affect productivity.

The conception of knowledge management within the organizational or community framework from a Knowledge Ecosystem perspective better facilitates the development of strategies and provides a better conceptualization or fit for the organization existing in an increasingly interconnected world. De Kluyver and Pearce II (2009) agree with this by arguing that "most companies rely heavily on networks of partners, suppliers, and customers to achieve market success and sustain performance" (p. 11). An ecosystem perspective best facilitates this conception as the ideas of interdependence and interconnectedness are inherent and symbolic of ecosystemic-understanding in any realm. Furthermore, deKluyver and Pearce II (2009) offer more support for conceptualizing the KMBOK and organization as a Knowledge Ecosystem by communicating how the present and emerging environment of business is reflective of biological ecosystems, arguing that business networks function like biological ecosystems in which companies succeed and fail as a collective whole, and that "Business ecosystems have become a widespread phenomenon within industries" (p. 11).

The Knowledge Ecosystem model presented in this paper (*Figure 1*) has been explained as an open system which never "peaks out" because as de Kluyver and Pearce II (2009) explain, "the boundaries of a business ecosystem are fluid and sometimes difficult to define. Business ecosystems cross entire industries and can encompass the full range of organizations that influence the value of a product or service" (p. 11). The Knowledge Ecosystem presented here that encompasses all the KMBOK elements and cultural, economic, political and legal factors impacting the organization or community and which must be assessed by leadership, allows the organization or community to fully deploy or leverage its available knowledge to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Furthermore, it facilitates an ecosystem-based strategy perspective which recognizes that interdependence is a critical factor in organizational success and performance, hence increased drive toward teamwork and shared values.

4. Leadership And The Knowledge Ecosystem

Leadership is the most important factor affecting organizational success and as such, leadership drives and shapes the Knowledge Ecosystem of an organization or an entire community. Leaders must see themselves as managing human capability or managing human resources or human capital; "the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of individuals that have economic value to an organization" (Bohlander & Snell, 2007; p. 14) as the key factor in driving organizational performance and success (McFarlane, 2008b) and become endeavored to make human value management (Fitz-Enz, 1990) their major approach to effectively leading in today's organizational contexts and environments. What knowledge leaders and knowledge workers value the most in their organizational capacity are knowledge and its application to meet organizational objectives and goals. This knowledge exhibits itself in the form of what Ichijo and Nonaka (2007) call expert power, which Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2009) refer to as "the power of knowledge" (p. 142). Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2009) argue that those with expert power are able to influence others or accomplish their mission because of their relative expertise in particular areas, and that expert power is a function of the amount of knowledge one possesses relative to the rest of the members of a group. In today's organizations we have many workers with expertise in several areas; they are highly qualified compared to their predecessors because many are college graduates with degrees, have received corporate training, are proficient in technology usage and have large amount of information for usage and disposal at their fingertips. Such workers must be led by one who is even more proficient in several areas of knowledge; a true knowledge leader who values knowledge in self and others.

To better serve their organizations, today's knowledge leaders must continually develop superior knowledge, skills, and experience within the workforce by identifying, recruiting, and selecting those individuals who are able to function effectively and productively in the Knowledge Ecosystem of the organization or community (McFarlane, 2008b; Bohlander & Snell, 2007). Knowledge leaders understand that their organizations must secure and strategically apply knowledge in two ways to successfully survive in the hypercompetitive global knowledge economy of the 21st century: organizational learning and competitive intelligence (McFarlane, 2008a). McFarlane (2008a) describes this approach to knowledge leadership:

Two essential processes are relevant for organizational survival in today's volatile and hypercompetitive marketplace and marketspace: organizational learning and competitive intelligence. These two processes or core and distinctive processes, as governed and determined by the nature and structures of organization, among other factors, are the result of effective grasp of knowledge – its development, dissemination, and effective leadership for value creation within organizations. In order to accomplish these and develop competitive advantage and market leadership, organizations must have unique knowledge systems knowledge (KSK) which can only be gained from possessing relevant knowledge, management, communication, computer and other support systems that coordinate information, knowledge, and learning; (intelligence collectively) across organizational units, processes, and structural platforms (p. 1).

This emphasis placed on knowledge leadership as a dominant requirement of the interconnected global business ecosystems of the 21st century (de Kluyver & Pearce II, 2009) should come as no surprise because training, learning, education, technical proficiency and expertise are increasingly in higher demands in today's organizations as the school economy functions to change the nature and quality of the labor force (McFarlane, 2010). Furthermore, McFarlane, Mujtaba and Cavico (2009) argue that "Organizations today are functioning in a highly complex environment where the demand for expertise in several areas is a constantly increasing reality. Knowledge management expertise is highly in demand for leaders and administrators who must put together the strategic puzzle in order to truly "manage" knowledge stocks for organizational effectiveness and efficiency" (p. 1). This means that current organizational leaders must assess their organizations to ascertain its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relative to the knowledge workers, knowledge systems, and level of knowledge available to create and deliver value in the competitive global market with regard to self and others (rivals).

5. Organizational Knowledge SWOT Analysis

If organizations view themselves as knowledge systems or learning organizations whose major or key resource is human capital in the form of the knowledge worker, then they must know their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs) comparative to other knowledge-driven organizations. According to Danca (2007) a SWOT Analysis is a basic, straightforward model that provides direction and serves as a basis for the development of a plan for success. Thus, organizations must plan their success or strategic moves by learning where their current knowledge can be effectively used to gain competitive advantage; where there is a shortage of effective knowledge workers or knowledge or expertise to fuel innovation, productivity, and foster quality and create value; what are the current and emerging threats to their learning prospects and growth; how they can effectively eliminate their weaknesses by capitalizing on opportunities for training, education, learning, technological acquisition and all opportunities constituting to knowledge building and knowledge development.

An Organizational Knowledge SWOT Analysis (OK-SWOT-A) can be an effective tool for measuring knowledge in today's learning organizations and for developing a plan for making knowledge the basis from which organizations launch their growth. This requires organizational leaders to heavily invest in human capital through human value management (HVM) practices (Fitz-Enz, 1990). Taking a value driven management (VDM) approach to knowledge building in organizations means making knowledge the underlying basis for evaluating and developing value drivers (Pohlman & Gardiner, 2000) into knowledge drivers that propel the organization to the front of the competition. The OK-SWOT-A serves a similar purpose as the "Self-Assessment Tool" proposed by Drucker, Collins, Kotler, Kouzes, Rodin, Rangan, & Hesselbein (2008) in answering "the five most important questions you will ever ask about your organization": (i) What is our mission? (ii) Who is our customer? (iii) What does the customer value? (iv) What are our results? and (v) What is our plan?" (p. xii). Drucker et al (2008) define the Self-Assessment Tool as "a method for assessing what you are doing, why you are doing it, and what you must do to improve an organization's performance" (p. 2). Similarly, the OK-SWOT-A can be used as a tool or method to assess what knowledge the organization and its members possess, how they are using that knowledge, what knowledge is lacking or needed, how that knowledge can be obtained, how to effectively and efficiently apply that knowledge to create value, what the knowledge of rivals or competitors are, how to increase knowledge and sustain knowledge workers, and how to create opportunities using expert power or power derived from existing knowledge.

According to Drucker and colleagues (2008) leaders and managers must take action in order to improve performance and meet organizational-wide goals and mission, and live up to value and vision. Within a global knowledge economy this can only be achieved by effectively and efficiently using knowledge resources, foremost among these, the knowledge worker as a unique competitive advantage in meeting the challenges in today's business environment, responding to change, and the increasing demand for greater value and quality. They must effectively mobilize teams within the organizational Knowledge Ecosystem to maximize knowledge utilization across functional units and departments to meet project targets. According to Pinto, Thoms, Trailer, Palmer, and Govekar (1998) managers leading project teams must understand that while teams are put together to coordinate resources for specific project goals, individuals making up these teams are sometimes still strongly influenced by functional team attachments rather than implementation team values. Thus, leaders or managers must function from a systemic approach, ensuring that the KMBOK practices are enacted within a framework of interdependent or linking nodes.

6. Exemplary Knowledge Leadership

Leaders in the global knowledge economy must use knowledge and information that are accurate and useful to form the basis for transforming ideas into value (Cohen, 2008). These leaders must be capable of understanding the role and function of the knowledge worker, understand the importance of leadership as the salient factor coordinating knowledge and all other resources to create value and deliver quality to accomplish organizational mission and vision, and understand organizational SWOTs to effectively plan for change and growth. There are several characteristics of effective knowledge leadership that need to be in place for successful leadership of the knowledge organization and its knowledge systems and workers. Kouzes and Posner (1996) have identified five practices defining or identifying exemplary or effective leaders, and these can serve as the basis for describing the exemplary knowledge leader (EKL).

According to Kouzes and Posner (1996), exemplary or effective leaders inspire a shared vision, model the way, challenge the process, encourage the heart and enable their followers to act. Exemplary knowledge leaders will likewise possess these characteristics by inspiring their followers in the organization to develop and share a vision of increased knowledge acquisition and

usage as knowledge workers, and will challenge the way in which the organization functions and approach value creation in the 21st century globally competitive market economy. Exemplary knowledge leaders will challenge existing workers or organizational members to increase their knowledge base by searching out opportunities for increasing expertise or knowledge in areas specific to personal and organizational growth. Such leaders are able to set examples or model the way by being the exemplars of knowledge as they possess vast amount of usable knowledge and they possess expert power which workers and business partners rely upon in the performance of their duties. Exemplary knowledge leaders influence and motivate their followers to follow their examples of becoming experts with technical, conceptual, and interpersonal skills that are highly prized, valued, and developed and they encourage their followers or workers through systems of sanctions; rewards and punishments to seek knowledge and point out the tangible benefits of increased knowledge, organizational training, and self-growth. Finally, exemplary knowledge leaders, from the conception of the exemplary leadership ideas of Kouzes and Posner (1996) enable their followers to exercise their knowledge and skills in performing tasks and contributing to organizational growth, performance, and success. They delegate authority and responsibility to followers because they trust their followers' ability and knowledge to accomplish organizational goals.

In addition to the above characteristics and values, exemplary knowledge leaders are lifelong learners and possess a keen awareness of business and knowledge ecosystems. They understand the global knowledge economy and that increasing global interconnectedness and competitiveness have created a market where knowledge functions as a key competitive resource defining organizational capabilities and boundaries. Exemplary knowledge leaders are able to effectively match their knowledge workers with tasks and responsibilities specific to their unique expertise or knowledge, talents, and abilities, and in doing so, are able to develop competitive advantage for their organizations. They understand and advocate that "Knowledge systems are the core requirements for organizing, controlling, and collaborating across systems of people, structures, and processes (organizational system, structure, & process knowledge – OSSPK) in order to develop organizational capability" (McFarlane, 2008a, p. 1), and they devote their efforts to build such systems to ensure continuous performance improvement through systems thinking, restructuring, reengineering, and benchmarking while planning, leading, controlling, and organizing individuals and groups (teams) to use organizational structures and systems and available managerial skills (conceptual, technical, interpersonal) from different sociocultural and technical knowledge fields to meet and respond to the issues and challenges of the organization and its surroundings as depicted in *Figure 1: The Knowledge Ecosystem*.

7. Implications And Conclusion

Project management is a thriving field and career option in business industries and organizations today (Pinto, et al, 1998). In order for project leaders and managers to be successful and effective at what they do, they must have efficient and robust knowledge systems that store, process, and retrieve, as well as manage and disseminate information and knowledge. "Knowledge systems are the core requirements for organizing, controlling, and collaborating across systems of people, structures, and processes" (McFarlane, 2008a, p. 1). Thus, organizational leaders must see themselves as knowledge leaders who are able to effectively lead knowledge workers who are fully equipped to respond to organizational needs in a changing and uncertain environment where competition is a tough challenge.

Understanding the organization as a Knowledge Ecosystem allows exemplary knowledge leaders and knowledge workers or knowledge followers to see where and how their roles and functions eclipse with organizational performance and success. They are able to understand that knowledge is the total worth of labor as a strategic intellectual resource necessary in creating and adding value in a global knowledge economy where advancing technology, increasing competition, increased training, education, and schooling are indices contributing to the development of competitive advantage and creation of marketing driving ideas and organizations. Most of all, today's leaders must understand change as the "wind of impermanence that drives our world and humanity's progress" (McFarlane, 2009, p. 1), and know that increasing their knowledge is the most effectively way to deal with and manage change where possible.

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