

Military Knowledge Transfer Mechanisms: A Passage to Academic World

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Abstract:

Knowledge Management is an important and significant segment of the Management discipline. Military units and formations could use this valuable asset in their operations. Unfortunately, the academic world could hardly address the knowledge management issues, particularly the knowledge transfers mechanisms in the military context. This paper makes an endeavour to fill up this gray area of the academic world. The exhibited knowledge transfer mechanisms show how military forces use various techniques and mechanisms to transfer knowledge between the knowledge contributors and recipients. The paper will help the business organisations borrow the military knowledge transfer mechanisms. The transfer mechanisms used in military forces presented here provide a deeper understanding of characteristics and nature of the mechanisms; Some of them are different and unique from those of the corporate/business world. Future researchers may empirically examine these mechanisms in military context.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Knowledge Transfer Mechanisms, Military Organisations

1. Introduction

Knowledge is inseparable information in context (Galup, Dattero, and Hicks, 2002), related to action (Tiwana, 2002). It is based on some experience (Leonard and Sensiper, 1998). It is a driving force for action and a sphere of influence for professionals. Alavi and Leidner (2001, p. 109) found that, "knowledge is ...the result of cognitive processing... information is converted to knowledge once it is processed in the mind of the individuals" (p. 109), which is essential for the military forces. Knowledge Management is an essential branch and useful tool of management (Edvardsson, 2006) and military forces. In the present world knowledge management could achieve its recognition in all fields. It has a multi-dimensional approach (Chae and Bloodgood, 2006). Tacit knowledge resides inside the human brains and when it is articulated in any form (s), it converts into explicit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Knowledge transfer is an important element of knowledge transfer process. Successful knowledge transfer demands a good vehicle between the knowledge actors. Limited literature (Hasnain, 2016a) could address the issue of knowledge transfer mechanisms in the military context. Hasnain (2016a) has identified face-to-face meetings, military exercises, training, model discussions, military exercises, training, model discussions, military exercise without troops, military logistics exercises, exercise debriefings and demonstrations as the knowledge transfer mechanisms in the military context. Though Hasnain (2016a) could bring and present numerous knowledge transfer mechanisms in the military context, but still many mechanisms remain unaddressed. Further, academic world and knowledge management gurus (Scarborough, 1995; Taiwana, 2002; Nonaka, & Takeuchi, 1995; Jasimuddin, 2007; Hensen, Nohria, & Tierney, 1999) could hardly address the issue of knowledge transfer mechanisms in the military context. This paper makes an endeavour to find out a few unaddressed knowledge transfer mechanisms in the military context.

2. A Few Knowledge Transfer Mechanisms: A Military Perspective

If transferred-knowledge is not absorbed by the recipients of knowledge, it means actually knowledge is not transferred (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Such cases may be dangerous for the military forces. Knowledge transfer encounters numerous barriers (Hasnain, Jasimuddin and Fuller-Love, 2016). So selection of appropriate transfer mechanisms is crucial for the military forces. Knowledge transfer mechanisms are the vehicles through which knowledge is transferred between the actors (knowledge contributor and knowledge recipients). Knowledge transfer mechanism may be compared with an element (e. g. media) of the communication model formulated by Shannon and Weaver (1949), where noise may disturb the whole process.

2. 1 Drum, Bell and Flag

While describing the method of battle tactics, Sun Tzu (p. 49) informs, "the drum and bell are used, because the voice does not carry; the flag is used to assist the sight. The use of bell, drum, banner and flag to attract the united attention of eye and ear. When all are united, the strong is not left to go forward alone, the cowardly are not free to retreat unrestricted. In this way can a multitude be used. Therefore, in night fighting, beacons and drums are largely used; in day fighting, a great number of banners flags and the enemy's eyes and ears are confounded." Literature (Paul, 2009; Howell, 2003) finds, the use of flags for knowledge transfer is used beyond the military situation also. For example, in 1972, some south-east country-CPPs' (Cyclone Preparedness Centre) volunteers were trained to hoist flags and spread warnings by megaphones among the local communities (Paul, 2009; Howell, 2003). Military organisations use drums, bells and flags for ceremonial purpose also.

By means of drum, bell and flag¹, the

direction of large forces in battle is possible,

and like unto the direction of small forces – Sun Tzu

2. 2 Intelligence Agency/Corps of Intelligence

Intelligence agencies and corps of intelligence are the excellent vehicles of knowledge transfer. Many people believe, Sun Tzu (500 BC), the Chinese military strategist, is the father and generator of strategies. "Knowing oneself" and "knowing the enemy" are the two divisions of Sun Tzu's principles (Wong, Maher and Lee, 1998) demanding intelligence. In brief, "Sun Tzu places high priority on intelligence about the actual conditions of the battle, and affords it a strategically decisive role." (Dimovskiet al., 2012, p. 154). The importance of intelligence is paramount in the warfare. Collect, collate and analysis of information are the prime duties of the intelligence agencies. For instance, British "Intelligence Corps operators collect information from range of sources and evaluate, analyse, integrate and interpret this information to inform command decision making." (British Army, 2015). Citing the reference from the Bible (New King James Version, Numbers 13:18-20), Hippner (2009) informs about the importance of intelligence and Prophet Moses' techniques of using intelligence. Further, Hipper (2009) cites the quotations of Moses:

See what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or

weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad;

whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the

land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not.

Hippner (2009) continues by explaining "Moses is a decision maker who wants to know everything that may be relevant, as his tasking implies. He asks for reports on the economic, military, and social situation of Canaan." (p. 1). Prophet Mohammed (SM) intensively used intelligence in all the battles against the Quaishis. For example, "on the eve of the battle of Uhud, Prophet Mohammed (SM) sent two agents to scout the area around Medina and Mount Uhud and to collect as much information as they could on the Quraishi, especially the number of men deployed against him and the area they were concentrated" (Al-Asmari, 2013, p. 101). So, "the fundamentals of war planning include an assessment of one's capabilities and gathering intelligence on the enemy to determine their strengths, weaknesses, capabilities and intentions" (Keller, 2008, p. 129-30). Further, Keller (2008) continues by informing "one of the most valuable assets that the military [and businesses] covert is intelligence of their opponents [competitors]" (p. 131). In modern days many countries have their own intelligent agents. They not only act to support the military strategies and operations, they also work as knowledge transfer vehicles to the people of the world through their open accessible web-pages. For example, CIA's (The Central Intelligence Agency) web-site of the US provides huge useful information and statistics on social, political and economic conditions of the countries of the world. Academics, researchers, organisations and states may be benefitted out of this

¹ "The drum was used to beat the assembly and in the advance, the bell as a signal to halt. Flags were of two kinds, signalling flags and distinguishing banners" (The Art of War, p. 32).

vast data/knowledge displayed there. In military the local field intelligent agents/units, work like the vehicles of knowledge transfer through the act of transmitting their collected information to their respective military units/formations during peace and war times. Such information helps the decision makes the planning and decision making process easy for the commanders. However, wrong intelligence may be suicidal for any commander and his/her under commands.

2. 3 Military Corps of Signal

Signal Corps of any military is a knowledge transfer mechanism between the units/ commanders. In Britain, "Royal Signals provide military commanders with their information requirements and ability to command and control their forces. The methods used are at the forefront of modern digital military communications and information systems technology and the Corps strives to live up to its motto 'CertaCito', which freely translated means 'Swift and Sure' " (Royal Corps of Signal, 2015). So in brief, as the medium of knowledge transfer, they ensure the transfer of knowledge to the knowledge-recipients as fast as possible so that they may take decision and act as per the demands of the situations.

2. 4 Military Training Institutions/Schools

Military training schools and institutions are the excellent vehicles of knowledge transfer for all ranks in the defence services. The United States *Military Academy* at West Point and The *Royal Military Academy Sandhurst*, generally known as Sandhurst, are the two world's most prestigious military training institutions where leaders are produced. Every year many foreign countries' military cadets/personnel receive training from these institutions. Countries, usually, possessing regular military forces have their own military academies. Further, *military staff colleges/universities* conduct advance courses for the officers. In addition to military academies and staff colleges, fighting arms, corps and supporting arms have their own respective *schools and institutions* where each member of the arms and services need to undergo their respective basic and specialisation training in their respective disciplines. In addition, there is *formation and unit level training* round the year for every member of the military organisations.

3. Conclusion and Future Research

Knowledge is an indispensable asset for any organisation. It has become the life-blood for the survival and prosperity of the organisations. It is a driving force for action. Human brains are the generators of knowledge (tacit), and after that it takes various forms (explicit). Knowledge management could achieve huge attention by the academics and the business worlds. Military units and formations could also utilise this invaluable asset into their operations. Knowledge transfer is one of the crucial elements of the knowledge management process. Knowledge transfer occurs between the knowledge contributors and the knowledge recipients. For the smooth transfer of knowledge between the knowledge actors, the selection and use of an appropriate media, e. g. vehicle is paramount. Inappropriate use of such vehicles may distort the transferred knowledge, or transfer may not occur and such situation may be dangerous for all units and formations engaged with the battles. There is numerous knowledge transfer mechanisms. In ancient days, bells and flags were used intensively in the battle fields to transfer knowledge. Drums and bells were the effective means for night warfare. Flags represents the national identity and symbol of own forces' drive. In modern days, military forces use drums, bells and flags for ceremonial purpose as well. In some parts of the globe, people use megaphone and flags to warn the inhabitants about a forthcoming natural disaster. Use of intelligence is an excellent mechanism of knowledge transfer, which was intensively utilised and engaged by the ancient Generals and leaders in the war and battle-fields. Modern days, many countries possess strong intelligence agencies and military corps of intelligence. These units/formations collect, collate and disseminate information and work as excellent knowledge transfer mechanisms for the fighting and logistics elements during the peace and times. Military Corps of Signal ensures the on-time transfer of knowledge between the units/formations. Military training institutions and schools are the brilliant vehicles of knowledge transfer, where in addition to basic trainings, specialised trainings are also provided to the military personnel of the respective arms and services. Thus the trained personnel may transfer knowledge to their colleagues and subordinates.

Future researchers may empirically examine the knowledge transfer mechanisms in any military or non-military context.

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