

Knowledge Management as a Mechanism for Large-Scale Technological and Organizational Change Management in Universities in Israel

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Scientific abstract

Over the last decade higher education has had numerous pressures and changes (globalization, mass education, large scale university rivalry – local, private and foreign – budget cuts, demands for greater accountability and increasingly sophisticated technologies) (Hanna, 2003; Scott, 2003; Waterhouse, 2005). Universities, the world over, must adapt to daunting social and educational challenges, in which technology is playing a bigger role than ever before – both in inducing changes as well as in providing the means to cope with them. This technological decade had had an impact on almost every aspect of learning and work in Academia: research, instruction and administration. Indeed, leading researches had pointed out that introduction of any new technology in bound to involve significant changes in work processes and organizational structures, even to the point of reshaping the university's future (Bates, 1999; Gutti-Rosenblit, 2005; Kiernan, 2002; Scott & Wagner, 2003, p1).

The role of technology in reshaping the university's very essence is pivotal in helping fulfill Academia's role as an agent of social and cultural change. Achieving this goal demands, on the one hand, a thorough evaluation and understanding of prevailing practices of change management, and on the other hand, establishing a well planned change management mechanism. Such a mechanism would provide the means whereby decisions will be made regarding organizational and technological shifts that are to determine the university's ability to survive and attract prospective students and staff, particularly in view of the traditional reluctance in some academic circles to embrace changes (Smith, 1999; Elton, 2003).

This study presents a cross-section examination of two overall organizational changes introduced into the work processes of higher educational system in Israel during the past seven years as E-learning environment and ERP technology. This work will describe the manner and

method by which these technological changes had been dealt with in two major universities. The study focuses on methods for enhancing for large-scale technological changes, both inside and outside the university, their formation, progress, and management, including repercussions

that any one University's decisions have on other universities. This study sets out to clarify that, if any, models and methods are devised for managing, navigating and adjusting Academia in an ever-changing environment, while considering its unique functions and culture.

Data yielded by this study indicates that overall organizational changes in Israeli universities are taking place without a clear and well-planned model. Moreover, there are no methods or guidelines, nor so much as a know-how tank in any of the regulatory systems inside or outside the universities. There is a sort of a mechanism (not pre-conceived) for large-scale technological and organizational change management in Israeli universities. This mechanism acts within universities or in close proximity to universities as a CoP (community of practices) and is influenced by other universities decisions. Information which reaches the CoP of professionals (a forum in which every university has one representative) serves as a change catalyst. In the process of receiving information and processing it, CoP's members are addressing all relevant issues: difficulties, problems, misgivings. These CoP map out all information while looking at different options to solve particular problems. (Drawing on experience accumulated in Israel and abroad). After consolidating their decisions they push for implementing various changes in their own institutions or in the higher education system, as a whole. They do so by lobbying, sharing the change benefits and providing guidelines. Any implementation of a given decision could in turn set the whole process in motion again.

The study in fact established that this process was non defined and diffused as far as methods or pre-conceived goals were concerned. It emerged rather as a Knowledge Management process. On the basis of this understanding, it would seem imperative to devise a pre-conceived and well-planned model that would enable efficacious large-scale organizational and technological change management. The model we propose is facilitating knowledge management strategies and process for achieving change management:

KM-M-Cm: (Knowledge Management as a Mechanism for Change Management).

