Knowledge sharing at the construction sector – facilitators and inhibitors

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Abstract

In modern economic society, organizations’ competitiveness relies heavily on their ability to leverage and manage knowledge rather than in physical assets, some authors refer even though the concepts of knowledge management (KM) are being well implemented in the industrial sector, the construction segment, however, appears to have some difficulties in adopting the practices and strategies offered by KM. It is known that the construction sector (CS) is experiencing a time of instability and recession, and one of the causes of this may involve the lack of adaptation to knowledge era. Therefore, this paper, based on literature review, gives an overview of inhibitor and the facilitator factors of knowledge sharing (KS) with the objective to answer two questions: which of the KS inhibitors and facilitators characterize the CS? has the CS its specifics KS inhibitors and facilitators? It’s presented a framework in order to verify the existence of exclusive factors of the sector. At this point it is possible to suggest that CS has mainly organizational factors as inhibitors and the facilitator’s factors are almost individual. The facilitating factors might be the consequence of an effective and successful KS strategy and can be seen as guidelines to improve the construction industry organizational performance.

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**Introduction**

Knowledge is a term with different meanings in different contexts. For example, according to Webster’s dictionary, knowledge is the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity, something that has been acquired through experience or association, as referred by Serna. Others authors, like Davenport and Prusak define knowledge as a mixture of experiences, values, contextual and specialized information, originating from and applied in each individual in the knowledge, and which provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. There are numerous definitions of knowledge in literature that confirm that knowledge originates and resides in people. As suggested by Nonaka and Takeuchi, knowledge can be classified as tacit/informal and explicit/formal. Nonaka define knowledge as showed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Explicit and Tacit Knowledge definition.

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<th>Explicit Knowledge</th>
<th>Tacit Knowledge</th>
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<td>This is the type of knowledge that can be expressed in a formal and systematic language, and be shared as data, specific formulas, details, manuals or specialists.</td>
<td>A more subjective knowledge, based on experience, it is invisible and hardly expressed, communicated, perceived or measured.</td>
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Knowledge organisations perform knowledge processes, using their primary resources of intellectual capital, their key input of information and their effectiveness in performing these processes depends on their knowledge capabilities. Egbu believes that, for leaders of construction projects and organisations, the processes by which knowledge is created or acquired, communicated, applied and utilised must be effectively managed.

Alavi and Leidner remind that according to Davenport and Prusak, most KM projects have one of three aims: (1) to make knowledge visible and show the role of knowledge in an organization, mainly through maps, yellow pages, and hypertext tools, (2) to develop a knowledge-intensive culture by encouraging and aggregating behaviours such as KS and proactively seeking and offering knowledge; (3) to build a knowledge infrastructure—not only a technical system, but a web of connections among people given space, time, tools, and encouragement to interact and collaborate. This paper will focus on the KM second aim: the KS, because understanding the effectiveness of formal and informal approaches to KS may assist organisations in taking full advantage of this practices and achieve better performance levels.

According to Robinson the CS represents one of the biggest resistant in terms of implementing KM strategies. These authors defend that construction firms (CFs) are often reluctant to invest in new initiatives or innovative approaches, citing low profit margins often militating against investment in research and development. Mohd Zin and Egbu follow the same line of reasoning, highlighting a variety of factors, most notably the cultural practices.

Regarding this, the main purpose of this paper is to emphasize the facilitating and inhibiting factors of KS at the construction industry firms and its impact on their performance.

To achieve more specific results, it will be separated individual KS from organizational KS factors, since it’s intended with this paper the classification and improvement at the organizational level of the sector under analysis.

In this way, based on former literature, it will be developed a representative framework of a set of facilitators and inhibitors to KS practices, distinguishing between individual and organisational factors. Throughout this literature review it will be presented an overview of those who are specific connected to CFs.

**Methodology**

As previously stated this paper is based on literature review and according to Brereton, a literature review has three primary phases:

1. Planning of the review;
2. Conducting the review; and
3. Documenting the results.

In this way, the paper will summarize all of these phases to answer the two research questions that were formulated for this investigation:

**(RSQ1) Which of the KS inhibitors and facilitators characterize the construction industry?**

To get an overview of different types of KS challenges reported in literature and identify the challenges that are most frequently reported in the context of this specific sector.

**(RSQ2) Has the construction industry its specifics KS inhibitors and facilitators?**
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