HRM Practices and Existence of Knowledge Management Agent in Higher Education

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Abstract

Purpose - the organizational life cycle theory show us about the impact of Knowledge management on Human resource practices. By observing universities that teach knowledge management in their academic course compared to university does not teach knowledge management, we want to know how knowledge management can impact on the quality of Human Resource (HR) practices. **Findings** - it appears that HR practices in universities that teach knowledge management courses were more able to develop research and education and information absorption than they did not teach the courses. In addition the universities which did not teach knowledge management sometimes more focused on operational issues and difficulties in building the skills and knowledge of their HR staff significantly, and have lower performance result. **Research limitations/implications** - there are limitations on the collection of respondent by purposive sampling and it is suggested to increase the number of respondents that extends from the geographical scope and a longer study period.**Originality/value** - HR practices in various organizations and universities have been widely studied. But it is still rare to study the field of knowledge management course especially about lecturer as knowledge management agent. In addition, this study applies the life cycle theory by examining HR practices in higher education that encourages the higher university to focus on strategic HR issues in their environment.

Keywords: knowledge management, university, organizational life cycle

1. Background

Facing competition services of Higher Education, from within and outside the country, and issues of fulfilling the desires of consumers (consumer's driven). Many universities have been driven to improve the quality of education. Therefore, the higher education administrators have been tried every way to continue to make changes in their organizations in order to survive in this competitive atmosphere. For that goal, the role of knowledge management is fundamental to the success of the universities.

Changing demand of customer (eg. students) has compelled every university to abandon the conventional paradigm of resource-based into knowledge-based competitiveness. It is centered on resource use of knowledge and technology as their advantage. The phenomenon has made the concept of Knowledge Management as important strategy in achieving and maintaining organizational competitive advantage (Rastogi 2000; Senge 2000).

This issue of organizational change has become a major cornerstone in the management and other disciplines. The process or sequence of events that unfold in this change through knowledge strategy has been in a transition in individual work and career, group formation and development. It then brings organizational innovation, growth, and reorganization of resources use. To understand how organizational change can be developed, management experts have borrowed many concepts, metaphors, and theories from other disciplines, ranging from organizational development to evolutionary biology (Andrew, et.al, 1995).

In academic activities, the university has HR policies and practices which in part shaped by the ongoing educational habits. In this regard it will highlight on how HR practices at university faculty which teaching knowledge management courses or other courses containing knowledge management. Therefore, this paper will takes KM lecturers as knowledge management agent in transforming tacit knowledge to their students and other academicians. On the other hand we consider how knowledge management agent can be informants to report and evaluate their HR practices in the organization.

Implementation of knowledge management in university environment has been important especially about how knowledge management can be built by certain agents. However, empirically, the research on the implementation of knowledge management agents in higher education is still rare (Anantatmula, 2010; Shoham & Perry, 2009). Some limited studies in the context of western countries shows that higher education institutions can transform their activities from knowledge institution into learning institution through the implementation of knowledge management. Universities that implemented knowledge management have put themselves as a response to the challenges of competition and also efficiency in the education process.

It is interesting to know how HR practices at higher education institutions and how knowledge management can improve their organizational performance and competitive advantage. For that goal, this paper will explain the implementation of knowledge management in university and how these practices can be

different in every observed university. Creation of knowledge in an organization cannot be done instantly, but it takes a process and empowering factors of knowledge management to make it happen. Knowledge Management is important concept to implement and still require further exploration and development (Suharti, 2009). Universities in Indonesia face various challenges and constraints on the development of education practices such as curriculum, educational facilities, teaching and learning, teacher's quality, and profession which finally impacts on the efficient implementation of knowledge management practiced in the universities.

In addition, today many higher education organization still operates solely based on their respective traditions and how the application of knowledge management activities in the organizations has been discourse in the lecture course. Thus, this study is considered interesting because it can explain how knowledge management practice in university can be improved. By using organizational life cycle (OLC) theory (McEvoy & Buller, 2013), it is known that every organization has fluctuated HR issues and need dynamic solutions that run from time to time as they grow and face new competition atmosphere. There are various models of OLC that explains how universities have different stages in the university characteristic, eg, age, size of employees or number of students, and leadership regeneration (Rutherford et al, 2003).

According Rutherford, et al., (2001), it showed that organization which able to grow bigger and healthier will have HR practices that are increasingly formalized, complex, and sophisticated. It implied that universities passing their start-up phase and entering the mature stage will have more complex human resources and investing in advanced HR system and more formalized. Dibrell et al., (2011) also showed that the universities which experience their organizational life cycle stages will configure and adjust their HR practices to meet the business needs and competitive advantage.

The purpose of this paper is to identify the role of the lecturer as knowledge management agent. HR practices are guided by knowledge management at university to improve organizational performance and competitive advantage of organizations. This is the purpose of this paper to explain the implementation of knowledge management in university and how these practices can be different in every university. Furthermore, in this paper it will be examined on the staff understanding about knowledge management and how knowledge management lecturer acted as agent that inspired many academic activities in shaping the competitive advantage of their universities.

2. Literature Review

Knowledge Management has been defined by Davenport and Prusak (1998). They distinguish the knowledge management process into understanding of data, information and knowledge and how the three concepts can build new benefits between the implementation. Knowledge is not just data or information, but relates the usability and how people can perceive the difference between theoretical and implementation.

Most organizations do not explore the potential of hidden knowledge possessed by their members. Similarly, in the case of universities, Delphi Group research shows how organizational knowledge can be stored structurally as below (Estriyanto, 2008):

a. 42% in mind (brain) of their employees;
b. 26% of paper documents;
c. 20% of electronic documents;
d. 12% of electronic knowledge base.

It is indicated that a large portion of the knowledge are (42%) stored in the brain. this kind of Knowledge is so-called tacit knowledge, which conceptually can be understood as hidden knowledge. While the materialization of knowledge in the form of paper documents (26%), electronic documents (20%) and knowledge-based electronic items (12%) are the explored knowledge. Potential tacit knowledge must be explored more to be made explicit with other knowledge in order to be transfer to others.

a. Knowledge Management Agent

There are many definitions and debates about the agent. Agents can be independent, mobile and/or intelligent. Agents generally is a program or set of programs that life (keep going) to multiple destinations (based goals) in a dynamic environment (changing access to resources) and can make a decision to take action to achieve the goal (Burnell, et.al, 2008). Agent has unique role of cooperation, negotiation, and communication to other division or group to achieve a variety of functions in their field such as discovery and classification of new knowledge, search and retrieval of information, and automatic evolution of domain ontology.

In context of knowledge management, agents can intervene beyond adaptation to specific environment. They can support other user to perform different tasks or they can be delegated to perform certain tasks by the users. They can reduce work and information overload (intelligent information agents, personal assistants), search and guide the user to find the different knowledge (filtering agent), or enhance learning process (pedagogical agent, story-telling agent) (Klusch, 2002; Brna, Cooper, & Razmerita, 2001).

b. Organizational Life Cycle

Indonesia has many universities that teach courses or business management, but knowledge management often run without standardization and less documented in which each organization operates based on the traditions of their leaders and how the application of knowledge management in the organization's activities are rarely published. Thus, this study is considered attractive because it can describe how knowledge management activities are implemented in the observed universities.

From organizational life cycle (OLC) theory (McEvoy & Buller, 2013), every health organization always grow and face new competition. For university context, the OLC models can be used to explain how the organizational health can be measured from the university character of age, employee size or student number as well as leadership regeneration (Rutherford et al, 2003). In addition, OLC theory can be used to explain how HR challenges are faced by universities teaching knowledge management courses (the lecturer of knowledge management course as the knowledge management agent) and the rate of organizational growth is primarily measured by the increase or reduction in the number of faculty staffs and student population.

To observe the university life cycle, McEvoy and Buller (2013) suggested a measure of the number of employees and business volume (i.e. the number of students) as criteria of success to develop systems and procedures of the organization.

Rutherford et al., (2001) also showed that organizations which can grow bigger and healthier will have HR practices that are more formalized, complex, and sophisticated. This means that universities in the mature growth level will have more complex human resources tasks and invest in more advanced HR system and more formalized academic activities. Also according Dibrell et al., (2011) it is also showed that the organizational life cycle stages is followed by adjustment and new configuration on the HR practices to meet the business demand and competitive advantage. Thus it can be considered that the early stages university will have loose and informal HR activities and most likely to run simply by the founder. By following OLC theory, the early stages university may focus their HR practice on the issues related to HR administration but inflexible about how knowledge management is practiced.

With the university grow bigger, there is a demand for new employees and new skills which often exceed the founder ability to manage not as simple as early stage university. To reach higher efficiency, it will begin to formalize the HR department to improve their evaluation and on stage of the affirmative, the HR function becomes more modernized and integrated with business strategy to generate higher competitive advantage.

Several empirical studies documenting HR practices and OLC stages (Pearson et al., 2006) has provided empirical support that the differences in HR practices are due to the various sizes and various stages of organizational life cycle, ie, the differences in the formalization of employee selection, performance appraisal, reward employment and benefits.

In addition, universities size and formalities of HR practices can be shaped by the owner or founder policies. McEvoy and Buller (2013) has specifically indicated that greater university size will demand on the university to employ HR specialists and use the professional resources in the recruitment.

Therefore, we will consider that universities teaching knowledge management courses will have sophisticated recruitment procedure, qualified training on-the-job, performance assessment methods and formalized HR procedures and HR record keeping.

Furthermore, McEvoy and Buller (2013) also found that different sizes organizations will have different HR practices. It encourages us to determine how the differences in perception of knowledge management agent will impact on the HR practices in the universities. We then compare it with the universities which do not have any knowledge management agent. OLC theory also predict that these differences can be seen by comparing the quality of HR practices, for example, recruitment practice, selection, training, assessment systems, compensation design, role of HR staff, HR orientation level, HR outsourcing and information systems that form skills and university staff performance. Thus, for systematized organization, HR has the authority to regulate them, spend time, and develop the contribution of organizational success.

c. University Size

To define the role of knowledge management agent to change the HR practice, then we suggests that HR practices tend to differ as the university grow and proceed their life cycle. Furthermore, it will observe the role of knowledge management agent represented by the presence of their lecturer who teaches management courses or knowledge management as core learning.

As the universities grow, it is interesting to know how knowledge management agent participates in academic activities and diffuses the knowledge management concept into HR management practices. Other question is how HR practices can take place without any knowledge management agent in the observed universities.

Hornsby and Karatko (1990) shows that the indicator of how organization is in growth level is about

their employee number. This means that organization must have 150-250 employees. Furthermore, according to the definition of Higher Education (Directorate of Higher Education of Indonesia, 2013) that university which expected to grow when it has run for least 5 years and have graduated at least one class of students. As for the size of the student, the numbers are considered to represent the stages of growth are universities that has graduated 100 students.

In short, from the OLC theory, we suggest that higher education policies and practices will vary depending on the university size. Because it is questionable how university can diffuse their knowledge management into HR practice and having more formal and sophisticated HR practices than the university that does not teach knowledge management courses.

3. Samples and methods

For the purposes of this study, it collected 25 universities consisting of faculty or university leaders as the respondents representing their respective universities. Furthermore, for simplification, it collected six universities that have knowledge management agent and 6 universities without any knowledge management agent till obtained 12 universities which divided into two groups. The first group consisted university with knowledge management agent that having 800-1200 employees and lecturers and more than 15,000 students. The second group consisted universities without knowledge management agent that having 100-300 people employees and lecturers with the number of students is less than 8,000.

Furthermore, this study uses secondary data from the syllabus and curriculum of the university that teaching knowledge management or sub-course contains knowledge management. Syllabus and curriculum were obtained from the respective universities websites.

For the next stage, it is carried out face-to-face verification to confirm the legality of the number of students and faculty and followed by the distribution of a questionnaire survey in early July 2014 to August 2014. After asking permission from each university leader and declare that the respondent data will be kept confidential and anonymous, we also invite the participation of the respondents in on-line survey on HR practices in each university.

We divide the questions into ten categories, namely, number of Employees and lecturers, technology integration, and strategic initiatives, customer focus and quality improvement, HR learning and practice, international research participation, time use of core work, provision of HR services and administration, technology use for file management, participation in strategy formulation, competent HR staff, HR performance assessment and HR expectations fulfillment gap.

By following OLC theory, we want to know whether the presence of the knowledge management agent can improve university resource usage. The other question is how HR strategy and HR practices in universities with knowledge management agent will be better than those without knowledge management agent. This difference can be analyzed from the level of formalization of HR practices and priorities on file management.

4. Analysis and results

Gradually, we ask the respondents about the time used by HR staff in the workplace. This is done by observing HR roles ranging from the file management to gathering or meeting. Then they were asked to recall how the percentage of the similar activities in previous years. The results of the HR role and their time usage are given Table I.

for universities with knowledge management agent, they have higher value on the time use for core work, provision of HR services and administration. We observed that both groups acknowledged having been working in disciplined manner to manage HR and administration tasks file.

Table 1. t-test used for comparison of the average difference in the following order:

	Universities with knowledge management agent		University without knowledge management agent			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	T-Value	P(Two-Tailed)
Employees size	8.28	41.183	3.90	19.416	2.018	0.05
Technology Integration	8.34	41.477	4.12	20.495	2.018	0.05
Initiatives and Strategies, Customer Focus and Quality Improvement Study and Practice HR	8.00	39.804	4.34	21.581	2.017	0.05
International research participation	8.28	41.181	4.18	20.792	2.018	0.05
Time Usage for Core Work, Provision of HR Services and Administration	8.32	41.378	4.26	21.186	2.019	0.05
Technology Use for File Management	8.28	41.183	4.02	20.003	2.018	0.05
Participation in Strategy Formulation	8.16	40.591	4.16	20.694	2.018	0.05
Competent HR staff	7.94	39.507	4.24	21.088	2.018	0.05
HR Performance Assessment	8.20	40.789	4.16	20.692	2.018	0.05
Expectations Fulfillment Gap	8.22	40.886	4.61	22.961	2.018	0.05

Source: processed data (2014)

Based on the analysis of t-value, we found that the universities with knowledge management agent has higher employees size, faculty and students size than university without knowledge management agent. This can be seen from the value of means (8,28), compared to universities without knowledge management agent (3,90).

Another indicator that universities with knowledge management agent will differ from university without knowledge management agent is the recognition that their university has technology integration to manage the HR practices and educational practices through e-HR and E-Learning. This is supported by Ulrich et al., (2008) that the organization in mature stage will change the focus and increase in the scale of organization to enter the local, national, and global market. Another indication of mature organization is the advanced leadership, new product development, coordinated strategic thinking as reflected from their HR practices. From the questionnaire, universities with knowledge management agent having higher initiatives and strategies, higher customer focus and quality improvement in HR learning and practices. In our sample, it only seven of 12 universities reported their participation in the international research activities, while the rest did not answer. In total, these indicators show that universities without knowledge management agent in our samples were less active in the process of international research participation. This has been verified by a two stage questions to the university leaders who acknowledge that they are rarely to participate in international research activities. A total of 5 universities admitted this statement because they feel they have no knowledge management agent to focus their activities in knowledge development so that they do not know completely how the process of making their university staff to be more innovative and creative in the research activities.

In addition, universities without knowledge management agents also less active in the organizational development and having difficulties to build new strategic partners. Another difference is that universities with knowledge management agent have adopted technology to take care of usage time for file maintenance (8.34 percent of the time) compared with the universities without knowledge management agent (4.12 percent of the time). This reflects the first group has had a more complex task that cannot be handled manually. After clarification to the concerned university leaders, it is known that the use of HR technology can save their time to deal with other problems in the increased activity of strategic business partnerships. It is recognized by the six universities that having knowledge management agent to improve their working quality especially in dealing with knowledge activities.

From Table I, the composition of time spending was similar for both universities with knowledge management agent and those without the agent in building build strategic business partners. Furthermore, in the third part of questionnaire, it asked about strategic partnerships and it resulted that four universities answered does not have a role, and 8 universities having input into the strategic role and involved in knowledge management implementation. When given a list of ten strategic activities such as "identify and determine design of a new strategy" or "assessing employment strategy and education strategy" four universities with knowledge management agent have identified that the frequent strategic activities are recruitment and development of staff talent and identify ways to build public-university trust. From the results it appears that the university without knowledge management agent tends to be less active in strategy formulation than those having knowledge

management agent.

We also ask to both groups about their priorities on HR function (HR planning, compensation and benefits, training, assessment, recruitment and selection). Both groups reported an increase in recruitment and HR planning priorities. This case is similar to McEvoy and Buller (2013). They suggested that human resources in universities with knowledge management agent have moved further in the direction of the development of strategic business role than university without knowledge management agent.

Universities with knowledge management agent have 49 percent higher implementation and technology integration into HR practices and business practices than universities without knowledge management agent. As can be seen, in all cases the first group has a higher rank on HR practices and HR effectiveness. In addition, universities with knowledge management agent understood the importance of having competent HR staff and academic partners. The universities with knowledge management agent have understood the important of their staff quality as characterized by having a higher competent HR staff.

From table I, it showed the variability of response patterns from both groups which describe their human resources skills in the "dynamics of the organization" (interpersonal skills, coaching, etc.) and how their satisfaction from the human resources capacity in metric, IT, and data analysis and data mining. In addition, there are significant differences in three of the five kinds of skills, e.g., business partner skills, and metric skills. Furthermore, in Table below, it asked on what extent the HR staff has the skills to succeed in their work environment. Again, their answer is significantly higher than universities without knowledge management agent.

This can be explained by the size of the organization and human resources staff. It is indicated that HR staff at universities without knowledge management agent plays a dual role of HR generalists, rather than specialists, as partners of employees and also as the leaders of universities. Instead, the university with agent knowledge management will tend to have HR staff are more likely as specialist and become more accurate to finish their HR tasks. In addition, the universities with knowledge management agent (3,703) are more professional to manage HR issues than universities without knowledge management agent (1,835). This also showed that universities with knowledge management agent are more ready to resolve their workload related to HR issues and better personal relationship with HR colleagues.

To know how the perception gap may occur, we estimate the gap for each dimension as the difference between the perception and the perception of required performance is achieved. The results showed that on average, universities with knowledge management agent rate themselves higher on HR performance than universities without knowledge management agent. For example, the overall dimensions of HR performance for the first group give an average value (4.040) while second group produces an average (2.002). The first group assess their HR performance was higher in HR services and business strategy but lower on the role of co-operation. Furthermore, the first group (university with knowledge management agent) generally has a lower gap and better ability to meet the expectations than second group. This is in accordance with Lawler et al. (2006) that high performance is indicated by higher satisfaction and the higher ability of human resources and better knowledge on their HR staffs.

Our finding answered the gap which lies on the establishment of a viable working relationship for building HR excellence and the combination to produce better HR services. This proves that universities without knowledge management agent may face operational problems due to the conventional HR strategy is not updated. It also showed that knowledge management agent can address the gaps in the inability of the organization to manage business partners, business strategy, and HR analysis. For both group, respondents rated themselves as lowest for the performance lies in the second dimension. The results also showed that they needs greater priority on strategic business issues in university with knowledge management agent.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

From the analysis result, it showed that organization has certain stage of life cycle. In academic context, knowledge management has positive impact on the quality of human resources practices. In relation to the organizational life cycle theory (Greiner, 1972), it is proved that the universities which entered into mature growth stage is characterized by sophisticated HR practices, and ability to build a strategic role with other business partners in the community both locally, nationally, and internationally.

Overall, HR management in universities with knowledge management agent can focus their resource to resolve recent issues of business strategy and achieve a better empowerment and improved HR management as characterized by systematized routine and file management. These findings are consistent with McEvoy and Buller's conclusion (2013) that OLC in organization with knowledge management expert is characterized by a tendency to be capable of managing greater resources and a more formal HR practices and more sophisticated than university without knowledge management expert. The university also seems to be more satisfied with the skills and knowledge of their HR staff significantly, and provide higher rate on their performance dimensions. In our analysis, the university implemented knowledge management practice can manage better of their HR task and had better strategy in evaluating their staff skills.

They also characterized by greater use of HR resource, and higher training need, which shows that routine activities undertaken have evolved complex tasks involving students and faculty staffs. This indicates that the agent can bridge knowledge management through intensive training with more challenging task. In fact, the knowledge management agents have improved organizational HR capability to resolve the challenges of a sudden work and change it to produce a satisfactory job performance.

Limitations of this study are the area of research is limited into a segmented and geographic city of Jakarta and cannot be generalized to other cities or other universities located outside the Jakarta city and outside of Indonesia.

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