



Booz and Company

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# Knowledge Management

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## UCD Assessment Submission Form

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### Declaration of Authorship

I declare that all material in this assessment is my own work except where there is clear acknowledgement and appropriate reference to the work of others.

Signed: Christopher Clarke

Date: 08/11/19

## *1. Introduction*

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Knowledge management is an area of emanating pertinence for organisations. Knowledge management may be referred to as the development of core competencies and the broad comprehension of strategic know-how in an organisation (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). Therefore, due to its focus on resources and capabilities, knowledge management directly relates to the theory of the resource-based view of the firm. This is evidenced by Zheng, Yang and McLean (2010) who argue that the resource-based view and Barney's (1991) phenomenon of sustained competitive advantage are integral motivators for knowledge management. Moreover, knowledge management enables firms to attain competitive advantage (Richter and Niewiem, 2009). Consequently, its importance cannot be overstated.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the increasing significance of knowledge management for organisations while critically assessing the implementation of knowledge sharing and collaboration practices at Booz and Company. The aforementioned theoretical perspectives maintained a considerable motivator for the firm's growing focus on the management of intellectual capital. However, the deployment of a cultural change initiative of such scale poses a conspicuous challenge for organisations, and Booz and Company proved no exception.

## ***2. Importance of Knowledge Management in Professional Services***

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### *2.1. Knowledge as a Product*

The importance of knowledge management is increasing across a plethora of industries due to the nascence of globalisation and the prevalence of a ‘knowledge economy’ (Forstenlechner *et al.*, 2007). However, knowledge management maintains a higher degree of pertinence in professional services firms due to the knowledge exchange involved in their services (Empson, 2001; von Nordenflycht, 2010). Moreover, Groysberg and Lee (2009) contend that knowledge is the product of professional services firms.

According to Canato and Giangreco (2011), consultants play a central role as knowledge brokers, knowledge integrators and information sources for their clients. Furthermore, Sturdy (2009; 2011) contends that consultants act as knowledge distributors. This indicates the paramount nature of knowledge for professional services firms, more specifically management consulting firms. This can be ascribed to the knowledge requirements of the clients of these firms; professional services firms supply value to clients by providing access to broadly unavailable knowledge (Czerniawska, 2004; Richter and Niewiem, 2009). Thus, the success of professional services firms is predicated upon the transfer of knowledge.

Moreover, central to management consulting is the exploitation of explicit and tacit knowledge (Richter and Niewiem, 2009). Schein (1990) refers to three forms of consulting: expert, process and doctor. Expert consulting involves the utilisation of tacit knowledge (McQueen, 1998) Tacit knowledge is a form of knowledge that can only be explained through its practical application and is characterised by its difficulty to articulate and intangibility (Grant, 1996; Nonaka and Toyama, 2003). Conversely, explicit knowledge is tangible and may be captured and recorded in the form of audio, imagery or writing (Dalkir, 2013). Therefore, due to the difficulty in conveying tacit knowledge, its control and administration via knowledge

management systems is pertinent. Furthermore, knowledge management is an effective mechanism in the administration of both tacit and explicit organisational knowledge (Offsey, 1997; Gold, Malhotra and Segars, 2001; Mudambi, 2002; Darroch, 2005).

In addition, the management of tacit knowledge was widely neglected by organisations previously (Howells, 1996). However, the success of professional services firms is increasingly predicated upon tacit knowledge intensive activities such as communication consulting. According to Engwall and Kipping (2013), communication consulting is growing, thereby augmenting the importance of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge requires management via knowledge management systems beyond explicit knowledge due to its intangibility and influence on organisational performance (Seidler-de Alwis and Hartmann, 2008). However, due to the complementary nature of explicit and tacit knowledge the importance of explicit knowledge must not be overlooked (Nonaka, Toyama and Konno, 2000).

## *2.2. Knowledge as a Differentiator*

Czerniawska and May (2007) argue that specialist knowledge is an integral aspect in a client's selection process of a management consulting firm. Thus, possession of requisite knowledge is paramount. Furthermore, the demonstration of knowledge capabilities during the initial client consultation process is central to attaining a potential client (Schein, 1990). In addition, empirical findings from Richter and Niewiem (2009) and Skjølsvik and Breunig (2018) support this view, with clients placing critical importance on consultants with transferable industry specific knowledge.

However, a client's supplier selection process is beset by information asymmetry. According to van der Valk and Rozemeijer (2009) and von Nordenflycht (2010), clients experience difficulty assessing the knowledge of professional services firms for this reason. Therefore, clients' perceptions of professional services firms' knowledge influence their selection process.

Consequently, professional services firms must focus on developing a knowledge orientation to improve clients' evaluation of their knowledge (Skjølsvik and Breunig, 2018). In addition, client organisations are increasingly implementing two stage processes to assess supplier knowledge to aid their selection decisions (van der Valk and Rozemeijer, 2009). Firstly, professional services firms are evaluated in a general manner to assess the relatedness of their knowledge to a client's activities, before their specific capabilities relating to the resolution of a particular problem are established (Skjølsvik and Breunig, 2018). Thus, consultants must focus on the augmentation of knowledge related to a potential client's industry to achieve success in this first round of evaluation.

Furthermore, knowledge management enables organisations to cultivate a knowledge orientation. This knowledge orientation was successfully initiated at Booz and Company through the firm's establishment of thought leadership. Thought leadership involves 'the promotion of a new idea whether by example, logical argument, factual demonstration or inspiring appeal' (McCrimmon, 2005, p. 1067). According to Griffiths and Remenyi (2008), thought leadership crystallises the knowledge and project outcomes of professional services firms for clients. Moreover, knowledge management and thought leadership are interdependent (Keen and Tan, 2007). Therefore, consulting firms' ambitions of thought leadership are predicated upon effective knowledge management.

### *2.3. Organisational Structure*

Due to the pervasiveness of the functional organisational structure in professional services firms, knowledge management is paramount (Groysberg and Lee, 2009). This organisation structure inherently unveils the possibility of the development of organisational silos (Gulati, 2007). Organisational silos occur 'where employees unconsciously treat the organisation, and those in other departments and divisions, as part-objects' (Cilliers and Greyvenstein, 2012, p.

3). Therefore, the existence of silos is detrimental to professional services firms' operational performance. Furthermore, Offsey (1997) contends that knowledge silos permeate service organisations. Knowledge silos occur where knowledge is of critical importance to an organisation's activities; such organisations are referred to as knowledge intensive organisations (Krylova, Vera and Crossan, 2016). Alavi and Leidner (1999) note that as firms expand their activities globally, communication issues relating to knowledge such as knowledge silos emerge. Given the global nature of management consultancy firms, this poses a considerable concern. This maintained a high degree of pertinence for Booz and Company as the firm operated across 60 locations worldwide.

Ardichvili, Page and Wentling (2003) propose that knowledge silos act as barriers to knowledge sharing. Furthermore, the locational fragmentation of organisations produces an inefficient utilisation of knowledge (Hwang and Krackhardt, 2019). However, Offsey (1997) and Bundred (2006) argue that knowledge management can prevent the prevalence of organisational and knowledge silos by integrating knowledge. Moreover, in a study involving law firms, knowledge management was found to be a critical success factor due to its ability among others to influence efficiency (See Exhibit 1) (Forstenlechner *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, knowledge management is a vital means of mitigating the organisational and knowledge silos inherent in global professional services firms.



### ***3. Obstacles to Knowledge Sharing at Booz and Company***

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#### *3.1. Organisational Culture*

The prior failure of Booz and Company's knowledge management system – iShare – proved a significant obstacle to the implementation of an effective knowledge sharing and collaboration strategy throughout the firm. This may be broadly attributed to organisational inertia. Organisational inertia is intrinsically linked with an organisation's culture (Abdul Rashid, Sambasivan and Abdul Rahman, 2004). Moreover, De Long and Fahey (2000) identify organisational culture and its associated inertia as a fundamental obstruction to the effective utilisation of intellectual capital. Inertia occurs where organisations maintain a resistance to change (Rumelt, 1995). This was evident at Booz and Company as employees were described as missing the simplicity of the previously implemented knowledge management system – Knowledge On-Line. This culminated in a complete absence of engagement with iShare and employee implementation of less effective knowledge sharing strategies such as the storage of content on local computers and the use of email. These factors contributed to reducing the organisational effectiveness associated with a successful knowledge management strategy (Yang, 2007).

Despite the abundance of technical improvements with Booz and Company's new knowledge management system – insidebooz – inertia ensured a lack of complete engagement with the system. This supports Zheng, Yang and McLean's (2010) research findings, empirically linking organisational culture as a moderator of the effectiveness of knowledge management. This moderating effect was evident in Booz and Company's implementation of insidebooz. However, the firm ostensibly identified this issue, as a major culture change initiative was instigated simultaneously; the purpose of which was to enable effective dialogue during

projects. Despite these efforts, employees failed to effectively engage with insidebooz due to among other issues, a lack of management support.

### *3.2. Concurrent Projects*

The simultaneous undertaking of further projects such as the integration of Katzenbach Partners following acquisition and the beginning of a large-scale cultural change initiative had a detrimental impact on the success of Booz and Company's new knowledge management system. Firstly, Katzenbach Partners' employees utilised what they believed to be a superior knowledge management system in HUB+, indicating incompatibility between the two systems. Gupta and Roos (2001) propose that incongruity between merging firms' intellectual capital may subdue the ability of knowledge to generate competitive advantage. In addition to the perceived inferiority of insidebooz, employees may resist technological change due to social factors such as the disruption of interpersonal relationships (Lawrence, 1969). Furthermore, according to Scheck and Kinicki (2000), following an acquisition, the employees of the acquired firm enter a period of coping with the perceived changes. Moreover, coping may result in pessimism from employees, culminating in a reluctance to engage with organisational change (Davy *et al.*, 1988).

In addition, although Booz and Company's cultural change initiative was seemingly positive for the implementation of the firm's new knowledge management system, it veiled the possibility of potentially detrimental effects to each initiative. Beer and Nohria (2000) maintain that the simultaneous alteration of organisation's hard and soft structures is difficult to accomplish and often brings the worst aspects of both forms of change. However, Booz and Company attempted to modify its soft structure through the firm's major cultural change initiative, while, concurrently, attempting to modify the organisation's hard structure and systems via the implementation of insidebooz.

Roberto and Levesque (2005) propose that an iterative approach to the execution of change initiatives may be more appropriate for organisations. However, this approach is less effective than the concurrent method of implementation (Sminia and Nistelrooij, 2006). Despite this, Beer and Nohria (2000) warn that such a deployment method requires a high level of management expertise, but propose that the approach may offer a source of competitive advantage. This may have provided the motivation for Booz and Company to attempt this difficult method of implementation.

## ***4. Critical Evaluation of Knowledge Management Initiative***

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### ***4.1. Success***

Despite the difficulties relating to the implementation of insidebooz, Booz and Company's knowledge management initiative experienced moderate success. Firstly, it enabled the opportunity to develop and display thought leadership. This offers potential competitive advantage due to its influence on clients' selection process of management consulting firms (Griffiths and Remenyi, 2008). Furthermore, the level of engagement prior to the launch of insidebooz at 60% was extraordinary given the failure of the previous knowledge management system – iShare. Thus, the knowledge sharing and collaboration team overcame significant organisational inertia in its implementation of the knowledge management initiative.

Conversely, complete engagement with the system was not attained as employees continued to rely on email and the storage of knowledge on hard drives, indicating a considerable shortcoming in Booz and Company's initiative. However, the future of the firm's knowledge sharing and collaboration strategy appears positive as performance metrics indicate positive momentum in terms of employee engagement with insidebooz. Despite this success certain challenges do remain.

### ***4.2. Challenges***

#### ***4.2.1. Management Support***

According to Lin's (2007) research findings, top management support is the most important factor in the success of knowledge sharing initiatives. This can be ascribed to its effect of encouraging the collection and donation of knowledge to colleagues. Booz and Company's leadership understood the importance of knowledge management. However, a considerable failure was the lack of affiliative and visionary leadership and enforcement of accountability for the absence of engagement with insidebooz from management (Goleman, 2000). Affiliative

leadership ensures the motivation of employees to achieve organisational objectives (Preston *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the leadership style exemplifies the concept of collaboration due to its focus on interactive processes (Gagnon, Vough and Nickerson, 2012). The absence of affiliative leadership significantly impacted the successful implementation of insidebooz as employees could not associate themselves with the pertinence of the system.

Furthermore, Westley and Mintzberg (1989) assert that visionary leadership involves the generation of an idea, followed by its communication and empowerment of employees to achieve the communicated vision. In addition, the visionary leadership style enables an organisation's employees to identify with and support management's vision (Westley and Mintzberg, 1989). Evidently, Booz and Company's management did not implement such a leadership style. Additionally, Grant (1996) argues that management must act as enablers of knowledge coordination to ensure the effective integration of knowledge. Consequently, the increased engagement of management with the implementation of insidebooz via affiliative and visionary leadership may reap reward for Booz and Company.

#### *4.2.2. Lack of Engagement with insidebooz*

Booz and Company's most pressing issue relating to the firm's knowledge management initiative is the low rates of engagement with insidebooz. Consequently, critical knowledge is not uploaded to insidebooz and is therefore unavailable to all employees in the firm. A meta-analysis of organisational knowledge sharing has indicated that intentions and attitudes, organizational culture, and rewards for engagement with knowledge management systems form the antecedents of a successful knowledge management strategy (Witherspoon *et al.*, 2013).

In the initial stages of the implementation of insidebooz, an overreliance was placed on the personalisation of knowledge over codification. However, Scheepers, Venkitachalam and Gibbs (2004) contend that an equal emphasis on codification and personalisation is a dangerous

approach. A personalisation strategy focuses on providing ‘creative, analytically rigorous advice on high-level strategic problems by channelling individual expertise’ (Hansen, Nohria and Tierney, 1999, p. 109). Thus, personalisation pertains to the management of tacit knowledge via interpersonal relationships. Contrastingly, codification ‘seeks to capture and store knowledge in explicit form for subsequent transfer and (re)use by others within the organization’ (Scheepers, Venkitachalam and Gibbs, 2004, p. 202).

Furthermore, Nonaka's (1994) theory of dynamic knowledge creation contends that the process of converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge may generate a knowledge spiral which broadens and deepens firms’ knowledge resources. As management consulting firms’ activities predominantly involve the utilisation of tacit knowledge, a focus on the codification of this knowledge as Booz and Company’s principal knowledge management strategy may be more appropriate (McQueen, 1998). Consequently, the firm may benefit from the aforementioned knowledge spiral greater than that of a dominant personalisation strategy.

Alavi and Leidner (2001) propose that professional services firms can effectively encourage engagement with knowledge management systems via positive reinforcement. This can be achieved through pay for performance initiatives and the basing of promotion decisions on the degree of engagement with a firm’s knowledge management systems (Lin, 2007). Pertinently, PwC, who recently acquired Booz and Company, succeeded in this manner by specifically rewarding employees for engaging in knowledge sharing activities (Alavi and Leidner, 1999; PwC, 2014). Although Booz and Company integrated an assessment of employees’ engagement with knowledge management into their annual appraisals, the breadth of assessment was questionable, merely focusing on qualitative measures.

A paramount cultural challenge relates to how employee performance appraisals are traditionally based around individual performance. According to Alavi and Leidner (1999; 2001), this results in knowledge hoarding. Lin (2007) suggests that to overcome this challenge

employees must understand how the donation of their knowledge will benefit the organisation and their colleagues.

### *4.3. Benefits*

Extant literature indicates that knowledge management may act as a differentiator and a source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1996; Alavi and Leidner, 1999, 2001; Darroch, 2005; Richter and Niewiem, 2009; Zheng, Yang and McLean, 2010). Therefore, the pursuit of a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration forms a vital component of a firm's competitive strategy. Moreover, Nonaka and Toyama (2003, p. 2) assert that 'knowledge and the capability to create and utilize knowledge are considered to be the most important source of a firm's sustainable competitive advantage'. Grant (1996) supports this viewpoint, proposing that knowledge underpins the performance of all strategic assets. In addition, knowledge management enables superior market responsiveness and innovation (Alavi and Leidner, 1999). Thus, a successful knowledge management strategy poses the capacity to improve competitive performance by supporting the development of a customer-oriented organisation.

Empirical evidence from research involving professional services firms supports the broadly held belief that knowledge management increases operational efficiency (Reid, 2003; Forstenlechner *et al.*, 2007; Hwang and Krackhardt, 2019). Forstenlechner *et al.* (2007) find that 58% (See Exhibit 1) of study participants believe knowledge management can augment efficiency by producing synergies, encouraging knowledge reuse, and reducing redundant work. Furthermore, empirical findings from McEvily and Chakravarthy (2002, p. 285) indicate that 'tacitness' and complexity mediate the sustainability of competitive advantage derived from knowledge. Knowledge management systems are an effective mode of controlling tacit and complex knowledge, especially for knowledge intensive organisations (Scheepers,

Venkitachalam and Gibbs, 2004). Thus, increased engagement with insidebooz may provide a sustainable competitive advantage for Booz and Company.



## *5. Conclusion*

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In conclusion, the success of Booz and Company's knowledge management initiative may be referred to as a moderate success. The implementation of its cultural change and knowledge management system largely overcame significant barriers such as the simultaneous pursuit of competing projects and organisational inertia. However, considerable challenges remain, such as the incomplete adoption of insidebooz by employees and the degree of management support for the initiative. Despite their extensiveness, these challenges are not insurmountable.

Furthermore, this paper has provided value to academic literature in terms of its underlining of the importance of knowledge management, specifically in the context of professional services firms. The findings of this research support the assertions of Brown and Duguid (1991), who argue that the mere presence of knowledge management systems does not ensure effective knowledge sharing. Moreover, insight has been provided into the requirement of determining a suitable knowledge sharing and collaboration strategy via an appropriate mix of codification and personalisation. Ultimately, the significance of knowledge management is increasing as knowledge becomes a progressively important competitive asset.

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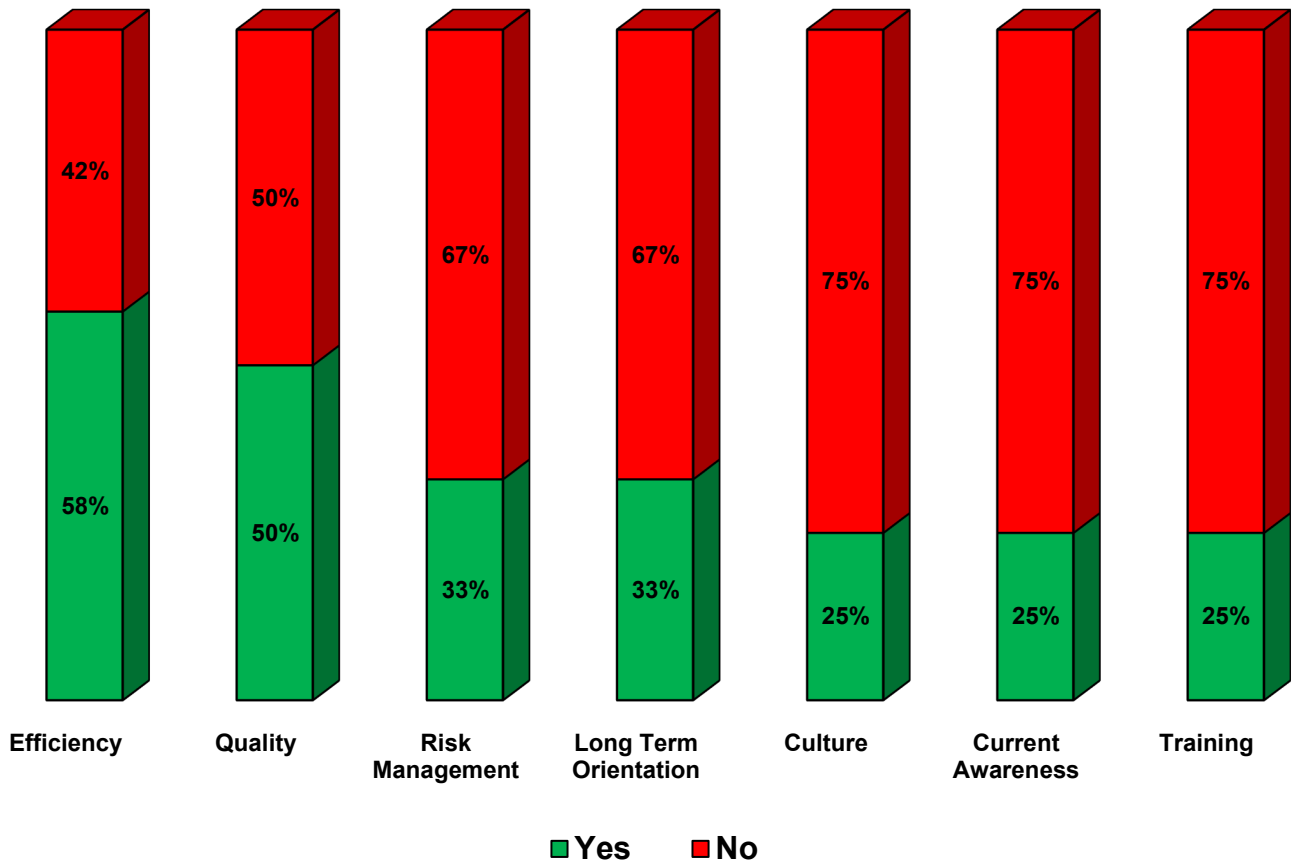
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### Study Participant Responses of Benefits of Knowledge Management



(Forstenlechner *et al.*, 2007)