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Factors that Influence Practitioners Trained in Six Sigma Principles in the Development of a Community of Practice

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Factors that influence practitioners trained in Six Sigma principles the development of a Community of Practice: A Case Study



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Abstract

Communities of practice are developed as a means of sharing and perpetuating **organizational learning**. While the literature is filled with individual studies that focus on **knowledge management, organizational learning, communities of practice, and Six Sigma** outcomes, it does not illustrate the inherent relationship between these thoughts and practices. This study explored the factors that lead to the development of a **community of practice** among knowledge workers such as Six Sigma practitioners. This case study illustrates the importance of Bandura's **theory of social learning** within the paradigm of a community of practice. This research illustrates the overwhelming influence of **experiential learning** in communities that have dynamic and complex relationships. The case study organization yielded 15 individuals who participated in **in-depth interviews**. Each practitioner shared his or her individual thoughts, perspectives, and **experiences** while utilizing the standard interview protocol. The results of this case study concretely promote the involvement of **senior leadership** in the development of the **Six Sigma** infrastructure, the importance of there being a commitment to the practitioner, the need for a **formal infrastructure** to be in place prior to implementing the management model, that **formal education** must take place, resources must be in place, and there needs to be a means for developing and sharing **best practice models**. This study suggested that future work is needed in two areas: What happens when organizations forget to learn and what is the impact of organizational leadership changes and changes in organizational strategies within an existing community of practice?

Purpose

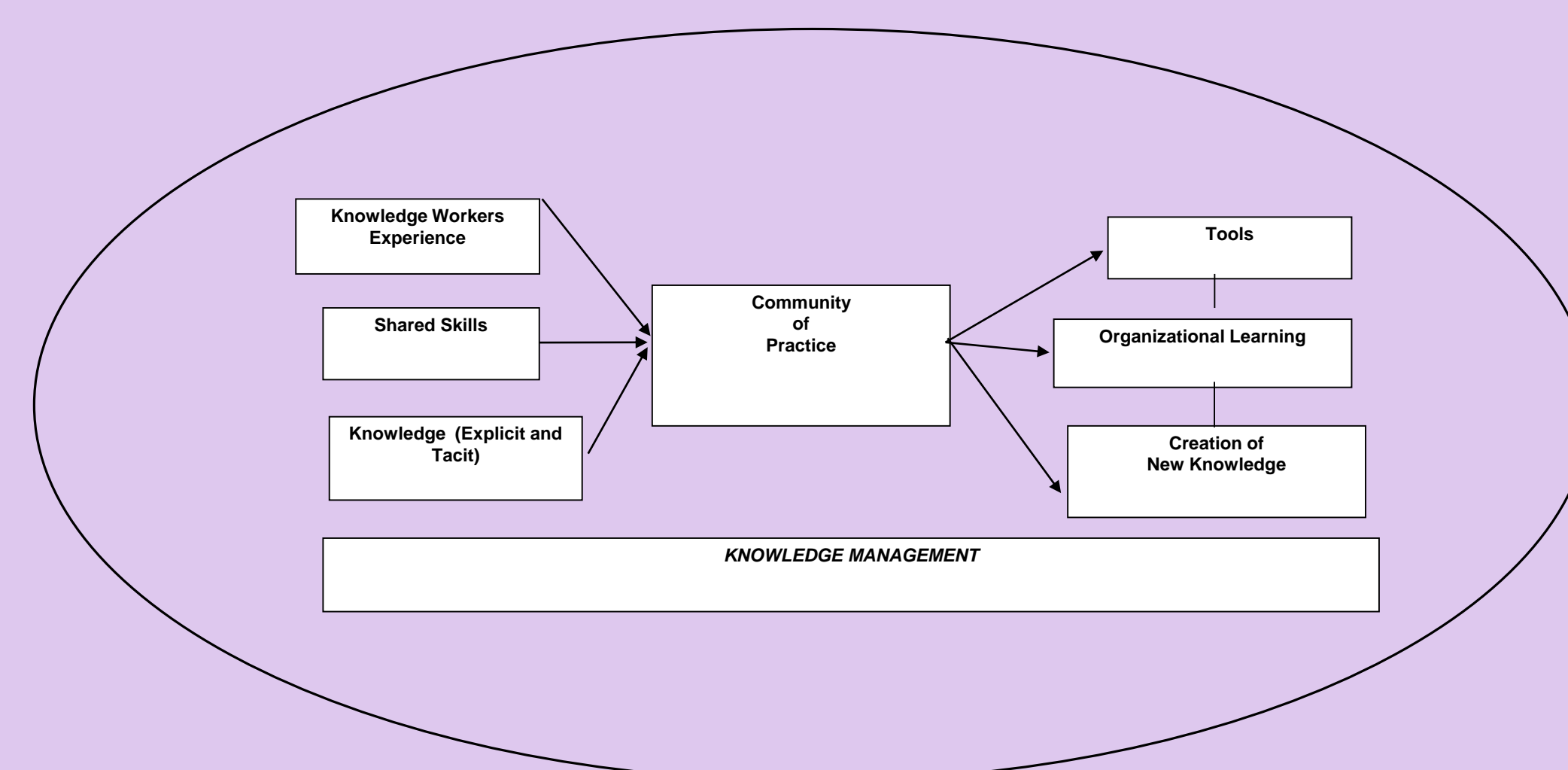
The purpose of this study was to determine the influential factors that impact the development of a community of practice amongst Six Sigma practitioners within a health care organization. This study explored the inherent relationship between knowledge management, organizational learning and Six Sigma practitioners by describing why and how the case organization developed their community of practice.

Research Questions

1. What factors influenced Six Sigma trained practitioners at The Source Health System in the development of a community of practice?
2. What was the role of knowledge management in the development and implementation of the community of practice at The Source Health System?
3. What is the relationship between organizational learning and the development of the community of practice for practitioners trained in Six Sigma at The Source Health System?
4. Why did The Source Health System choose to create a community of practice among its Six Sigma practitioners?



Research Design



Critical Success Factors

Research question	Critical success factors
1	Leadership A new way of doing business and to address a decline in financial stability Accountability Two-year commitment from the practitioner Format or infrastructure in place prior to the implementation of the program
2	Formal education Experiential learning Ability to use the resources Community meetings Learning, knowledge sharing, and development of best practice
3	Practitioners became teachers Ability to translate the methodology Entire culture embrace the management model Known expectations
4	Best practice Shared common knowledge and purpose

Area's Of Focus

Community of Practice (CoP)

- Wenger et al (2002) suggested that the concept promotes groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic. (The definition of Community of Practice is based on the construct of Bandura's Theory of Social Learning)
- A CoP can drive strategy, generate business, solve problems, promote best practice, develop individual professional skills, recruit and retain knowledge workers.

Knowledge Management (KM)

- KM is the process of gathering and making use of a firms collective expertise wherever it resides – on a paper, in databases, or people's heads (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004)
- KM also embraces the social context of the experience of others' and the lessons learned in the process

Organizational Learning

- DiBella and Nevis (1998) stated that there are three essential criteria for organizational learning:
 1. New skills, attitudes, values and behaviors
 2. What is learned will become the property of the organization, and
 3. What is learned remains within the organization even if the individual leaves.



Six Sigma

- Six Sigma Practitioners = Knowledge workers. (Drucker (1994) suggests that knowledge workers are individuals who use their intellect or knowledge in order to create new products or processes
- Pande, Neuman & Cavanaugh (2000) define Six Sigma as a comprehensive and flexible system for achieving, sustaining and maximizing business success. It is uniquely driven by close understanding of customer needs; disciplined use of facts, data, and statistical process of gathering and making use of a firms collective expertise analysis

Study Outcomes, Implications and Conclusion

This research demonstrated:

- That a CoP of practice can and should be formulated as a means of perpetuating organizational learning and knowledge management.
- That strong leadership and the appropriate resources are essential in the development of a formal infrastructure
- That KM is critical to the maintenance and evolution of the Six Sigma community
- That there is role for experiential learning in the development of a CoP

Conclusion

Kolb and Kolb (2005) suggested that experiential learning in teams occur when conversational space is available. The case organization had two forms for such learning – the formal monthly meetings and the sub-communities. Experiential learning is at the core of the learning systems

A CoP is the social fabric of organizational learning and relies on both collective and individual learning. As individuals share their knowledge or learning, they promote collective learning within the community of practice

To support the CoP organizations must create a culture of learning and develop a platform for continuous learning and knowledge sharing.

Future Research

1. The research should be expanded to include the impact of changes in leadership and strategic focus on a Six Sigma community of practice
2. The research should be expanded to include more locations within the corporate entity and or other organizations
3. The research should include the phases of community life cycle and provide determinants of when a community should disband
4. The research should be expanded to determine the impact of best practice measures, such as site visits, on developing communities within differing organizations.
5. This research should be expanded to include what happens when organizations forget to learn

