

Applications of Noble Eightfold Path in Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning

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Abstract

The focus of this research is more on the applications of Noble Eightfold Path (NEP) in Knowledge Management (KM) and Organizational Learning (OL) in the Nepalese context. The primary motivation of the researcher is to see whether people at the managerial level have some sense, or understanding in the Buddhist way of doing things, or the idea of applying NEP while performing duties and responsibilities.

It is known that the job of quantifying values into numeric system is a tough one; therefore, mixed-method has been carried out as a tool so as to interpret the quantitative, qualitative, and the content of Key Informant Interview (KII). The mixed-method is the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry, and this is what the researcher has done here in the Nepalese organizations that deal with various sectors such as education, finance, human resource development, profit and non-profit etc.

KEYWORDS: Noble Eightfold Path, Knowledge Management, Organizational Learning

Introduction

In this research, the researcher studied the applications of Noble Eightfold Path (NEP) on Knowledge Management (KM) and Organizational Learning (OL) in Nepalese organizations. It was, particularly, based on mixed methodology. Mixed method is defined as 'the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Quantitative information was collected with 220 respondents from different organizations. The qualitative sample consists of 10 participants who should allow the researcher to hear most or all of the perceptions that might be important. All participants were managerial level staffs, with the knowledge on Buddhism, who were in the capacity to influence their subordinates. A purposeful sampling strategy was used. An interview was conducted with 10 participants who were already included for the quantitative study.

An application of Buddhist teachings such as the NEP in the domains of KM and OL has been one of the interesting topics of study in the context of Nepal. There are several moments and situations in which people working for the different organizations tend to follow the elements embedded in the NEP, but those who do it realizing its value, and for the good of the organization and that of its staff members, would achieve better results in terms of productivity, excellence, and quality. The fact of knowledge, whether ancient or modern, is a matter of constant sharing and management with flexibility in understanding and complete mindfulness. An organization is expected to grow up along with the discipline formed in its atmosphere that is more conducive to exchange ideas and experiences amongst its staff members and also with the one at the managerial level. The

NEP, despite being simple in its theme, has now been considered to be scientific and practicable to the people of many organizations. But to those taking up the responsibility of managing things in an organization, the NEP enhances KM practices and does strengthen OL.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The eight factors of the ennobling practice are not steps to be followed in sequence, one after another. They can be more aptly described as components rather than as steps, comparable to the intertwining strands of a single cable that requires the contributions of all the strands for maximum strength. With a certain degree of progress all eight factors can be present simultaneously, each supporting the others, and until that point is reached, some sequence in the unfolding of the path is inevitable (Marques, 2012).

According to Hanh (1999), the Noble Eightfold Path is practiced to achieve joy, peace, and insight in the mind. The eightfold practice contains the gist of many thousand discourses scattered in Buddhist scriptures (Bodhi 1994).

Prayukvong and Rees (2010) note that the NEP is classified into three parts such as 1) morality; 2) concentration; and 3) wisdom. Morality consists of right speech, right action and right livelihood, whereas, concentration consists of right effort, right concentration and right mindfulness. Wisdom is constituted through right thought, and right view. There is interplay among morality, concentration and wisdom. Morality denotes ethical behavior on a personal level that leads to fostering cooperation at a societal level. Concentration assists morality by enabling the development of wholesome intentions in an individual accountable for his/ her actions. In turn, harmonious co-existence at societal level is encouraged by practising the above mentioned elements. Wisdom signifies the insight one develops in understanding the natures of reality which is the interconnectedness of all phenomena that helps one shape intentions. Insights into the web of relationships enables individual to understand deep connections with self, others and nature.

Knowledge Management

Since there is confusion concerning what KM is all about, a definition as follows may help to clarify it: Knowledge is a fluid mix of contextual information, values and experiences. For an organization, this resides within employees (human capital) and represents a source of creativity, innovation and adaptability to change. KM is an explicit system to use this capital (Filemon and Uriate, 2008). Asian Development Bank (2014) defined KM is the way organizations create, capture, enhance, and reuse knowledge to achieve organizational objectives.

There is no universally accepted definition of KM. But there are numerous definitions proffered by experts. Put very simply, knowledge management is the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and sharing it within the organization. Putting it more technically and accurately, KM is the process through which organizations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge based assets. Defined in this manner, it becomes apparent that KM is concerned with the process of identifying, acquiring, distributing and maintaining knowledge that is essential to the organization (Filemon & Uriarte, 2008). There seems to be a growing consensus in the literature that the overarching aim of KM is to improve organizational productivity and competitiveness (Kakabadse , Kakabadse, & Kouzmin, 2003).

Organizational Learning (OL)

Generally organizational challenges call for learning and creativity, there is no consensus around what organizational learning is or how to best facilitate it. With researchers from disciplines as diverse as psychology, sociology, business, and ecology studying learning from distinct domains, there has been a “general lack of cumulative work” (Huber, 1991). Kim (2003) defines OL is simply the sum of what individuals in organizations learn, Levitt, & March (1998) contend that OL is a reflection of the collective ideas, activities, processes, systems, and structures of the organization.

In spite of different studies and views written about the learning and OL, there is agreement that both terms are correlated. Thomsen and Hoest (2001) see that the learning and OL as two sides of the same coin considering that the OL is the central activity in the learning. However, it is very important to understand the meaning of OL. Garvin (1993) definition of OL relies on the requirements that an organization must satisfy in order to become a learning organization. He defines the learning organization as an organization that is skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights.

Research Methodology

The current study applies the mixed methods, based on the understanding that researching NEP, KM practices and OL is deeply rooted in the social context. Such practices can, at least partly, be measured to a certain extent on a scale representing the perceptions of the respondents. The choice of such an approach is also informed by the fact that total objectivity is deemed to be impossible in social science research. In addition, it is assumed that subjectivity is inherent in the social world, although it can be minimized by means of the triangulation of the methods used, by self-questioning and by the inviting of scrutiny of the topic covered.

Objectives

The overall objective of this study was to make an investigation of the applications of NEP in KM OL in the context of Nepalese organizations using mixed methods.

Research Question

The following are the research questions of this study:

- i. Is Nobel Eightfold Path (NEP) applicable in Knowledge Management (KM)?
- ii. Is Nobel Eightfold Path (NEP) applicable in Organizational Learning (OL)?
- iii. Do managers believe that they can use NEP in (KM) and (OL)?
- iv. Do managers have a role in supporting the applications of NEP in their organizations?

The first and second questions have been specifically answered by the quantitative study. The data has been collected from the structured set of questionnaire. Descriptive, correlation, and regression analysis have been applied to test the proposed assumptions.

The qualitative component of this study is to answer the third and fourth research questions. Qualitative data has been collected through Key Informant Interview (KII) and Open Ended Question (OEQ) methods.

Samples of the Study

The population of interest, in this research study, included core employees in the Nepalese organizations, relatively valuable and unique human capital representing the decision making capability regarding the organizational work.

Hence, the target population included minimum officer level staffs, with the working experience of more than a year, from the organizations having a minimum of ten staff members. An extensive search for potential participant organizations was first conducted by informal talk with employees of the respective or selected organizations. The aim was to gather information about whether they can meet the required criteria to participate in research work or not. An initial pool of organizations fitting the criteria for the target population was selected.

The researcher worked on the quantitative data initially, but for the qualitative section, the researcher mainly put priority on the individual participants with some knowledge and experience on Buddhism. For the purpose of quantitative part 220 employees of different organizations were included.

Creswell (2014) assert that sample size does not influence the importance or quality of the study and note that there are no guidelines in determining sample size in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers do not normally know the number of people in the research beforehand; the sample may change in size and type during research. Sampling goes on until saturation has been achieved, namely no new information is generated. The use of key informants from organizations for data collection has been a popular and effective approach in a wide range of research contexts (Huber and Power, 1985). For the purpose of this study, the key informants were those in the managerial positions with a power to influence subordinates, and also with some background on Buddhism. Ten respondents were included as KII.

Results and Discussion

The purpose behind using mixed-method is to justify the importance of NEP in the Nepalese organizations, based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, in relation to KM and OL. Since the Buddhist teachings are more about the psychological aspects, it is almost hard to completely depend on the quantitative findings for the end result. It is for this reason that the researcher applied the mixed-methods, considering this to be the best one. The mixing of qualitative and quantitative data has offered a better sense for the research outcome.

Table 1 was developed to illustrate findings from the quantitative and qualitative sections of the research. These findings were related to the findings obtained from the questionnaire survey.

Table 1: Matrix on Qualitative and Descriptive Response Status

Questions	Mean	SD	Participant's Response
NEP	5.84	0.57	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEP is useful because they are based on the Nepalese and eastern culture. They should be brought into practice in day to day living of an individual. Staff members have the chance to be more decent by following NEP. • The NEP is partially applied in my organization and it has still to walk a long way ahead. • They NEP could be really be an effective tool to apply in an organization because it helps make a person less violent while practicing his/her power and authority.
KM	5.18	0.94	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive and frequent meetings, discussions, sharing, exchange of ideas, receiving feedback, comments, timely corrections, involvement of all stakeholders are practiced in my organization. We have the culture of getting things done in a team. • Indeed, we are implementing various strategies for KM like staff meetings, group counseling for staffs and documentation of the activities accomplished, planned or scheduled. • One of the best things I always appreciate of my organization is that everyone here sit together and share their individual experiences which is an opportunity for everyone to get acquainted with something new and different kind of learning.
OL	5.04	1.06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational learning occurs through team work, brainstorming, and trustworthiness among the human resources at all levels. • I strongly categorize my institution as a learning organization because employees get ample space for learning by means of tea-talk, workshop, meetings, seminars etc • I don't get confused to rate my institution as a learning organization where all the staff members sit together in order to discuss and share important issues and challenges in order to find a better way forward. Everyone has an opportunity of sharing problem of any kind during the time the duty is assigned.

Source: Draft Thesis of PhD Submitted to LBU in 2018

Table 2 presents the findings from correlation and regression between study variables and comments from the Key Informant Interview (KII) that correspond to those questions. The quantitative result is sufficiently supported by the qualitative responses received through KII.

Table 2: Qualitative and Quantitative Response Status

	Correlation and regression with NEP	Participants' Response
KM	$r = 0.411$ $\beta = .692, p < .000$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the background of NEP, KM and OL gradually tend to establish in an organization. • The NEP, when applied correctly, is really helpful in KM and OL, but the leaders need to act as a role model, for the others to follow them. • An organization needs both subjective and objective aspects of the knowledge smooth run. On the background of NEP, KM and OL automatically take place. • NEP is useful everywhere and for everybody, for instance, if people fail practice right speech and right mindfulness, the organization eventually tends to shrink.
OL	$r = 0.359$ $\beta = .677, p < .000$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NEP properly guides not only in KM and OL, but also to be a true human being. • When we help people cultivate values and morality, they might learn more quickly and effectively. • Although, KM and OL have not been maturely established on the background of NEP, it is deemed an important driving force to achieve a success in the present day globalization. • Learning requires cooperation among the staff members and it grows along with the use of NEP which is why I am happy.

Source: Draft Thesis of PhD Submitted to LBU in 2018

Significant at 0.000 level (2 tailed).

Conclusion

The main highlights of the current study are grounded in the fact that NEP, KM and OL concepts have a significant correlation. KM and OL have been covered in the existing literature, but to date, no research has been linked with NEP for the enhancement of KM and OL, and the interactions between these concepts have been taken for granted. As of now, good deal of researches have been conducted on the external aspects relating with

KM and OL, but not the internal and psychological ones; for example, right views, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Considering this to be a central concern, the researcher has tried to fit and address the Heart of Buddha's Teaching, for instance, the NEP in the domains of KM and OL in Nepalese organizations, and also the attitudes and beliefs of employees at managerial level, for the applications of such teachings in their institutions.

NEP forms with the fundamental elements to make life meaningful, and that this is not only for monks and nuns, but also for the people working in different organizations working for the good of the society. Right activities lead towards positive inquiry, positive action, positive learning, love, peace, and eventually bring change in the organizations as well as employees working in the organizations. Moreover, all these positive actions that replace the hatred, disharmony and the tendency to harm others, and will facilitate for the enhancement and applications of KM and OL in the organization.

The specific essence of this study lies with the statement such as 'the more applications of the NEP, the better KM and OL practices. The more the NEP an employee applies is, the better his/her potentials for the learning and managing of the knowledge will be'.

Research findings show that NEP has significant contribution in each and every walk of life including several different organizations. Specially, managerial level employees, being responsible for the organizational activities, can support their subordinates to follow the NEP in their organizations.

On summing up the responses provided by the research participants it was learned that almost all the managers agreed the fact that their thinking, motivation for change, behaviors and attitudes etc. have an inevitable role to lead the organizations to the right directions as they have the power to influence, use creativity, provide decisions etc.

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