

KM and Politics at the Highest Level: An Exploratory Analysis

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Abstract: This paper analyzes Knowledge Management (KM) as a political activity, made by the great political leaders of the world. We try to inspect if at the macro political level KM is made, and how. The research is interesting because given that we live in a Knowledge society, in the Information Era, it is more or less obvious that the political leaders should also do KM. However we don't know of any previous study on KM and world leaders and this paper wants to be a first step to fill that gap. As a methodology we use literature review: given this one is a first preliminary study we use data we found in the internet and other databases like EBSCO. We divide the analysis in two main parts: theoretical ideas first, and an application second. The second part is itself divided in two segments: the past and the present times. We find that rather not surprisingly, KM always was and is pervasive in the activity of the world leaders, and has become more and more diverse has power itself became to be more and more disseminated in the world. The study has the limitation of relying on insights and texts and not on interviews. But we believe it is very interesting to make this kind of analysis and such studies may help improving the democracies in the world.

Keywords: knowledge management, politics, globalization, efficiency, leadership

1. Introduction

As a science, Knowledge Management (KM) has been essentially applied to companies; the logic behind that occurrence, is that companies are the organizations for which knowledge is more easily needed as a source of return (Andreeva and Kianto, 2013); therefore, companies are interested, pay and invest in determining the outcome of KM interventions. Recently KM analysis has been extended non-profitable organizations (Cegarra-Navarro and Sánchez-Polo 2010); seldom, KM is also analyzed for regions, countries (World Bank, 2012). But, in our knowledge nobody ever did a study on KM in relation to Prime Ministers or Heads of State. We really searched the internet (using Google) and an extended version of EBSCO and did not find any specific study. This is finding itself deserves some discussion, because there are some very well know studies relating KM with political issues like e-government (Allahawiah and Alsarairoh 2014), local government (Khilji and Roberts, 2013) or digital governance (Rao, 2013). We will address this issue in the next section. But, rather quite surprisingly, because if we are in a knowledge economy and obviously the political power is based in knowledge and in knowledge management, we did not find any study, theoretical or empirical on KM and high politics.

Therefore in this paper we will try to analyze if and how, KM is done in the spheres of top decision makers in the field of worldwide politics. The research question is the following; is KM done by worldwide policy makers? And if it is, how it is done? And with what results? We believe the question is interesting because policy leaders are the top of our world, and it might happen that some styles of leadership might be defined regarding KM and that some of them manage KM better than others.

The paper will have the following structure: In the first section we present the concepts of KM, political leadership. In the second section we expose some theories about the KM, leadership, and KM in leadership. In the third section we examine how the relation between KM and the practice of political leaders evolved historically; the section itself is divided in two subsections, one about an historical overview, that could be named "KM and political leaders through Humanity" and the second about the actual times, this meaning since the eclosion of the Third Industrial Revolution in the last decades of the 20th century. In the final section we present the papers' conclusions, limitations and indicate some inroads to do further research.

2. Concepts: KM and leadership and political leadership.

In this paper we consider knowledge as understood information and information as organized facts (Maurer, 1998). In this context knowledge management is both the activity of managing knowledge and the science that analysis that activity (Tomé, 2005). We also assume that political leadership is the action of influencing society by being placed at the top levels of the political hierarchy. Specifically political leaders are Heads of States, Prime Ministers, party leaders, and opinion makers, like gurus and other individualities that may be invited to attend places like the World Economic Forum in Davos (WEF, 2014).

3. Theories: Knowledge management and leadership

Knowledge Management

Theoretical ideas on Knowledge Management can be traced long ago at least to Drucker (1957) and Polanyi (1966), when those very important authors defined respectively, the knowledge worker and the concepts of tacit and explicit knowledge that would base Nonaka's Knowledge cycle approach (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). And in the last two decades KM changed from an emerging field to an established science in the very diverse field of intangible analysis (Tomé, 2012): KM science relates to knowledge creation (Kianto, 2008), sharing and transfer, stocking, as well as unlearning (Cegarra Navarro, Moya, 2005). KM has been applied to multinationals (Cavaliere and Lombardi, 2013), public bodies (Ferguson and al, 2013), the voluntary sector (Ragsdell, 2013), SMEs (Heavin and Adam 2014) and countries or regions (Bonfour and Edvinsson, 2005), industry (Liu and al, 2013), agriculture (Assefa and al, 2011) and services like tourism, logistics, health care, banking etc (Tomé, 2011).

Leadership

Quite interestingly, Leadership analysis began long before KM analysis, since we may consider that Frederick Taylor's (Taylor, 2003) on organizations and performance had a strong focus on the role of the leader. And in the last one hundred years, management science has produced a considerable amount of studies on leaders and leadership, linking it to the organization itself (Sternberg, 2003), the national cultures (Zagoršek, 2003), the competences of the leaders (Hawkings and al, 2007), the development of the leaders (Johnson and al, 2012), globalization (Youseff and al, 2012) the technology and strategy (Coad, 2011), the types of leaders (Dai and al, 2013), the relation between leaders and other similar roles in the organization like coaches and their relation with the HR function (Boyatzis and al, 2006).

Over the last eighty years, there have been six main schools of leadership theory (Turner & Muller, 2005): 1) The trait school; 2) The behavioral or style school; 3) The contingency school; 4) The visionary or charismatic school; 5) The emotional intelligence school; 6) The competency school. Each theory contributed to the deepening of the concept of leadership:

1. Theories focused on the traits and behaviors of the leader are focused on their attributes, personal skills and behaviors. Through them the leader exerts its influence and power. Accordingly, the leadership concept from Katz and Kahn (1978) refers to the attribute of a position, the characteristic of a person and the category of conduct.

2. However, according to several authors, the definition of leadership appears mostly associated with the exercise of influence. The influence is associated with power, which, in turn, means exercising influence but based on the domain of force or submission to authority. (Ferreira *et al.*, 1996) The power does not require goals' compatibility, but dependence. Leadership requires congruence between the goals of the leader and the followers.

3. Then with the contingency theory and the importance of context, the leadership only exists if there are followers. The leadership process assumes that the leader influences the followers. The situational theory of Hersey and Blanchard emphasizes the role of followers; it is the followers who accept or not the leader.

4. Within the context of charismatic and transformational theories, 40% of the variance of leader behavior can be attributed to hereditary / genetic factors, while 60% of the variance of leader behavior can be learned and developed through lifelong learning. Thus, true leaders are people "*who not only attract higher moral values, but include in their behavior the sense of mission, the delegation of authority, learning and constant training, the emphasis on problem solving, the use of argumentation.*" (Bass and Avolio, 1993)

5. Furthermore for some authors, the essence of leadership is the ability to influence followers, (Ferreira *et al.*, 1996) through a process where the leader and the followers interact with each other and influence each other using emotional intelligence. The leader is the one who influences followers, and they influence the behavior of the leader. This theory, is valid whatever the organizational level where such influence is exercised and the flow relational existing: formal, informal, vertical and horizontal. (Ferreira, *et al.*, 1996) The influence is present in the concept of leader, but what stands out is the interaction between him and the followers. The leader influences others, however, it has to be inspiring, motivating and understanding the goals and motivations of their followers.

6. The need for leaders available and competent to take on the challenges ahead, the concern arises in the development of leadership, particularly leadership competences. The research in 125 leaders aims to realize which their leadership competences. According to the study' authors and 75 members of the Stanford Graduate School of Business's Advisory Council, authentic leadership emerges from the life stories of leaders and one of the skills to be developed by leaders should be the self-awareness. (George *et al.*, 2007) This competence is also one of the emotional competencies defined by Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2001) associated with the model of emotional intelligence competencies. The authentic leader emphasizes self-development, i.e., the leader creates its development plan; the leader cares about your personal and professional development. (Figueiredo, 2013) The leader is concerned with own personal and professional development and it seeks to promote the development of others.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, theories of leadership regained the characteristics of a leader; the leader's role becomes crucial in the leadership process. We are seeing a humanization of the concept of leadership. The concept of 'authentic leader' has been referenced by several authors as being someone who "(...) demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts as well as their heads. They establish long-term, meaningful relationships and have the self-discipline to get results. They know who they are." (George *et al.*, 2007)

Summing up, according to the evolution of leadership theories is possible to find a wider concept of leadership due to the complexity of today - Leadership is a process of reciprocal influence between leader and followers; the influence is exerted not only by power, but by traits, attributes, behaviors and skills of the leader. Through these, the leader inspires guides and motivates followers, being accepted by them. Increasingly leader besides considering the goals of the group, must also seek to reconcile them with the personal goals of followers, including the goals of personal and professional development of each follower. The interaction of the leader with followers is key to keeping alive leadership.

KM and leadership

Studies on the relation between KM and leadership have only been made quite recently. However some important insights could be obtained using the old theories. In fact traditional leadership, in tayloristic organizations, was meant to manage Knowledge in a top down approach, centralized, according to which the central command department will produce knowledge, with the collaboration of the middle managers and the executive skills of the shop floor workers (Taylor, 2011). Everything was meant to change with the emergence of the Knowledge Era, in which pos-tayloristic organizations would require a new kind of leaders, more flexible, more prone to accept mistakes and more willing to receive knowledge from other workers at lower levels of the hierarchy (Tomé, 2011). Anyway we know that nowadays, even in the service based and knowledge led economy pre-tayloristic, tayloristic and pos-tayloristic organizations coexist:

- The first type may be encountered in family based SMEs, which try to survive in the non-tradable sector, providing the local markets. In these organizations KM is essentially done by default and the role of the leader is to ensure and in last resort it is done, through accountancy, putting a website online or hiring competent youngsters.
- The second type of organizations may be found in industry sector, many of them that have adopted lean thinking based strategies (Roos and al, 1991); it all started with the McDonalization of society (Ritzer, 1993) and applying essentially chaotic knowledge creation strategies to lean structures manufactures was never going to be easy (May, 2005); Indeed, depending on the level of skills used in those industries the intensity of knowledge varies considerably; in the more knowledge intense companies, KM practices are implemented, but even so, the chain of command is strong and top down, and the division between managers is executioners is important (Liu, 2013). Furthermore taylorism may be found in low skilled and

massified services, in which the scale of operations is very big, and in which a big number of workers in low paid jobs, execute the tasks that were designed by the managers; call centers are the most common example of those types of services (Torraco and al, 2014). In those types on organizations price is still more important than value, costumers are more buyers than clients. In those organizations the role of the leader is still extremely important because command and control procedures are still decisive.

- However in creative industries and in high quality services the creation of knowledge is quite permanent, the interaction between the company and the costumer is decisive, knowledge creation and transfer is intense and the role of the leader is more of defining strategies, setting goals, monitoring and facilitating teams which themselves create knowledge (Kianto, 2008: Torraco and al, 2014).

Specific cases of KM and leadership

One avenue of recent research relates to the difference between top leaders in non-profit and governmental organizations versus profit organizations. In the first case (non-profit), the main findings are that the power in non-profit organizations is more diffuse and therefore leadership is also less clear (Johnson, 2013). When it comes to competences, non-profit should have a broader set, having in mind that they are not so money oriented. When it comes to dealing with employees, non-profit leaders should be softer and less strict. In the second case (governmental organizations) the leaders have to have some awareness of the direct political landscape, from which they depend. Also they must be sensible to social policy concerns, related to the Welfare State they manage; this implies a broader sense of public duty and of respect from the electorate from which ultimately they depend. Finally governmental leaders must be extremely sensitive to employment issues and to the management of the labor force.

A second avenue of analysis related with the HC traits of top leaders. One of the main trait relates to charisma. The notion of charisma is in itself very diffuse. But it is well understood that a top leader should have some characteristic that makes him being followed by a very large group. However it is not straightforward what are the characteristics which make a leader to be charismatic: some leaders are more open or extroverted than others; but usually a charismatic leader has an ability to communicate his or her message in an exceptional manner. The education and training required for top leaders varies, some may be autodidacts, some have the upmost university backgrounds – we would say the what is really required is that they acquired formally or informally a rare expertise, which enables them to make or inspire decisions like no other persons.

Finally a third avenue of analysis is about on how KM systems may help to develop the organizational knowledge of the governmental unit. KM systems may be used to define the needs of information, the planning of the information supply, its dissemination, storage, use, reuse, renewal, learning and unlearning. In a governmental unit the ultimate (and non- economic or financial) goals might require a very specific use of all the information, even if the ultimately the institution faces economic and financial constraints in the long and short run.

4. KM and political leadership

An historical overview

KM scholars usually consider that KM science only got to exist after the Information Revolution of the Eighties and Nineties of last century. However, we all know that Humanity has been based in Knowledge, and that all great Civilizations have based themselves of Knowledge. More than that, we know that all Civilizations have based themselves on strong Leadership which has been practiced through various forms of Government. Therefore it is possible to try tell the History of Humanity by the perspective of Leaders managing knowledge. It may be a bold attempt, but it is something that we consider that is worth being done, and even more it is something that might add some value to the understanding of KM. Therefore, in this section, we will try to describe the evolution of KM and Leadership through the History of Mankind.

Starting by the start, it is interesting to remember that in Ancient Egypt, the Pharaon, son of the Sun King, was meant to be wiser and more knowlegeable than the other individuals; and that, for managing the successive Empires, successive Pharaons secured themselves with the help of a network of private secretaries and administrators. That network of administrators, centered in the quasi-divine Pharaon, was in fact the first great demonstration on KM by any administration and for what matters to this paper, the first time political leaders had to have an important role in managing knowledge. In this case, the Pharaon took decisions and put

in place a KM network, in which in fact he had to depend. The main topics of management had to do with the agriculture, the pyramids, religion and wars.

The situation in the Mesopotamian Empires was not different from the Egyptian. Things were only to change in the Greek and Roman Civilizations. In Greece and Rome the power was sometimes more, sometimes less, democratic and participative, but definitively more democratic and participative than it ever was in the precedent civilizations. This meant that the leadership had a different way of managing knowledge, less based on divine right, and in fact the network of knowledge managers (in which the Roman Senate and the Greek Areopagus were fundamental) was more extended and more horizontal. The production of science and philosophy at the times account for the high intensity and large scope of the activity of KM of the epoch. But other fundamental topics remained to be the economic subsistence, and war and peace.

The Early Middle Ages were somehow a doomed period in Civilization, at least in Europe, and the only form of leadership that could be said to maintain any form of KM practice was the Catholic Church. As an improvement to that sorrow state of affairs, in the late Middle Age, kings surrounded themselves by councils of nobles, priests, and anonymous people as jokers in assemblies; some kings were philosophers or writers or poets; and basically KM was related to war and taxes, that should finance those wars.

In the Renaissance everything became more complex. The Discoveries changed trade, but also societies and power. Galileu and Copernicus questioned the leadership of the Earth in the Universe. Hamlet expressed the dilemma over life but also over Knowledge and ultimately over KM and leadership, in societies. In general though, as societies became more affluent and complex, KM recovered in intensity and extension. Leaders began to be more and more educated. In fact Machiavelli's Prince can be read as a manual of best practices for KM by political leaders (Machiavelli, 1505), in war and in peace; the qualities of the Prince (ie the leader) and its prudence were also analyzed by Machiavelli. That the adjective "Machiavellian" made his entrance to the vocabulary of languages shows well the importance of the analysis. Finally, sometimes leaders delegated some part of the national business in companies, in fact delegating KM over that section of the economy in societies. Queen Elizabeth I of England even delegated warfare of corsairs (Kelsey, 1998).

The 17th and 18th century Absolutism, and the Enlightened Monarchs which put it in place, were in fact a way of stressing like few times in History the relation between leadership, Knowledge and KM. When Louis XIV emphatically declared that " – L'Etat c'est moi" he was putting himself in the center of the KM system in France and in all the French colonies and affairs. The court based in Versailles was however, the Kings first and ultimate support base to manage the Royaume de France through KM. Catherine of Russia did the same in St Petersburg, and the Iberian Monarchs replicated the experience near Lisbon and Madrid. That at the same time in History, in England and Holland, a different form of Government, based on liberty, Constitutions, and popular Government was generating a different form of leadership, and a different production of and management of knowledge, might surprise the Absolutists. But, it should not surprise anybody who knows that non-authoritarian regimes benefit very much from freedom to develop and manage knowledge. And it is by no means a surprise that England, Scotland and the Netherlands were at the forefront of the Agriculture and Industrial Revolutions of the 18th century and the early 19th century. That advantage of liberty versus Absolutism happened even taking in consideration that Absolutist Kings sought the support of Philosophers like Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau to rule better. Anyway, the role of the political leader to foster knowledge was very decisive, because they were the ultimate guarantees of the regimes. But Absolutists tried to restrain KM to a small circle, whereas non-Absolutists invested in education and science and by doing that developed a large network of knowledge managers in society. All in all, both types of leaderships tried to manage KM even if in different ways.

Republics, starting particularly with America in 1776, and following with the French Revolution, changed somehow the role of the political leaders managing knowledge, in relation to absolute monarchies and even the more liberal regimes of the past. It is an interesting that the first big book of Economics in Modern Age, the Wealth of Nations from Adam Smith (Smith, 1977), was published in 1776. In fact this book will have a major influence in the governance of the world more civilized countries until the crisis of 1929. And rather importantly, the liberal regime based on Laissez faire and Laissez passer, effectively promoted the dissemination of KM. Also in such regimes, the role of the political leader was to be facilitator or a marketer of grand designs and ideas. Indeed in Republics like the American, or in Constitutional Monarchies as in the UK, Presidents have governments and Parliaments whose role is to ensure the management of political knowledge

for the good of societies. That management relates to producing and enforcing laws, guaranteeing freedom and external security, developing the economy, and intervening more or less in social sphere. But, taking into account the differences in ideologies, there is no doubt that in those regimes, two fundamental realities existed regarding KM and political leadership: the political ruler had an influence in KM; he was helped by an increasing vast administration.

In a way the problems managed by the leaders of the more advanced societies in the 19th century were already the ones leaders face today, almost 200 years later. One would say that the best among the best leaders of time (Disraeli, Gladstone, Garibaldi, Bonaparte, Bismark...) could also rule today, if only they managed to adapt themselves to what changed – and this idea is reflected in some nostalgia which is expressed in the arts or the social media of today over those glorious personages.

What changed in the last 200 years were fundamentally two facts which made life faster and much more exigent: education, democracy and technology. Those three facts put much pressure on political leaders to be more accurate in their management of knowledge for the benefits of societies. Also they created more and more possibilities to everyone to manage knowledge, and therefore to participate in the leader's management of knowledge. And in fact they made possible a much faster and correct management of knowledge by the political leaders, if only they were up to it. Also, the number of world countries augmented from a few dozens in 1800 to about 200 in 2000. This increase was even more felt in the number of non-elected persons with political influence, as party leaders, managers, writers and other intellectuals, which including the internet age, augmented exponentially as in a political Big Bang. Therefore the number of relevant political leaders increased a fact which in itself increased the difficulty and complexity of the task of the leaders.

Keynesianism and Socialism when applied in societies, particularly, post-WWII were firm builders of the State, and have an enormous impact in the form of implementing KM, to which the leaders had to adapt themselves. Elections became more and more frequent, and more and more disputed and controlled, a fact that also contributed to the need of a great KM activity by political leaders. Spy games became more and more elaborated. In the early Eighties, when the Third Industrial Revolution was about to explode, with the support of Neo-liberalism, societies could be ranked by their development levels, but also by the way their KM network system worked. Those networks relied on a vast number of leaders, elected and non-elected.

The current times

Governance has never been so much an issue in societies than in the knowledge based, and service led economy of the 21st century, mainly because of the growing globalization process. Societies need to be as competitive as companies, and for so doing they need to manage knowledge. Indeed, Indicators on Knowledge (World Bank, 2012) have been used. But for our knowledge, nobody ever studied the phenomenon of KM at the higher level of politics in current societies. One study (Lakshman, 2009) analysed KM at the level of executive leaders, concluded in favor of the importance of those leaders in the management of information and knowledge. But we amazingly and decisively lack any specific scientific analysis on how KM is done at the high level of politics.

However, the topic of the management in politics has also been widely addressed in art: the celebrated TV series *Yes Minister* (Lynn and Jay, 1989) is nothing but a satire on how politics was done in the eighties of last century in the oldest democracy of the world, but more importantly may also be analyzed showing the importance of knowledge as power and the importance of knowledge and the cycle of knowledge in the relations between the elected politician and the civil servant; clearly all is made to state that experience counts and that the civil servant knows much more and much better than the new arrived politician, in fact ending to have power over him. Much more recently a celebrated French movie (*Quay D'Orsay*), described ironically how politics was managed in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many other movies have been made over political leaders, like Mandela, Thatcher, JFK, Gandhi, or Queen Elizabeth II.

Other important books and movies have dealt with election campaigns. In those campaigns, marketing and authenticity has become a decisive political issue. But no study has been made on KM and those political leaders, yet.

The situation is even more interesting because in modern politics we know that decisions are based on committees, which in fact makes those States a case of “comitology” (EC, 2014). And committees are in fact ways of making KM, almost as Communities of Practice. Following the information revolution, e-government become to be a very important issue in science, and its implications for KM have been widely recognized (Fraser and al, 2013; do Canto Cavalheiro and al, 2014); as a major scientific domain.

The same situation applies to or digital government. Also, In the last few years with the advent of studies on Big Data and data mining, the possibility of using KM on politics was enlarged. Finally the famous quote of Donald Rumsfeld about known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns has been largely quoted in the KM field. But to our knowledge, Rumsfeld and his peers were not analyzed as KM actors.

Finally, in the last two years, scandals like those surrounding Julian Assange and Edward Snowden have reminded us of the importance of intelligence and secret services in the running of the world, intelligence being in our opinion a type of KM.

5. Concluding comments

The relevance of KM and leadership, in societies, in one hand, and of KM in leadership in the other hand is not reasonably questionable from the theoretical point of view. Quite amazingly however Humanity never had a society in which the political power is so complex, and also one in which political leaders are submitted to so much pressure. Studies exist over the role of KM in governance of 21st century and post-industrial societies. But we don't know of any specific study on the role of leaders in KM through history and in the actual times of the Human evolution.

While analyzing the history of leadership in Humanity we found that there were many ways of managing knowledge but even if non-assumed this was one of the most important activity world rulers always performed. In modern times, democracy, education and technology increased the pressure over the leaders and also increased the extension and intensity of KM. Also the impacts of that activity began to be more and more scrutinized. Indeed nowadays, ruling the world amounts at managing and directing massive institutions public and private that essentially do KM.

This was always to be a preliminary study. We would like to try to do an empirical study on the topic. A possibility would be to try to question directly or indirectly a large subset of current political leaders. Very different types of leaders exist in the political spectrum from “hiiper-presidents” like Nicholas Sarkozy to discrete presences like Queen Elizabeth II who in fact as been in charge for more than 60 years We would like to compare them empirically and to analyze them in terms of knowledge activity and its impact. If we could conclude that some types of leaders are better knowledge managers than others, given certain circumstances, this fact could have an important feature when regimes and leaders are chosen by the anonymous public. In any case, we believe sincerely believe that the study of the interface between KM and politics is worth being pursued and specifically that the study of how world leaders manage KM may prove to be crucial on improving the governability of countries and societies, and therefore on improving the wellbeing of the anonymous people those leaders are meant to serve.

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