Reflections from Juani Swart's Scholarly Contributions in the Field of Knowledge Management

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ABSTRACT: The work of Juani Swart can be divided into five categories 1) the link of HRM systems with other facets of organizations like performance, organizational commitment, organizational forms, clients relationships and, most important of all, the knowledge systems 2) the role of intellectual capital in organizations 3) Human resource development strategies 4) knowledge management, intellectual capital formation, and HR practices in professional service firms (PSFs), and 5) the association of knowledge workers with learning, knowledge creation and some other organizational facets. This write-up is an effort to explore some of the areas she has contributed in.

Keywords: *Juani Swart, HRM systems, knowledge management, intellectual capital, professional service firms, HRD.*
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Prof. Juani Swart started her formal writing from the network organizational perspective and she went through multiple scholarly ladders and enriched her ideas and perspectives, in order to contribute to the body of knowledge in the fields of human resources and knowledge management. She has developed an affiliation with knowledge systems and its dynamics in organizations throughout the period. In last one decade she has covered a variety of knowledge facets in its relationship with multiple other factors within organizations. The work of Juani Swart can be divided into five categories 1) the link of HRM systems with other facets of organizations like performance, organizational commitment, organizational forms, clients relationships and, most important of all, the knowledge systems 2) the role of intellectual capital in organizations 3) Human resource development strategies 4) knowledge management, intellectual capital formation, and HR practices in professional service firms (PSFs), and 5) the association of knowledge workers with learning, knowledge creation and some other organizational facets. Following are some of the areas she has contributed in.

Human Resource Development

Strategy is meant for long term planning of a firm and HRD is supposed to be a part and parcel of strategy making process; this is what world class organizations are doing. HRD has emerged out as a strategic facet of organizations due to the reason that organizations widely benchmarked the practices of Japanese firms and started believing HR instead of technology to be the ultimate factor for development and success. Whereas, other important factors like manager –worker relationship have been widely overlooked or ignored by the researchers and practitioners (Swart, Mann et al. 2012). Knowledge based view of the firm provides a sound groundwork for strategic HRD because it places knowledge at the core of creating a sustainable competitive advantage in organizations. Building knowledge as a core competence is at the heart of the discussions and work on learning organizations and organizational learning (Swart, Mann et al. 2012).

Linking HR Systems with other Factors

After an extensive research, using exploratory approach, in PhD dissertation on the topic of Self-awareness and collective tacit knowledge (Swart 2000), the link of HR with different organizational facets like performance, organizational commitment, organizational forms, clients relationships and, most important of all, the knowledge systems is explored. In the context of the dependence of some firms on a relatively small number of clients in business-to-business (B2B) relationships instead of dealing with mass consumer base, it is tried to understand how firms make strategic choices regarding the tension between client relationships and organizational form and how this tension influences HR practices, using extensive empirical evidences (Swart, Kinnie et al. 2001). Moreover, through a detailed study of a single case, the ways in which HR policies and processes contribute to overcoming barriers to sharing knowledge have been examined (Swart and Kinnie 2003). It is also found that the managers' strategic choice in terms of the links between HR and performance is constrained by the stakeholders in the network which the firm operates in. It is concluded that the links between HR and performance is context dependent i.e. only the properties of network relationships can help in understanding this link (Kinnie, Swart et al. 2005, Swart, Purcell et al. 2005).

The relationships between employees' commitment, satisfaction with HR practices and their commitment to the organizations, has been developed by examining three groups of employees: workers, line managers, and professionals. Findings endorsed the links between satisfaction with some HR practices and employees' commitment to the organization, whereas other HR practices varied in their link with employees' commitment to their organization among different employee groups. These findings put universalistic model of HRM to a serious trial and also had implications for researchers and practitioners who were looking for best HR practices for improving organizational commitment (Kinnie, Hutchinson et al. 2005).

Organizational Knowledge

Author's explicit focus on organizational knowledge emerged with her research on a descriptive model of conceptualizing organizational knowledge as collective tacit knowledge. Through extensive fieldwork with organizational teams of an international retailing bank facing novel situations, insights into the use and development of tacit knowledge in practice have been generated (Swart and Pye 2002). In the development of measures of intellectual capital, a contribution has been made by identifying the sub components of intellectual capital—human, social, structural, organizational, client, and network capital—from the literature (Swart 2004, Swart 2006). A brand new relational form of capital—embedded capital—is identified presenting it as the critical resource in knowledge-based industries such as professional services firms, because it facilitates the process of value capturing in firms due to agency and interdependency—previously overlooked dimensions in RBV of the firm. Embedded capital includes procedures, processes and brand value. Embedded capital is also

uncontrolled yet by either the firm or individual employees in terms of its deployment. Each form of capital has been linked with the processes of value capturing (Bowman and Swart 2007). It is proposed that, from best practices to best fit, a shift in focus is necessary to accommodate the differences in organizational contexts. The conceptual model, in this regard, framed out the ground work for the development of a knowledge-centric organization typology, which could facilitate organizations in choosing the most appropriate, context specific, ways to knowledge management (Cruywagen, Swart et al. 2007).

A knowledge-scaling function in organizations, keeping in view the association of scaling with knowledge as meta-information and the interconnectivity point of view of knowledge scaling has been exhibited. This can outline the characteristics of knowledge itself as the criteria for future knowledge-based research. Its practical implications include the creation of ability to figure out knowledge concentration areas within a system, usefulness to lead the deployment of resources for knowledge management and the potential development of appropriate approaches for the management of this knowledge (Powell and Swart 2007).

Knowledge and Learning in Networks

It is reviewed that how the HRM networks have developed over a period of time, using various metrics. These HRM networks are considered less dense than other comparable academic networks, being made up of several weakly-linked subcomponents. The ego-nets of individuals, that are indicative of different publishing strategies, have also been identified. The practice of Social Network Analysis (SNA) identifies how different groups of knowledge workers interact with each other, and how a big community can be scientifically and systematically examined to uncover the prevailing mechanisms (Henneberg, Swart et al. 2009). Mechanisms of knowledge and learning with respect to the HR practices have been studied in organizations operating in dispersed geographical regions and widely scattered networks with highly distributed and dispersed customers, suppliers, partners, and regulators (Swart, van den Hooff et al. 2011). Boundaries across which learning may take place include geographical, knowledge, organizational and temporal boundaries. The way in which entities connect across these boundaries, i.e., the means for interaction via structures, socio-psychological processes and technology have been focused (Swart, van den Hooff et al. 2011).

Development of different human resource policies, procedures and practices, as a result of the application of strategic choice in a network, has been examined. In knowledge intensive firms (KIFs), it is found particularly evident, that the networks have an influence on competitive advantage. Because, to generate intellectual capital, these KIFs solely rely on their human resources (Swart, Kinnie et al. 2009). Tacit interaction of the valuation systems of the counterparts has widespread implications for the management of a continuing relationship between the firm and the supplier. This type of interaction can be easily comprehended through the lenses of Knowledge management systems. Knowledge management, in business to business transactions, helps organizations facilitates the transfer and co-creation of knowledge. Based on a case study, an approach has been presented, therefore, to accommodate the particular characterization of these valuation systems and their interaction. It is concluded that the supporting structures, between companies, of knowledge co-creation are inevitable to win the contracts (Powell and Swart 2010). Knowledge boundaries determine the self-sustaining knowledge core a project requires to reach and use all the corresponding and interrelating knowledge it needs, unlike the project or organizational boundaries. Either the project knowledge must be managed across boundaries, or it must be maintain by the organizations involved by investing over the odds (Swart and Harvey 2011). Project knowledge is a connected, interdependent, and linked entity that covers boundaries.

The impact of cross-boundary operations on professional knowledge worker commitment is examined. Different co-existing foci of commitment, which describe their dynamic interaction, have been identified, extending the unit of analysis beyond the boundaries of the firm to include the actions of professional working which capture the main influences on employee commitment (Kinnie and Swart 2012).

Knowledge Management in PSFs

Professional Service Firms (PSFs) have been studied to recognize the interdependence among knowledge assets of a firm and their nature, human resource practices and learning mechanisms of organizations (Swart and Kinnie 2010). The theoretical model encompasses explorative as well as exploitive learning and also includes the dimensions of time Professional Service Firms operate in. Multiple learning orientations, characteristics of the leading knowledge assets, HR practices underpinning all learning orientations, and HR approaches that can manage the strains arising from the mingling of exploitive and explorative learning. PSFs have also been studied to see the relationship between HR practices and the management of knowledge assets (Swart and Kinnie 2011). Knowledge assets are divided into three sub-

categories; human (industry and firm-specific), social (entrepreneurial and co-operative) and organizational capital (mechanistic and organic). Core-client interface processes of professional services firms have been studied to examine the HR practices used for the management of these different categories of knowledge assets. Two bundles of HR practices, profession focused and organization focused, are identified which can b used to manage specific combinations of knowledge assets (Swart and Kinnie 2011).

Conclusion

Juani Swart, in her scholarly career (spanning almost a decade), has widely focused on the importance of human resource development, intellectual capital, and knowledge management. The units of analysis throughout this research include the individual level, where individual is taken as knowledge worker in most cases, groups and community level (especially communities of knowledge workers), organization or firm level—with a special emphasis on Professional Service Firms (PSFs), and inter organization, industry or sector levels, particularly focusing on the networks and business to business transactions. The methodologies in these works range from quantitative to qualitative empirical investigations (including mass surveys and single firm case studies). Knowledge creation and management, as a matter of fact, have been found positively associated to knowledge worker commitment, performance of PSFs, competitive advantage, and strategic HR practices.

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