Ethnography and Management Talent as a Tools to Knowledge Sharing in the Consulting Sector

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Abstract: The goal of this paper was to understand if the current KM practices in a consultancy organization met what the workers preferred and in what way ethnography could be integrated in these practices and give guidelines for future studies where it can be integrated in the talent management process. The results showed an organization with employees willing to share their knowledge and obtain it through methods that involve the participative observation employed in ethnography as in the Socialization process of the SECI Model.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, talents are a resource must needed for any kind of organization, putting a strong challenge to attract, develop and retain them (Poorhosseinzadeh, Subramaniam, 2013). The management of talent is now a pillar of extreme importance for any company trying to be more successful and resilient. Human resource departments are collecting data and analyzing it with the objective of create intelligent and integrated frameworks that allow them to classify their employees regarding different dimension as knowledge, behavior, skills and risk. Because Knowledge has been regarded as a most substantial organizational asset and it has been considered as one of the intangible sources of competitive tools (Kiessling & Harvey, 2006) and because talent management can benefit and enhance the knowledge management in the organizations (Whelan & Caracary, 2011), a relevant number of organizations have put, or are putting, in place some kind of process, system or policy to deal with this issue.

Ethnography is a method made famous by Bronislaw Malisnowski, one of the founding fathers of Social Anthropology and its' goal is to describe in detail an object of study, giving importance to the context that involves it and developing a narrative from the point of view of the one who is being observed (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012; Kane *et al*., 2005). This technique was applied and tested not only by Anthropology but also in different areas such as Sociology (Goffman, 1963), Marketing (Joy & Li, 2012;

Oliveira, 2012) or Organizational Theory (Czarniawska, 2012; Schein, 2004). In Knowledge Management (KM)ethnography has also been a subject with a small variety of works referencing this methodology (Cook, 2013; Davey & London, 2005; Kane *et al*., 2005; McInerney & Day, 2007; G. Tian, Wang, & Dai, 2013; Wang & Borges, 2013).

Despite this linkage with KM ethnography is often discarded as a valid method because of the criticism towards it (Boellstorff *et al*., 2012; Cook, 2013). However, we have found that many anthropologists have adopted quantitative tools (such as questionnaires) and combined them with the qualitative techniques that compose ethnography to perform their activities in complex organizations (G. Tian *et al*., 2013), as well as to overcome criticisms related to their objectivity and scientific validity (Boellstorff *et al*., 2012; Cook, 2013).

In this work, our goal is to explore this link by questioning how ethnography can contribute as a method of collecting and sharing knowledge as a technique of KM in a consultancy firm. Also, being knowledge sharing a key issue when organizations are managing talent, we identify lines of investigation where ethnography can be integrated in the talent management process as a tool to help organizations extract and elevate the value of the knowledge of its talents.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Talent Management

The present and future of organizations is developing their activities in high complex and dynamic

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ecosystems, where the capabilities to attract, deploy, and retain talents its critical for the persecute of organizations mission and objectives. Even if most organizations have recognized the critical importance of talents and of talent management, they don't show a strong agreement regarding how it should be defined. Some define talent as the high performance employees or potential people in the organization; the others consider high skill and knowledgeable people as talents, and another group believes that the organization itself can make their talented people with succession planning (Poorhosseinzadeh, Subramaniam, 2013).

Iles *et al*. (2010a) and Capelli (2008) presented three points of view regarding the definition of talent management: (1) Talent management t includes all the human resources activities and therefore it can be said that it is a rebranding term of HRM; (2) Talent management includes human resource management with a specific emphasis: talent management uses the same instruments as human resource management and organizational development, but talent management emphasizes on talented people, both internal and external of the organization; (3) Talent management concentrates on proficiency development through managing the progression of talents within the corporation.

A reason for the importance of talent management, that has strong consensus, is that successful talent management gives organizations high capabilities to recruit, elevate and retain key strategic talents. Poorhosseinzadeh & Subramaniam (2013) give one more reason, stating that talent management is fundamental to engaging employees in the organization. For Hughes & Rog (2008) the combination of these two vectors that is becoming a primary determinant for organizations success.

The turmoil that where the last economic years, have reinforced the organizations need to reduce their costs and focus on their core capabilities, so they could be successful and even to survive. Colling & Mellahi (2009) go further, saying that employees' knowledge, skills and capabilities need to be boosted and recognized as a vital source of competitive advantage. As so, great number of organizations has made of talent management a key strategic objective, and began to invest on long-term strategies to hire and also develop management skills (Poorhosseinzadeh, Subramaniam, 2013). Rowland (2011) stated that a talent management well-planned strategy could help to overcome organizations' difficulties and boost business success.

If we think that most organization tries to imitate our reuse that core successful activities, it is also expect that they also try to, somehow, replicate talent. But talent, as also experience or other human attributes are not easy to imitate or putting it in a formal structure so they can be communicated through out an organization. As so, for human resources departments it has become a strategic activity to recruit these people with tacit knowledge and experience and retain them in the organization or greatly invest in their training and development (Poorhosseinzadeh, Subramaniam, 2013). Williamson (2011) see two issues as of extreme importance for the success or failure of an organization in today's competitive business environment: (1) the need to get and retain the talents need to support the organization mission; (2) but also find ways to manage this talent in ways that it can increase the organization value.

Knowledge is seen as one of the most substantial organizational asset and it has been considered as one intangible source that is a source of competitive advantage (Kiessling & Harvey, 2006). Whelan & Caracary (2011) recognize that knowledge management can benefit from talent management, putting human resources departments in the frontline of knowledge management strategies of every organization. They try to do so by working with their talents, within the internal organizational processes and culture, to find ways to capture, describe and communicate the knowledge and experiences that are encapsulate in each of their talents. Talent management should be seen as the prime source of mining, developing, structuring, retaining and communicate the knowledge of an organization.

2.2. Anthropology and Ethnography

Anthropology is the science that studies the entire spectrum of humanity and uses comparative methods to explain its findings from a holistic point of view. It is described as a science that "strives to study Man both from within and without" (Wolf, 1964). Cultural Anthropology is one of its' main branches and is the one responsible for studying the culture and organization of individuals, groups or societies. It is also in this field that the ethnographic method has become the choice of researchers who do field work.

Cultural Anthropology made its link to organizations clear from the 1980s - until then the ethnographic

works applied to this area were not considered anthropological - with the creation of the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology in 1984 and so too the organizations began looking for anthropology as a solution for the areas of information, communication and design (Boyer *in* Moeran, 2012). From this linkage derived one of its sub-disciplines, Business Anthropology, that deals with the systems of value and belief of the organizations and the motivation for making decisions (Boisot, 1987; Becker *in* Moeran, 2012).

Ethnography presents itself as the method par excellence used by Anthropology and recurs from participant observation to develop a complete work by engaging in the culture of the *'other'* in order to arrive at the tacit elements of the knowledge of this *'other'*.

Although the method is indicated as being ideal for collecting the tacit elements of knowledge (Kane *et al*., 2005), it is classified by some as being an 'interpretative' method, i.e., by doing a study related to another culture understanding is manipulated by the researcher own cultural beliefs (Boellstorff *et al*., 2012). In order to overcome this situation, the researcher faces two challenges: the need for abstraction (of himself as he approaches the studied object and embodies the erstwhile reality) and reflexivity - i.e. using academic and personal knowledge to reflect upon past experiences and to find bridges of communication between the observer and the observed, as well as perceive the influence that this will have on the way the knowledge will be extracted (Albu *et al*., 2013).

Thus, the validity of this method can be understood as an 'ecological validity' because it is based on the relation between what happens in the real world and the investigation of the same experiences in controlled contexts (Schmuckler, 2001). However, in ethnography the objects of study are not placed in experimental environments, instead they are directly observed and the ethnographer can extract what is important to the investigation. Anthropologists interpret this as to "not remove phenomena from their context, rendering them impossible to interpret" (Boellstorff *et al*., 2012).

The application of ethnography to KM in a consultancy firm faces a major difficulty. Although there is no minimum duration for fieldwork it can be noted in the classic works of Anthropology that the temporal space tends to be more than 6 months which can be considered more than reasonable for an area in which

the market is in constant change and with a high turnover of the workforce (Albu *et al*., 2013; Lee, 2014; *Retention Strategies: What can you do to keep your best consulting staff?*, 2005). It is possible to believe that the time windows are currently lower in view of the practicalities of professional livelihood against this methodology if this were not the case, but the longer time may be due to other difficulties such as accessing sensitive information or meetings of top positions (Lee, 2014).

2.3. Knowledge Management

KM arose from the need to have an area in which the main focus would be knowledge-based systems and knowledge acquisition structures and thus tools, techniques and strategies have been developed for these purposes (Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006; Dalkir, 2007). Their use is related to the design of this strategy, structures and also processes so that an organization can use what it knows and consequently create economic and social value (Omotayo, 2015). It can be said that its purpose is to create the link between workers, technology and processes in order to increase knowledge and therefore create business value and generate competitive advantage (Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009; Omotayo, 2015).

Knowledge is seen as an intangible asset that is built on intuitions, understandings and empirical knowledge of the individual, influenced by its historical-cultural past and is something that can not be accurately transferred to others (Hunt, 2003; Pritchard, 2006).

It was always the main raw material of any worker because regardless of the necessary tool, knowledge was the core for the success of his trade. Given this it is curious that only from the 1990s has KM become a trend and have come to influence domains as diverse as industries or the public sector (Omotayo, 2015). The techniques that this area applies have shifted from the shadow of other management practices to become fundamental to the organization and to the imposition of the former strength in the market (Allee, 1997; Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009).

While physical tools are often modernized and therefore demanding replacement costs to the organization, with effective management of intellectual capital, as in defining a good knowledge creation strategy, one can not only acquire new knowledge (through training and recruitment of expert

collaborators) but also develop their own and thus improve their results on an ongoing basis (Omotayo, 2015). But knowledge is not static and so both organization and workers need to renew their knowledge base (Allee, 1997). However, it is necessary to understand how knowledge is treated by both parties.

Knowledge can be considered an object and for that there must exist processes that aim to collect 'knowledge objects' (represented by documents of various types) for KM systems (such as databases, repositories, libraries, among others) (Dalkir, 2007; Green, Stankosky, & Vandergriff, 2010; Gourlay *in* McInerney & Day, 2007). The importance of documentation and the use of digital means sometimes creates confusion between document management and KM systems (Dalkir, 2007) so one must pay attention to what he needs to develop according to his goals.

On the other hand, knowledge can also be seen as a process and in that sense the focus lies in the application of expertise while considering that knowledge does not exist separate from human action and its existence is intrinsically related to the social construction of meaning (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Wasko e Faraj *in* Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009). Here the focus of knowledge creation is on the tacit elements of this and importance should be given to the fluidity of knowledge transfer and its processes, not only for creation but also for the sharing of knowledge. It is then necessary to separate mechanical processes - which imply a dependent flow of the construction of collaboration tools - and humanistic processes where the importance falls on unstructured activities that may not have a concrete end besides the relationship between members of the organization (Lacerda *in* McInerney & Day, 2007).

This separation is not, however, linear insofar as it is impossible to dissociate knowledge from people. Knowledge is not limited to documents or repositories because it extends to the organizational routines, processes established, practices, values and even the culture of the organization and these depend mainly on people which should rather be the focus of KM strategies (G. Tian *et al*., 2013).

This decision between how to face knowledge is related to the dichotomy made famous by Nonaka and Takeuchi in separating knowledge in tacit and explicit, i.e., the invisible and highly personal elements from the

tangible elements that do not depend on a personal understanding to be understandable (Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009; Kane *et al*., 2005). Polanyi, one of the classics of Anthropology and Sociology, affirmed that "we know more than we say" (Kane *et al*., 2005) thus giving the idea of what would come to be known as tacit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge is knowledge with a highly personal coding that is built on the basis of each individual's context. This kind of knowledge is made up of shaped interactions and experiences. It influences our behavior and perception making it subjective and difficult to verbalize. It can be said that it is a specific knowledge of a function that transforms the expertise and practice of each one (Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009; Kane *et al*., 2005; Nonaka, 1994). The same event can be witnessed by two people and each one of them will make a different registration of it due to their coding practices, which makes the knowledge of this type more fragile and perishable (Boisot, 1987; Nonaka, 1994; Omotayo, 2015).

Blacker (as quoted in Omotayo, 2015) states that knowledge has 'formats' and from his definitions we can attribute to the tacit elements the classifications of 'embodied', 'abstract' and 'wrapped' formats. The first is the knowledge that is received through the training of the body for a task (also called know-how), while the second is a knowledge possessed but not easily transmitted and cumulative throughout our life; the 'wrapped' format seems to be a combination of the previous ones since it is what is perceptible in the routines and processes and can not be separated from the practice (Omotayo, 2015).

Tacit knowledge is the most difficult to gather because of the influence that experiences (or lack thereof) have on how a user finds something. Experience has already shaped and given examples on how to deal with a situation; inexperience leads us to be bound to existing handbooks and lessons learned.

Despite its difficulty in transforming itself into explicit knowledge, it is still possible to do so through complex socialization processes that depend on a translation of experiences from one individual to another (Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006). Ethnography trough describing and analyzing "hidden" issues that inhibit, repress, and restrain people (Löfgren *in* Moeran, 2012) can facilitate this in a way that readers can draw their own conclusions while understanding the context of the object of study.

On the other hand, explicit knowledge is formal and systematic, having a structured, fixed and conscious form and therefore is more easily coded, collected, stored and disseminated. These conditions allow capture and sharing through technological elements and make knowledge 'palpable' in central knowledge repositories (Dalkir, 2007; Nonaka, Umemoto, & Senoo, 1996).

As a rule this knowledge belongs to the public forum and therefore depends on a codification built through shared social symbols that have been constructed over time and have remained 'active' despite cultural clashes, between classes and, at a more basic level, between people (Boisot, 1987).

It is related to the explicit knowledge that we find the last two formats of knowledge mentioned by Blacker. The 'accultured' format approaches the definition presented by Boisot (1987) of public knowledge because it is formed by beliefs shared by the group whereas 'codified' is the knowledge described or exemplified.

The latter type of knowledge has been given more attention due to its tangible and measurable aspect, despite the recognized importance of tacit knowledge (Kane *et al*., 2005).

Knowing how to identify the types of knowledge and how to deal with it we can address the ongoing strategies or the ones to be applied. Designing a strategy is not limited, however, to the conditions of knowledge, but also to the organization's capacity to implement them, provided that it is not a divisible and easily shareable raw material, requiring incremental processes dependent on different types of links to that the information is not lost (Allee, 1997).

2.4. Knowledge Management Models and Ethnography

From Nonakas' SECI model (Nonaka, 1994) to Boisot's Knowledge Categories model (Boisot, 1987) there are models considered as pillars to KM that have helped shape the way the research and practice of this discipline is done.

Nonaka (1994) has devised a model where the process of passage and creation of knowledge is continuous and distributed from individual to organization and vice-versa, Boisot (1987) on the other hand explains us that knowledge spreads more easily as more diffused and codified it is (through the creation of a global language in the organization) (Boisot, 1987; Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009; Nonaka, 1994). However, both separate knowledge in types and focus on the transition from tacit to explicit elements. There are also models whose attention turns on the management of intellectual capital as the model of the Skadia group (Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009) and others whose focus is on data as the Business Intelligence model (Dinakar, 2016).

Ethnography has a strong component in the difficult task of collecting tacit knowledge through its participant observation methodology, yet its written component can also influence the way in which sharing occurs, an equally difficult process (Li, 2007) that is defined as the exact or partial replication of internal processes that are considered superior to others, paying attention to what is required for the recipient to replicate the same conditions as the original container.

Boisot's Knowledge Categories model aims to measure the capacity of codification and diffusion of knowledge, which implies that knowledge could be more diffusible as the more structured and convertible for information it can be (Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009). This model identifies knowledge according to four conditions – Figure **1**.
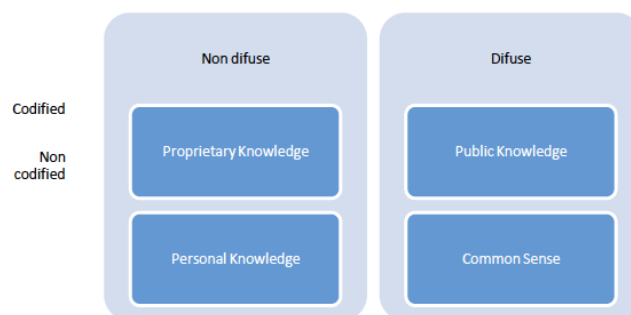

Figure 1: Boisot's Knowledge Categories model.
Source: Adapted from Haslinda & Sarinah (2009).

Codified is knowledge that can be quickly prepared for transmission such as financial data. By allying the encoded with the non-diffuse we have the proprietary knowledge that is deliberately transmitted to a small group of people who are identified on a need-to-know basis. If the connection is between the coded and diffuse conditions then it is seen as knowledge that is public (like what exists in libraries, newspapers, books, etc.) (Boisot, 1987; Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009; Li, 2007).

The opposite - not codified - is knowledge that cannot be prepared quickly, such as the experience of

a collaborator. From the connection between this and the non-diffuse we obtain the personal knowledge (the experiences, ideas, perceptions, etc.). When it comes to not coded and diffused, we are faced with common sense that is essentially transmitted through socialization and externalization (Boisot, 1987; Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009; Li, 2007).

This model evolved later with the addition of a third dimension, the abstraction, with the objective of evaluating the degree of reductionism over structuring captured knowledge. This evolution has made the model three-dimensional and thus creating free circulation of knowledge. When it encounters barriers these are called as 'friction of information' (Li, 2007).

In this model ethnography does not appear to have the opportunity to play a role of notorious difference since its objective seems to be that of classification. In addition, this seems to occur in a selected way, especially in proprietary knowledge and what becomes common sense seems to be information that is built on social symbols and not on voluntary processes for that purpose.

We thus note a difference when we study the Nonaka model because it is intended to create a vicious cycle of knowledge creation. The Nonaka Knowledge Spiral (or SECI model) develops a continuous interaction between different knowledge carriers that can be of different levels (knowledge can pass from the individual to the organization) and a continuous conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit and vice-versa (Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009; Nonaka, 1994) – Figure **2**.
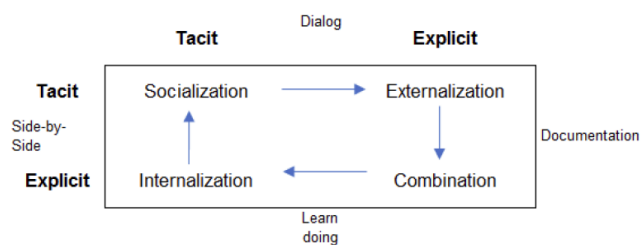

Figure 2: Nonaka's Knowledge Spiral.

Source: Adapted from Nonaka (1994).

The SECI model is then developed according to Figure **2**. The process of Socialization aims at transforming tacit knowledge into tacit knowledge, i.e., transmitting knowledge from one member of the organization to another through the processes of mentoring and side-by-side formation. It is from this process that the Externalization of knowledge occurs,

transforming what has been learned by experience into models, concepts and other techniques of representation that are perceptible to other members. The Combination occurs when we use the information obtained in the previous process and by means of transformation, combination, substitution or removal, the processes in process in the organization are changed. Finally, Internalization happens when the employees have internalized the procedures, transforming them in order to adapt to what they consider to be the best practices (Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka *et al*., 1996).

In such a highly interactive process that happens mainly in informal networks of relation it can be recognized that the barriers that can arise are related to the relations of power or with the cultural differences between different parts of the organization. Since the objective is to transfer knowledge from an individual level to a collective level, it is necessary not only to find a way to 'translate' information between the different departments, through the creation of a global language in the organization, but also to do this same 'translation' in a vertical plane.

Ethnography can be seen as the competent means to accomplish this task according to the arguments we have elucidated above, especially in the process of Socialization and Externalization. In this process the aim is to explain the motives and steps of an action, a decision making or a process and passing that explanation from a language codified by the individual to a coded language for the general group. With regard to the process of socialization, it is nothing more than a process of participant observation in which the learning element not only observes but also has the function of questioning and perceiving the how and why of these actions.

3. METHODOLOY USED

In order to obtain results for this work, it was necessary to use an exploratory empirical study under a research model using an online questionnaire (Severino, 2007) based on the Knowledge Management Capability Assessment model (R. Freeze & Kulkarni, 2005; Kulkarni, Ravindran, & Freeze, 2006). The model of Freeze *et al.* (2005; 2006) was used to understand the factors that are important for the evaluation of the current KM capacity of the target organization. This questionnaire led to the evaluation of the users' satisfaction with the techniques of KM and also of the organization (Kulkarni *et al*., 2006).

The organization studied is in the branch of IT and Business Consultancy while also conducting Outsourcing. Sampling was carried out for convenience only considering the internal collaborators (at the time of the survey there were 536, of which 136 participated in the survey) assuming that they were a homogeneous population in relation to the organization (Brites, 2007). The choice of internal collaborators was based on the assumption that they would have a more in-depth knowledge of the functioning of the organization and its tools.

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION RESULTS

This study main concern was to understand how ethnography could be used as knowledge collector technique in a consultancy firm in Portugal, for this it would also be necessary to know the conditions of KM of the organization and the characteristics of the employees because they represent the central point strategies to be applied.

It was verified that the workers of the organization studied could not identify the department responsible for the organization's KM. It is noteworthy that in organizations that give relevance to these methodologies there are own functions or dedicated departments that define strategies, in other organizations the department responsible is the direction of human resources or training (Allee, 1997) and this can be the case since the second most chosen answer was the department of 'People', the equivalent to the management of human resources and training.
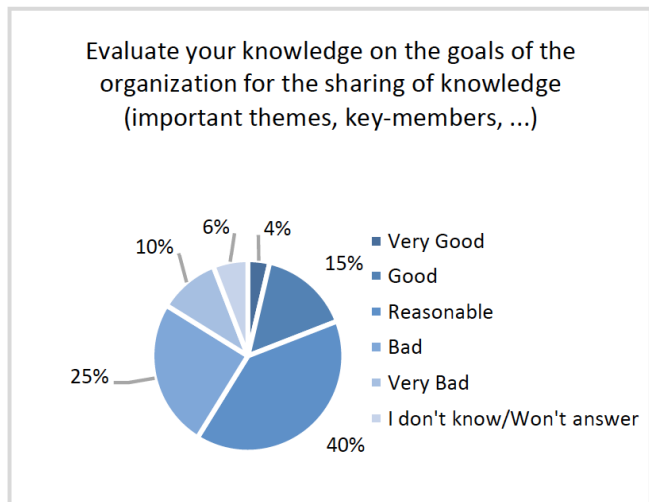

Figure 3: Self-evaluation on the knowledge of the organization goals for sharing knowledge.

Source: Elaborated by the Authors.

Only 16% of the participants believe they have a good knowledge of the strategies in practice and also the knowledge about the objectives for the organization's KM are little known with only 19% of users grading their knowledge as above-reasonable while almost double (35%) have a below-reasonable knowledge.

Concerning the effort dedicated to knowledge sharing, 62% agree that there is an interdepartmental joint work for this, which demonstrates an organization's investment in order that knowledge can flow between different areas.

However, when asked to describe the knowledge flow within the organization and within the business unit itself, the evaluation is tendentially more positive for the passage within the department itself and there are more negative evaluations for the passage of knowledge within the organization (4) which can be considered natural due to the codification of knowledge, that is, the specific language of a department is more understandable for the members of that department. It should be noted that employees who have identified their category as 'Manager or Superior' have assessed the business unit and the organization in a similar manner, which means that this negative feeling occurs at the levels of the lowest categories.
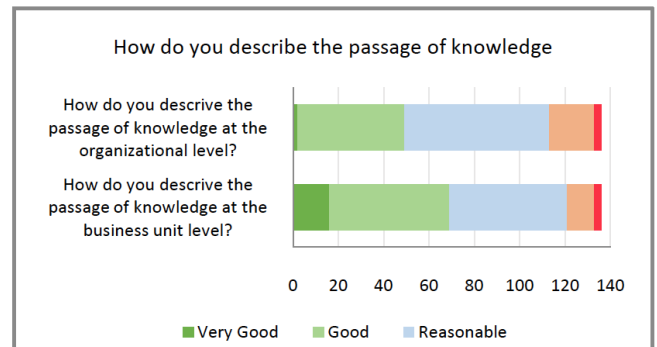

Figure 4: Evaluation of the passage of knowledge in the business unit level and the organizational level.

Source: Elaborated by the Authors.

As we saw earlier, the transformation of tacit knowledge into explicit is done through a complex process of translation of experiences that depends on coding attributed by each individual (Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006). In order to facilitate this transmission and thus to approximate the assessments between the passage of knowledge at the level of the organization and the evaluations at the level of the department we can argue that ethnography will be able, through the

analysis of the similarities and differences between the subcultures of the departments existing in the organization, to mitigate or even destroy existing barriers to the sharing of knowledge by performing comprehensive works that allows interpreters to understand the context in which an idea is conceived (Löfgren *in* Moeran, 2012).

A complementary way to overcome this issue, is to invest in the creation of a global language, which can be done through Communities of Practice (CoP) (Haslinda & Sarinah, 2009; Omotayo, 2015). In previous studies it has been shown that CoPs between departments are able to have some of the best expert knowledge and collaborative work (Cook, 2013). For the success of these communities (and the KM) the involvement of the leadership in activities and strategies is fundamental (Green *et al.*, 2010).

These results seem to show that, from the perspective of the collaborators, the organization gives a high importance to KM but the way the information is transmitted should be improved so that the objectives and strategies become clearer.

The way knowledge is treated by the organization and members is an important data for the definition of the strategy to be applied in the organization. It is argued that the two views do not have to be seen in separate ways and can be used in combination (Gourlay *in* McInerney & Day, 2007) and indeed KM Systems are an important part of KM even if there are processes of socialization implemented as a way of sharing and collecting knowledge. In the organization studied this is what seems to happen because although there is a strong preference of users for socialization
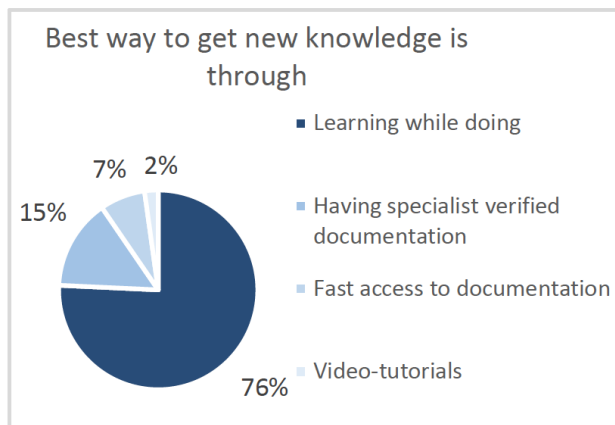

Figure 5: Where do collaborators go when they need advice on work.

Source: Elaborated by the Authors.

methods there is also a strong interest in the existence of documentation – Figures **5** and **6**.

Figure 6: Best way to get new knowledge.

Source: Elaborated by the Authors.

Figures **5** and **6** show the importance attributed to communication with specialists or members with more experience. It is considered that qualified professionals and specialists produce and disseminate high-quality knowledge (Maksimova, Telnov, Tikhomirova & Tikhomirov *in* Green *et al.*, 2010). Thus, it is natural that when we analyze how best to obtain new knowledge for employees we find that they prefer learning alongside other members and learning by doing as can be seen in Figure **7**.
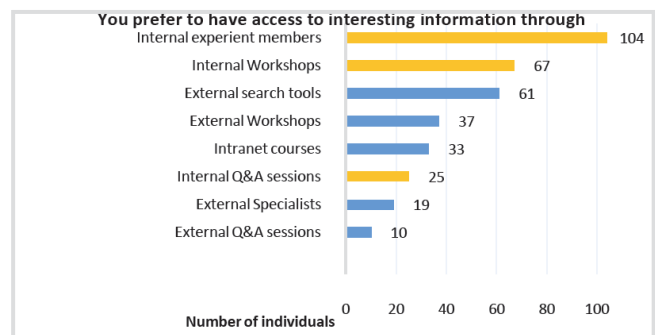

Figure 7: Preference in accessing interesting (work-related) information.

Source: Elaborated by the Authors.

Analysing these graphs one could conclude that knowledge is seen mainly as a process and therefore the techniques of knowledge management must go through the creation or maintenance of processes of socialization and externalization such as those present in the theory of the spiral of knowledge of Nonaka (1994). However, when asked if knowledge should be stored in a repository in order to be accessed, the answers were overwhelmingly positive, and there were more negative answers when it was questioned if the processes of knowledge passing are more important
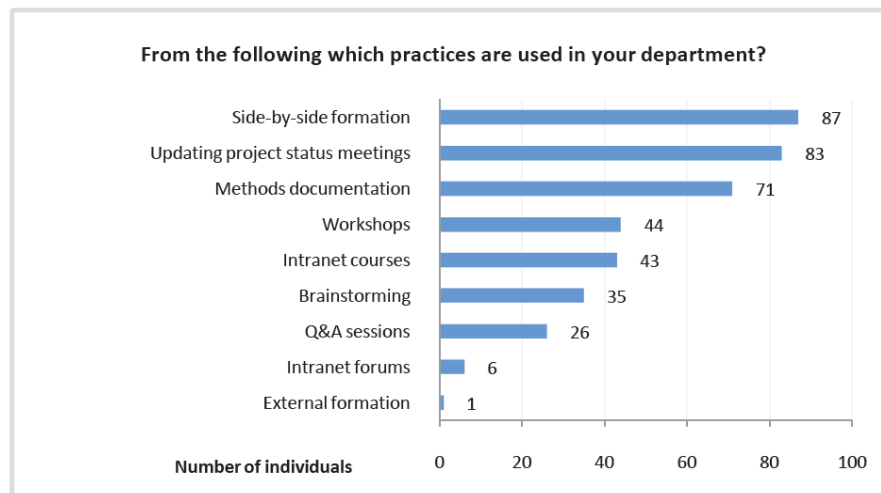
Figure 8: Practices used for the sharing of knowledge at a business unit level.
Source: Elaborated by the Authors.

than the documentation of this, although the negative responses.

It is not possible to say that the organization deals with knowledge in only one way, noting that there are approaches in both directions and that users are generally satisfied with these approaches as we have seen before.

But from this information we can also conclude that employees prefer to share their knowledge through socialization processes and when analyzing (which despite being about knowledge sharing practices refers to those that are implemented by the organization at business unit level) it can be seen that the most used way to capture knowledge in the organization are the processes of socialization through the 'side-by-side formations' – Figure **8**.

The employees of this organization are generally distinguished between members of technology departments and members of business consulting departments and although the former - despite developing tacit knowledge about the technologies in which they work - have knowledge that can more easily be transmitted to processes of knowledge capture for documentation, the latter have a high tacit knowledge that is acquired through professional experience and direct relationship with customers.

This distinction has the possibility of influencing the definition of KM strategies, and business units may already know this, seeing as the evaluation of methods of knowledge transfer in departments is better evaluated than those of the organization.

Regarding knowledge sharing and as mentioned before, the preferred by the collaborators is the sharing through the direct interaction with other collaborators and currently the techniques established for the sharing fall on this process.

It is important to emphasize that the culture of the organization has a nuclear role in the processes of knowledge sharing and the ideal is to transform the process of knowledge transfer into an unconscious and less explicit activity, that is, without resorting to the need of generating documentation (Dinakar, 2016).

However, it would be interesting to see if the existing interaction is a learning process for less experienced members by putting them immediately to work with the technologies or if there is a moment of externalization, for documentation or reflection, of the material collected during the socialization which is an important part of becoming familiar with the technology or the area to be assimilated (Boellstorff *et al*., 2012).

Organizations should "encourage to the sharing of expertise between" the work force (R. Freeze & Kulkarni, 2005) and in the organization studied, the majority (78.7%) agree that there is an incentive to share knowledge as can be seen in but this encouragement is not currently accompanied by recognition or compensation for those who take initiatives to share knowledge according to 44% of the respondents. This reward can be a way of creating the organizational culture for sharing and creating the habit of organizational learning (Green *et al*., 2010; Kulkarni *et al*., 2006).

Figure 9: Preference of techniques to share knowledge.

Source: Elaborated by the Authors.

One of the criticisms pointed out to ethnography is related to its elevated time-consuming in relation to the turnover of members in this type of organization (Albu *et al*., 2013; Lee, 2014). At the start of this study an existing bias was that the consultancy members for their technical characterization and the hourly pressure that the projects entail would not be available to be observed and questioned about their work by someone else.

It was noted, however, that a large number of employees prefer to share their knowledge by explaining the motivations of their actions to another person, which is precisely the genesis of ethnography as described by Marcus and Fischer (as quoted in Kane, Ragsdell, & Oppenheim, 2005) – Figure **9**.

Seeing this results we can say that ethnography can be used by competent users in the application of this technique to begin the process of socialization and externalization for documentation.

It is also important to note that this technique can help create a common language. For this it is necessary for the anthropologist, in an initial phase, to analyze the similarities and differences in the subcultures of the organization so that later, through ethnography, he makes use of this comparison, thus producing a translation so that members away from diverse areas understand the same topic (Oliveira, 2012).

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethnography seemed to be in line with Nonaka's knowledge spiral theory as a method of collecting knowledge in the Socialization process (Nonaka, 1994) and so in this paper the aim was to try to provide a link to a context highly distinct from ethnography origins in

a space such as consultancy where employees have, as a rule, a volatile career in organizational change (Batchelor, 2011; *Retention Strategies: What can you do to keep your best consulting staff?*, 2005) and where retention of knowledge is a problem for the organizations.

It is also considered that ethnography may be more valuable in its application to members of the business consulting departments due to the value attributed to tacit knowledge, however, its applicability to the technical areas can be seen in a sharing purpose due to the way in which these recourse to documentation and to the possibility of being simpler to transform into explicit knowledge when it comes to technical matters.

Initially one of the assumptions made by the researcher was that employees of this type of organization would not have the desire to explain their decisions and the motivations for these, not only for the sake of availability but also for the value they would have when the knowledge is dispersed by other collaborators. It was with surprise that it was noticed that a large majority of users would rather share knowledge by explaining their actions to someone on their side - which is the core of ethnographic work. Ethnography can contribute to this form of knowledge extraction since it is a tool that is based on the observations of others and on the participation in the culture, trying to explain the meaning of the decisions regarding the context in which they were taken (Kane *et al*., 2005).

In order to assess whether ethnography could be used in an environment such as this one, it was first necessary to understand the current KM capacity of the target company and to understand if this was already an important issue within the organization and what

techniques were used for the knowledge acquisition and dissemination.

KM is an asset to organizations and an important way to create an advantage through the knowledge they have and how effectively they use it (Rezende & Alves, 2007) and this importance is recognized by users who answered the questionnaire in this study. This could also be certified by the literature review made on talent management, where it could be established that one the most relevant issues in talent management is knowledge gathering and retaining.

This work also demonstrated that, although the employees of the company under study indicate that there is an effort to share Knowledge and that, in general, they are satisfied not only with the techniques implemented but also with the way communication is made (Kulkarni *et al*., 2006) their knowledge on the KM strategies on course is subpar for what would be expected in order to the practices and strategies become internalized in the daily routine.

The fact that the assessment of knowledge transmission organization level is worse than the evaluation made about the passage of knowledge within the business unit should be further explored in the future taking into account the subculture component of departments within the organization. It has been noted in earlier work that lack of attention to cultural and social aspects may impede the effectiveness of KM initiatives, even when they have IT components, one of the central artifacts of KM initiatives, as is the case with internal repository of courses for its collaborators (Kulkarni *et al*., 2006). Thus, ethnography may be the necessary element to unlock this situation by providing an understanding of the subcultures in the organization so that the applied strategies are also adapted to the passage of knowledge between departments effectively.

The success of these initiatives is also intrinsically linked to the personal investment of higher-ranked members (Kulkarni *et al*., 2006). In the KMCA model (R. D. Freeze, 2014) one of the assessed points for an organization's capacity is how leadership and senior management positions demonstrate commitment and communicate the value of knowledge sharing. In the organization in question, it was noted that although there is a great resemblance in responses to KM strategies and techniques, assessments and issues related to existing effort or compensation had some disparity between what leadership positions and members below the 'Manager' category.

What this research also showed is the need for talent management inside every organization. Its role is critical to make knowledge one of the most value resources. It will be the human resources departments, as the ones responsible for talent management, that will implementing ethnography or other methods or tools to assure that all critical knowledge is gathered, kept and used to support the organization strategy.

In spite of these conclusions, we cannot fully assess the capacity of ethnography as a method of collecting and sharing knowledge, requiring not only comparative studies between departments and between organizations, but also practical work with this methodology in order to understand the real capacity of ethnography to extract knowledge and then disseminate it.

Although KM is currently a point of interest for many companies, it is noted that for many it is still a strange concept and that although it seems obvious the need to share the knowledge of members of the organizations there is no discussion about theory within the organizations.

This gap in the discussion of KM issues occurs because the investigations in this topic are usually confined to one organization only. Although it is recognized that KM is part of the construction of competitive advantage, it would be useful even for the organizations to have the possibility of doing an investigation comparing the applied techniques while taking into account the culture of the organization and the success of these before the collaborators.

This type of research would make it possible to understand if the techniques to be applied within a business area (in this case consultancy) are effectively dependent on the culture of the organization or whether they can be decided at a macro level across the same business branch.

A first limitation that should be pointed out is that this study refers only to a consultancy firm that has its own culture and that therefore members when recruited are usually filtered not only by technical skills but also by the values they share or not with the company. This fact makes it impossible to generalize the results demonstrated for all consulting companies.

On the other hand, it may be necessary to do more work on the subcultures present in the organization since the groups may have formed the common identity by comparing departments (Doise, 1988) when what

should happen was an organizational identity. Regarding the questionnaire, it was noted in the results the difficulties presented generally to the use of the Lickert scale (Bertram, 2007), in concrete the predominance in responding to the center of the scale options when this was possible.

Clearly, there is room for further research on the effects of talent management, and ethnography as a method, in the ways organizations manages and values knowledge - Future researcher may not only include those who are nominated as a talent, but also their colleagues for whom such nominations, by implication, is a nomination as a non-talent (Daubner-Siva *et al*., 2018). More studies should also explore the role of human resource departments and of its function of talent management in supporting and developing knowledge sharing among the organizations structure. If ethnography can be a method to help to do this, more investigation have to be done to share some light regarding how to integrate it into the internal processes - could be through Business Competence Centers – and into the organization culture.

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