

# Open Education Initiatives and KM Readiness of an ODeL Institution

Melinda F. Lumanta, PhD<sup>1</sup>

University of the Philippines Open University ◆ Philippines ◆ mflumanta@upou.edu.ph

Alvie Simonette Q. Alip, MAEd<sup>2</sup>

University of the Philippines Open University ◆ Philippines ◆ alvie.alip@upou.edu.ph

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## ABSTRACT

*Open education initiatives of an open and distance elearning institution were examined vis-a-vis the Knowledge Management maturity level of the organization. Results of an earlier research which established the Knowledge Management maturity level of the institution were presented in terms of the seven audit categories. These included leadership, people, processes, technology, knowledge processes, learning and innovation, and outcomes. Using the institution's three-year strategic plan, open education initiatives were identified. These include initiatives related to open and distance elearning, open education resources and massive open online courses. The process of establishing strategic goals related to the institution's open education initiatives were discussed in light of the characteristics of the Knowledge Management maturity level of the institution. The study aimed to contribute to the discourse on the application of Knowledge Management principles and practices in educational institutions and more specifically to open and distance elearning institutions.*

## INTRODUCTION

Recent discourse on education has been increasingly characterized by dimensions of openness often discussed in terms of open education practices. However, little attention has been given to the academic institution even as it is widely recognized that institutional readiness is a prerequisite to being relevant in today's knowledge society.

Education today is subject to the same pressures of the marketplace. Hence, educational institutions, just like any other institution, need to perform just as well as any other organization (Brown and Duguid, 1996). In an era of open education, this

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<sup>1</sup> Professor, University of the Philippines Open University

<sup>2</sup> University Researcher, University of the Philippines Open University

becomes even more pronounced for open and distance learning institutions which are at the forefront of 21st century education.

Unarguably knowledge permeates organizational processes and its effective management is crucial to organizational growth, productivity and innovation. As Butcher (2007) points out, effective knowledge management (KM) concepts and strategies “should resonate in an educational context” as well. One of the challenges in a knowledge society is to develop the role of educators and learners as knowledge workers within the broader education system and within the academic institution.

According to Butcher (2007), at an institutional level, “KM is essential to creating organizations that ‘learn’ more effectively” hence, “KM should be a fundamental objective of any educational institution, as learning is its core function and should be reflected in how the organization operates”.

## OBJECTIVE

This study aims to contribute to the discourse on the application of KM principles and practices in educational institutions and more specifically to open and distance learning (ODeL) institutions.

### The ODeL Institution

The ODeL institution is defined as an academic organization engaged in open learning, distance education and elearning with values of a university and operating in a networked environment. This definition derives from an organizing framework (Figure 1) that puts these elements together.

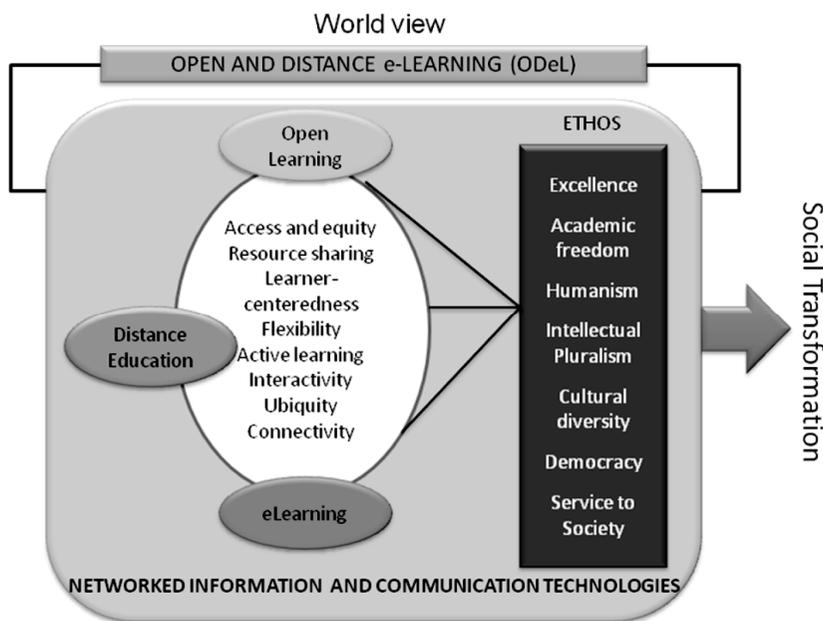


Figure 1: ODeL worldview (Alfonso, 2012)

As illustrated in Figure 1, the ODeL framework “draws from the features and affordances provided by open learning, distance education, and e-learning – access and equity, resource sharing, learner-centeredness, flexibility, active learning, interactivity, ubiquity, and connectivity... these affordances and features are infused with values that underpin the university – excellence, academic freedom, humanism, intellectual pluralism, and service to society ... together, all these elements are embedded and facilitated by networked and communication technologies... The interweaving of these components can bring about social transformation” (Alfonso, 2012).

As an institution specifically mandated to offer degree and nonformal programs via distance education, the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) is seen to operate under an ODeL framework. UPOU offers courses fully online and has recently embarked on the offering of its own version of a massive open online course known as MODeL or the Massive Open Distance eLearning (Bandalaria, 2014). As a constituent university of the University of the Philippines System and as a leading open and distance education institution, it pioneers and continues to innovate in the field of open and distance elearning.

### **KM Readiness**

The UPOU’s KM maturity level was determined in a previous research (Lumanta, Alip, & Lagaya, 2014) using a KM Readiness instrument, which is a modified version of the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) KM Assessment Tool or KMAT. KMAT was developed by the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC), and has been used extensively in corporate organizations. It measures seven dimensions or audit categories which constitute the following: (1) leadership, (2) people, (3) process, (4) technology, (5) knowledge processes, (6) learning and innovation, and (7) outcomes. The tool is a 42-item likert-type scale which covers seven audit categories, wherein each category has a maximum score of 30 points, and a total maximum score of 210 points for the seven categories. Each of the questions in the categories can be rated from 1 (doing poorly or none at all) to 5 (doing very well).

Using responses of 58 UPOU employees who replied to an online format of the KM Readiness instrument, UPOU was scored at 149 out of a possible 210 points indicating that implementation of knowledge management principles and practices are continually being evaluated for continuous improvement (Figure 2).

The web or radar diagram in Figure 3 shows the actual scores obtained for each dimension versus the maximum score in that category. Results in the previous study revealed that the Technology dimension is the highest rated followed by the Learning and Innovation, and the Process dimensions. For an ODeL institution, this is not surprising. It is through appropriate web-based technologies that the institution is expected to develop, deliver, create and sustain knowledge-based solutions and a knowledge-sharing environment. Also it can be argued that in an ODeL environment, the technology leads to greater opportunities for innovation.

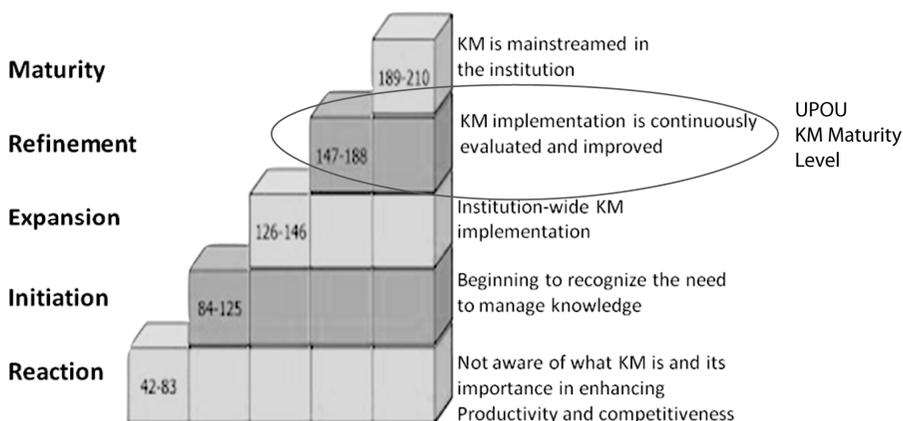


Figure 2: KM maturity level (APO, 2009)

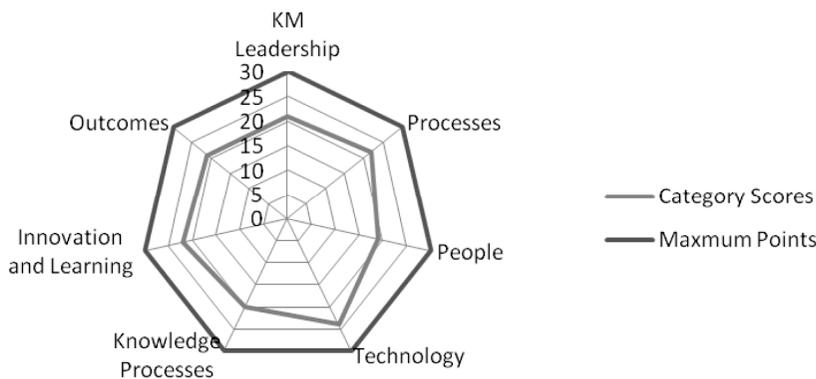


Figure 3: ODeL Institution’s overall organization radar chart

**Open Education Initiatives**

For this study, UPOU’s open education initiatives were identified as documented in the institution’s three year strategic plan. This document reflects the collective vision, commitment and agreed-upon goals and activities of organizational members. The institution’s strategic planning activity involved a two-stage process. The institutional vision, mission and goal statements for the years 2013-2016 were articulated by the leadership and these were validated in a general assembly at which commitments were made by the various sectors of the organization.

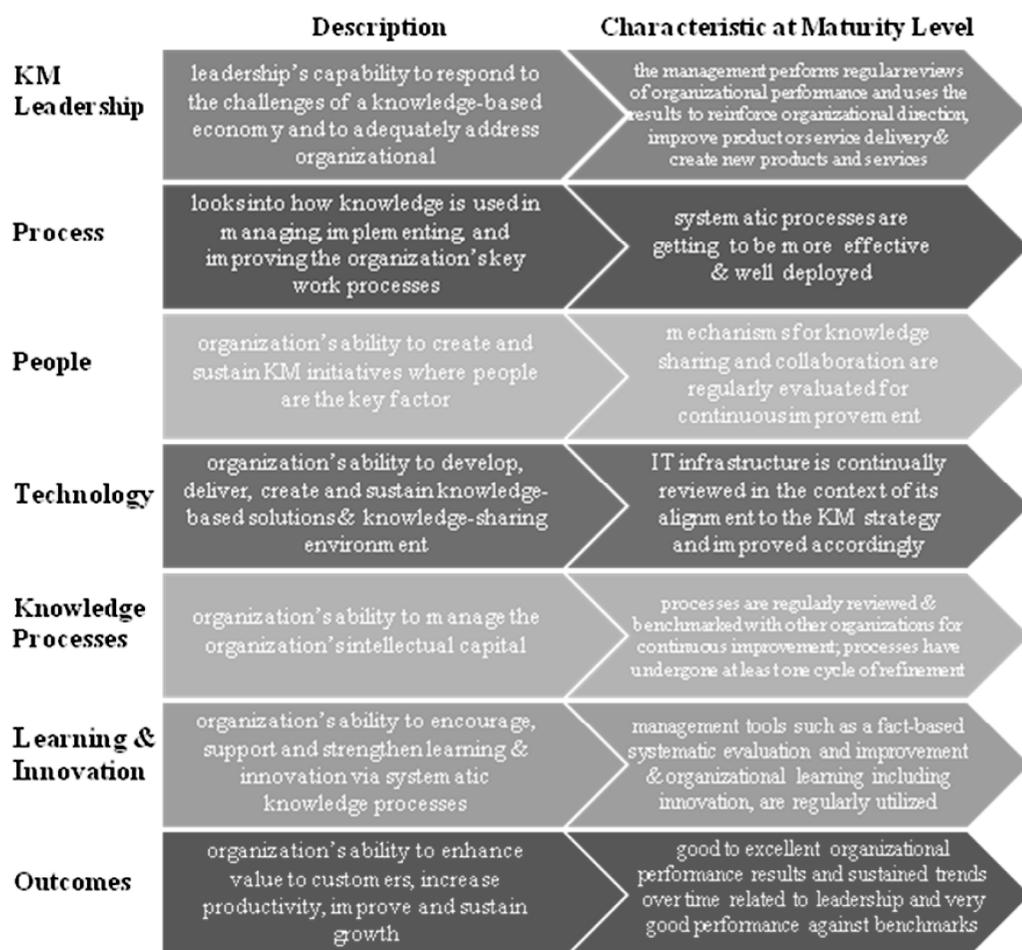
To determine the suitability of this institutional document for documentary analysis, the study applied the quality control criteria of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. Scott (1990) as cited by Mogalakwe (2009) recommended and defined these four criteria as follows:

*Authenticity refers to whether the evidence is genuine and from impeccable sources; credibility refers to whether the evidence is typical of its kind; representativeness refers to whether the documents consulted are representative of the totality of the relevant documents; and meaning refers to whether the evidence is clear and comprehensible.*

The UPOU 2013-2016 Strategic Plan was examined for open education initiatives of the university and these were shown to be those related to ODeL, Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

### **Open Education Initiatives and KM Level of Readiness**

Figure 4 presents descriptions of the characteristics of the KM dimensions at the KM maturity level as determined from a previous research. In light of these maturity level of KM dimensions, the UPOU's behavior or performance as it developed its strategic plan is discussed.



**Figure 4:** KM dimensions, descriptions, and UPOU's characteristic at maturity level

A documentary analysis of the 2013-2016 Strategic Plan of the UPOU revealed that open education initiatives are in the areas of ODeL, OER and MOOCs. This section presents how UPOU derived its goals from its vision of being at the forefront of the knowledge society as a leading institution of open learning and distance education.

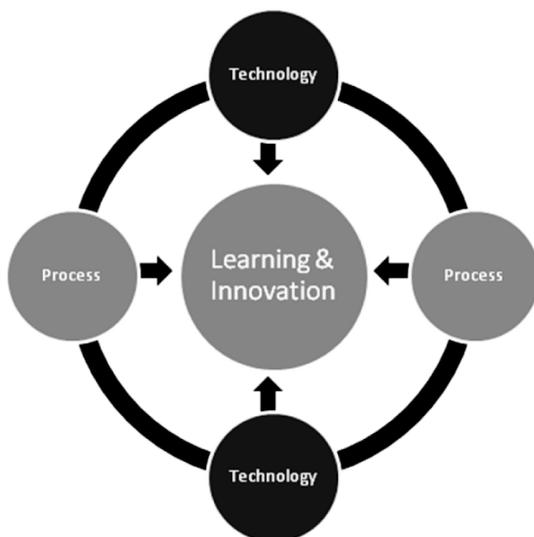
In coming up with a unified vision of making ODeL a powerful means of promoting access and equity in higher education, UPOU conducted a Strategic Planning Workshop using the strategic directions from the leadership, articulation of the ODeL framework, and the overall thrusts of the UP System. From the strategic directions, goals were set in the areas of instruction, research, public service and administration. These goals were then presented in a General Assembly of UPOU officials, faculty, and staff, wherein everyone was given an opportunity to voice their commitments and identify enablers.

Strategic directions in the area of instruction were identified as follows: (1) enhance the learner experience by tapping web-based approaches in faculty development, establishing online-based student support systems and promoting the co-creation of

knowledge in instruction; and (2) expand the public's access to UPOU course offerings through institutional promotions and partnerships and provision of lifelong learning opportunities. In research, the strategic directions were: (1) cultivate a culture of research as part of the teaching and learning praxis; and (2) provide an enabling environment for research to increase research productivity and impact. In the area of administration, the strategic directions included: (1) boost the administrative capacity of the university to harness resources and technologies; and (2) provide a physical and social working environment conducive to the wellness and development of the human resources' full potential. As a state university it included strategic directions in the area of public service. These included: (1) strengthen the university's engagement with the communities of practice and facilitate discourses to empower disadvantaged groups; and (2) nurture a vibrant relationship between the university and the alumni.

It can be gleaned from these general directions that open education initiatives are lodged primarily in the instruction and research functions of the university. Hence, the commitments declared by the stakeholders were mostly in continued research and development of OERs, MOOCs and ODeL. These reflect the learning and innovation inclination of the institution and its concern for being relevant in the changing times through benchmarking with similar organizations. In the area of administration, the commitments declared by the constituents were geared towards the continuous improvement of IT infrastructure, connectivity, hardware and software as an appropriate response to the requirements of emerging pedagogies.

In this study, it appears that the affordances of technology and systematic processes that are continuously reviewed and improved affect the learning and innovation propensity of the institution. These interrelationships are shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5:** Interrelationships of technology, process, and learning and innovation

## CONCLUSION

This study attempted to illustrate the use of a methodology that validates the expected characteristics of a given level of KM maturity of an ODeL institution. The contribution of the study is seen to be in: (1) the application of a KM readiness instrument to an educational institution, more specifically to an ODeL institution; (2) the use of an institutional document, the strategic plan, that is reflective of a collective vision, goal and commitment in the pursuit of open education initiatives of an ODeL institution; and (3) a methodology that combines an online perception survey with that of document and process analysis to get a deeper understanding of the ODeL institution through a KM perspective.

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