

Integrating Knowledge Society: A Survey Led in Three Universities

Azzedine Bouderbane

Teboura Benkaid Kesba

Nadjia Gamouh

Abstract

Knowledge is considered as a general basic principle for managing the individual's tasks and activities and for organizing society. This precious resource is so important that its acquisition is able to provide strength and wealth to its holder. The environment in which we interact now is known as 'Knowledge Society'. One can notice from this terminology that knowledge is pre-requisite for people who wish to live in this modern space. However, knowledge alone is no longer sufficient to integrate this complex society. Several other factors are now needed to integrate 'Knowledge society'. A lot of people are interested in getting a place in this new society, but they do not really know about the parameters required by 'Knowledge society'. A problem is stated and some questions are raised: What are the fundamental factors that people should acquire to be able to integrate this new complex society? Is it easy to acquire these factors? We attempted to answer these questions through a survey that we led with a sample of university teachers from three universities in the city of Constantine. We adopted the descriptive approach and used the interview as an instrument for collecting data. Significant results were obtained. The main result consisted in the acquisition of digital literacy.

Keywords: Knowledge society; complex society; prerequisite factors; integration; survey; university teachers; Constantine.

Introduction

Progress generates an unprecedented upheaval in all fields. The acquisition of information and knowledge by citizens gives new dimensions to learning and development. Technology has disseminated a variety of products that enable people to have access to information and knowledge rapidly and efficiently in a moving society. Information resources are available in a variety of shapes. Knowledge has become a valuable resource that provides strength and wealth. On the one hand, this resource helps individuals in their daily activities, and, on the other hand, it helps in organizing society. Though a lot of people endeavor to integrate this new modern knowledge society, most of them fail in achieving their goal. The reason is that a lot of people do not first make efforts to know about the parameters required by this society that can allow people to integrate this new environment. A problem is stated and some questions are raised: What are the fundamental factors that people should acquire to be able to integrate this new complex knowledge society? Is it easy to acquire these factors? We attempted to answer these questions through a survey that we led in the city of Constantine. Three universities were concerned by the survey. A sample of university teachers constituted our population of study.

Information and knowledge

Nowadays, It is not sufficient to know how to read. We should also be able to know how to use the new means of communication in order to be able to have access easily to the needed information. In this new society, our future relies on our capacities in using and exploiting our knowledge which has become pre-requisite for any progress and for any success. The writer Blanquet said: "The future belongs to those who master knowledge" (Blanquet, 1999). Libraries and information sources have become a fundamental means for all citizens. They are the main keys that help to open the doors of knowledge society (Candallot, 2005). It is hard to acquire knowledge in this new society, where information knows a real explosion. The rapid development of technology has led to the emergence of a variety of new information products and services that permit an efficient access to information. These technological products are found in all areas. They help in filtering a great quantity of information and in processing it at a very high speed.

In this economic world that is hostile to social and economic activities through the ever-increasing diversity of events and products that have to be managed. To know how to manage, we need to know how to use information and produce knowledge. It is even emphasized that the educated man is the one who "has acquired a method of research and work to be able to form an idea by himself" (Pochet, Thirion, 1999). In this frightful context, only the intelligent person armed with the right information, remains competitive (Bouderbane, 2004). Thus, the appropriation of information becomes strategic to stimulate innovation and creation, in order to anticipate competition or to contract new projects. All this must be accompanied by the mastery of the use of new technologies. Information is therefore the leverage to drive business success, performance and prosperity, when it is new and appropriately addressed so that it can act effectively when needed. This is about the transformation of this information into a useful and exploitable knowledge to follow the pace of development.

Knowledge society

The evolution of knowledge, as a product of human intelligence, generates a real mutation within society. The day-to-day work of individuals and institutions is increasingly based on access to information and knowledge. This information is so abundant, so useful that it has pushed people to develop communication networks that are forming at a blazing speed (Goulding, 2001). The introduction of ICT in this shifting society has given a new dimension to the explosion of information sources and communication systems. Men have understood that access to information is rewarding. Institutions are also experiencing growing development. They need knowledge to achieve efficiency and to be able to occupy a nice position in an increasingly complex and highly competitive environment known as knowledge society. The integration in this new society is very hard for individuals who have not acquired some specific characteristics required by knowledge society (Bouderbane, 2013). Furthermore, these individuals do not care about these requirements. Developed societies have generated knowledge societies that are able to produce knowledge, to handle it, to access to it, to produce the instruments that permit the access to this precious resource. These societies assure training and encourage their institutions to train citizens, so that they will be familiar with knowledge and understand how to learn by handling information and knowledge (Rigot, 2006).

Methodology

We led a survey at the three Universities of Constantine 1, 2 and 3. A sample of sixty (60) university teachers, randomly selected, accepted to respond to our questions in an interview that we arranged at the central university libraries. Thirty males and thirty females, in addition to twenty teachers from each university constituted our sample. We wanted, on the one hand, to identify to which extent university teacher were aware of the fundamental factors that they should acquire to be able to integrate knowledge society, and, on the other hand, to check whether it was easy for them to acquire these factors. We adopted a qualitative study. In our interview, we showed a list of ten factors (see the appendix) that may help in integrating knowledge society. We asked our respondents to select the most appropriate factors. It was possible for them to include any other factor of their choice.

The survey's results

Competence

All the respondents (100 %) selected this factor in the first position. They mentioned that competence meant having the theoretical and the practical knowledge of a specific discipline, in addition to a method of work that facilitates the pedagogical interaction with people in general and learners in particular.

Autonomy

In the second position, 54 respondents attested that they needed independence in order to integrate knowledge society explaining that teachers had to rely on themselves in any project they undertook. The new society requires individuals who are able to take decisions, to lead projects and to think independently.

Flexibility

In the third position, 50 university teachers showed the importance of flexibility. They mentioned that society is open to a variety of aspects, so teachers had to be its image. They added that they could not imagine a stubborn teacher integrating

an open environment. Several new things had to be accepted in order to be accepted by the members of knowledge society. Flexibility requires making efforts to be open – minded.

Information literate

As a fourth position, 45 respondents underlined the importance of acquiring information literacy as a basic human right in knowledge society that promoted social inclusion in it. Information literacy meant for them handling efficiently the techniques of information search (.Hinchliffe, 2005) They also mentioned that it was important for individuals to have a spirit of ethics when using and exploiting information and that they should understand that information had economic, social and legal dimensions. They added that teachers should understand the importance of making efforts to produce information, not just to consume it. They affirmed that information literacy should be acquired by all people: It could help them to integrate this new complex society (Baltz, 1998). Their social and professional position and statute would be preserved. They should know that their future relied on their capacities in using and exploiting knowledge, the source of any progress and any success. Updating our knowledge has become a constant process and getting the ability to know how to search information is learned in all disciplines; this has become a necessary universal competence (Duspaire, 2004).

Technology literate

The fifth position was taken by 45 respondents who showed the necessity of handling efficiently the techniques of information search via technological devices. They added that this competence could allow them to overcome anxiety that was felt in front of new machines, and to avoid 'techno-stress' (Van Wallace, 2013). They affirmed that the mastery of technology has become indispensable; "it has given rise to new paradigms of services and new roles for the staff" (Curran, 2006). They were convinced that when well handled, these technological instruments would become very useful: "technology changes and the better trained a staff is, the better they can handle those changes" (Childers, 2003).

Accepting change and coping with it

40 respondents took the sixth position while stressing the factor of change which became inevitable. They added that knowledge society was facing a rapid and a constant change that educators should take into account in their daily activities. They affirmed the necessity of being able to adapt yourself to the new situations, to the new changing environment, and to the modeling of human behaviors. Darwin was convinced that the species that survive were neither the strongest ones nor the most intelligent ones, but rather those that know how to adapt themselves.

Accepting life-long learning

30 university teachers selected life-long learning in the seventh position. They emphasized the factor of updating our knowledge that became a constant process. For our respondents, refusing continuous training meant to be on the margin of knowledge society. "We do not want to be excluded from the new society", they affirm. Training has become an obligation for every educator. "Training has become a necessity, not a luxury" (Childer, 2003).

To be operational

26 respondents selected in the eighth position the factor of being operational. "The new society does not accept individuals who are lazy, late or tired", they stressed. They explained that this complex society was not social or emotional. "That new environment is materialistic, harsh and concrete", they added. They concluded that knowledge society rejected individuals who were non operational or no longer able to respond to society strict orders. Either you are present when they need you or you are absent and no longer useful.

Handling foreign languages

25 university teachers opted for this factor as a ninth issue. They recognized the importance of handling at least two foreign languages in this competitive space. They added that it was very hard for individuals who use just their mother tongue to occupy a position in knowledge society. Our respondents underlined the high position of English in this new environment. "It has become a must", they said.

An individual with multiple competencies

In the tenth position, 24 university teachers mentioned the fact that being good in just one unique discipline was no longer sufficient. "Knowledge society requires individuals with several an multiple competencies", they said. They underlined the importance of mastering foreign languages, of handling technology, in addition to your expertise in your selected discipline. They added that you were able to collect knowledge about others disciplines, it would be suitable.

To be innovative

In the eleventh position, 21 respondents underlined the factor of innovation. They explained that knowledge society preferred individuals who believed in innovation, who were motivated for launching innovative projects and for creating new services. They added that these individuals had to be imaginative and ready to learn and get informed about innovation as a subject of interest. At last, they explained that they had to encourage the other people to be creative.

To care about sustainable development and environment

The twelfth position went to 12 respondents who wanted to explain that all teachers should put in their mind that society needed them, and that they had to participate in developing it in a positive way. Protecting the environment was a factor that attracted their attention. They mentioned that progress should not be anarchical, but should rather rely on preserving our natural space for the benefit of the next generations. They added that we should not accept the destruction of our environment. "Knowledge society had to endeavor for the sake of protecting nature", they affirmed.

Able to work in networks

The thirtieth position concerned 10 respondents who believed in the importance of group work. They mentioned that knowledge society required persons who were able to work collectively in projects. These persons could be separated geographically and would work on multidisciplinary projects. In this way, they thought, the results would be more satisfactory.

To accept to be visible

Five university teachers took the fortieth position and emphasized the factor related to visibility. They mentioned that knowledge society was a space of digital activities in which you could no longer feel free in your daily work. They explained that the electronic supports that we used made us visible in the digital world. They also added that our group – work outcomes and our inclusion in network activities would not remain invisible. They concluded that knowledge was shared and disseminated through open access and visibility.

General comments

Teachers who answered our questions come from a variety of disciplines that require information skills and knowledge. The respondents, in general, seem to be prepared to assume their future responsibilities in knowledge society. They underline the importance of acquiring information and technological literacy stressing the necessity of handling digital supports (Massou; Morelli, 2012). The survey shows that teachers know that they will not succeed in integrating the new complex society if they do not give importance to information and knowledge, in addition to some other specific factors discussed in the interview (Chevillote, 2005). They recognize the importance of continuous training and life-long learning in order to be independent in their activities. They also highlight the factor of flexibility which helps a lot in interacting with the other people. As competence "is a set of knowledge and behaviors" (Praderie, Plasse, 1995), teachers insist on acquiring multiple competences and on being operational all the time to avoid being on the borders of knowledge society. They show the development of networking as a new expanding method of work (Serres, 2008). They also believe in change and accept it in order to be able to cope with all that is new. Our respondents emphasize the importance of mastering foreign languages in knowledge society. Some of the university teachers mention the new living style which renders everything visible. Sustainable development and innovation have also attracted the attention of our respondents. They know that they have an outstanding mission to accomplish: they should prepare the young generation for knowledge society.

Conclusion

In the era of knowledge society, the environment has a new shape.. The comprehension of change, its assimilation and acceptance throughout the world should incite individuals to be more conscious than before, to be alert and perspicacious in order to be able to cope with change and with its impacts. We have to be present in these new spaces to be able to have a place, a position... a status. We should not be frightened by this complex environment. The handling of multiple competences, the mastery of information and communication technologies can be a suitable issue to face change and to manage it adequately. Literacy suggests understanding and the ability to adapt and increase that understanding (Childers, 2003). Learning and acquiring knowledge can cure us from ignorance, failure and distress. The developed world moves forward very rapidly, but reforms in developing countries are often very slow, and human's behavior is often inflexible. Governments should help their citizens by reducing their difficulties and anxiety when being in front of projects that require information search and technology use (Mebarki, 2003) The University has a vital and strategic mission: it should stand as a strong supporting pillar in enhancing development and innovation in all levels (Robles, 2006). Educators and authorities should reconsider the potential of information literacy that should be adopted as a global approach for educating citizens who can be able to develop their own identity in knowledge society. We should stop speaking just about food; it is high time we gave a priority to integrating this new complex society.

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Appendix

Select from the list below according to your preference and in a chronological order the factors required for integrating knowledge society:

Competence	Accepting life-long learning
To be innovative	To accept to be visible
Handling foreign languages	Able to work in networks
Flexibility	Technology literate
Information literate	Accepting change and coping with it
Autonomy	An individual with multiple competencies