ENHANCING THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE SHARING

By Thifhelimbilu Emily SHIRUMA
Vice Chairperson
Competencies of Africa for Africa and Abroad
Pretoria, South Africa.
Shrthioo@yahoo.com

Introduction

This article is based on the reflections of the findings of the study that was exploring the acquisitions and evaluation of interdisciplinarity as a measuring factor for business success. It presents some considerations about Interdisciplinary knowledge sharing and subtly argues that managing indigenous knowledge in an interdisciplinary way can enhance its role in rural development. The issue is that more often, indigenous knowledge is talked about as if there are synergies within different elements - yet in practice different elements and players or practitioners of indigenous knowledge tend to focus on different aspects in isolation. However, the fact that the different aspects of indigenous knowledge co-exist; there is more room of improving its value for development through sharing in an interdisciplinary way. For example, such an approach could lead to combining indigenous and conventional methods and finding common or integrated ground in indigenous knowledge system could be a foundation for rural development. Interdisciplinarity is an indirect means to fulfill the vision of rural and sustainable development. The basis of this article is around interdisciplinarity and sharing of knowledge, which may require describing as an initial step.

The Concept of Interdisciplinary Knowledge Sharing

Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinary knowledge sharing is basically a summation of three stand-alone constructs, which create a stronger meaning when put together. The first concept is the interdisciplinarity, which is actually made up of two words: inter and disciplinarity. Now inter means between, in the midst of, connecting. Thus, interdisciplinarity may be defined as combining in some fashion components of two or more disciplines. It is different from the multi-disciplinarity in that, according to Fairbairn and Fulton, interdisciplinarity ‘focuses on the interrelationships among a range of business disciplines and content areas, and the implications of those interrelationships upon business strategy’.

In simple form, interdisciplinarity emphasises the value of integrating several disciplines to solve a single problem or to tackle one theme. Many of the activities surrounding
interdisciplinarity are related to the notion of knowledge integration. Henceforth, they are not the same. The bridge to differentiate between knowledge integration and interdisciplinary knowledge sharing is very thin. In many ways, the questions of how to organise, conduct and evaluate interdisciplinary work are derivative questions that sort themselves out once interdisciplinarity is seen in a certain context. Following will be an attempt on establishing what it is and above all, why is it important.

Interdisciplinarity is a problem-based/ object-based/ goal oriented approach or analysis in which knowledge and methods from more than one discipline are brought to bear as needed to solve or examine a complex problem, a central theme, or to address an object of study. This is where interdisciplinarity may apply in indigenous knowledge in development, which will requires bringing together different elements to address a particular problem of development.

Knowledge sharing

An organization’s ability to effectively leverage its knowledge is highly dependent on its people, who actually create, share, and use the knowledge. Leveraging knowledge is only possible when people can share the knowledge they have and build on the knowledge of others. Knowledge sharing is basically the act of making knowledge available to others within the organization. Knowledge management specialists argue that knowledge sharing between individuals is the process by which knowledge held by an individual is converted into a form that can be understood, absorbed, and used by other individuals. The use of the term sharing implies that this process of presenting individual knowledge in form that can be used by others involves some conscious action on the part of the individual who possesses the knowledge.

Those who attempt to share knowledge, even if it is just progress, illuminate some confidence to peoples to fill included in the success of an organisation or the process. Interdisciplinary knowledge sharing can be simple if one knows where and how to operate it. As a problem-based approach, is better to create an interdisciplinary team.

There are some general benefits of interdisciplinary knowledge sharing (according to Brett Fairbairn and Marray Fulton). Firstly, it facilitates creative breakthroughs, which emanates from linkage of previously unrelated ideas. Secondly, it provides cross-disciplinary oversights in that disciplinarians often commit errors, which can be best detected by people familiar with two or more disciplines. Thirdly, it creates room for holistic intellectual, social, and practical problem solving. Many complex or practical problems can only be understood by pulling together insights and methodologies from a variety of disciplines. Fourthly, it provides unity of knowledge - interdisciplinarians reveal the various components of human knowledge for what they are. Familiarity with other functional cultures enables seeing of deficiencies in ones own. The real responsibility is not on the individual participant to learn the disciplines of the others, but rather to interpret one’s own discipline to the others so that they can learn what they need for the common project.
Interdisciplinary Knowledge Sharing (iks) in Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS)

It appeared evident from the literature that integration of different disciplines to produce synergy is important in mostly social and development projects hence the importance of interdisciplinarity in sustainable development.

In many instances, indigenous knowledge is not merged with livelihood activities, which tend to fall into disciplines, such as agriculture, forestry, natural resources management, human health, veterinary medicine, livestock management, etc. Indigenous knowledge, in contrast, is holistic and culturally bound. Some studies have shown the importance and complexity of using, for example; religion, ritual and conventional scientific practises together. This may reach a stage where discipline-based solutions fail to address the problems of local people.

In this article, it is viewed that interdisciplinary knowledge sharing goes beyond specialisation, to collaborate on common goals, to embrace interdependence, to deal with key problems that fragmented occupations and perspectives grasp. Framing an interdisciplinary subject is about crossing boundaries. It also implies valuing people and ideas precisely for their differences, since it is the differences that add to the capabilities of a team. Indigenous and scientific knowledge need not be considered isolated from each other.

To apply interdisciplinary knowledge sharing in indigenous knowledge systems, it is better to consider it at the early staging of capturing or compilation of IKS. This could be within the realms of what is called integrated planning in IKS. The purpose of interdisciplinary knowledge sharing can be to streamline and integrate scientific and indigenous knowledge and address some information gaps. In doing so, the IKS will provide a solid platform or tool that can serve for decision making in rural development that can be helpful. IKS can also present common and understandable data.

Interdisciplinary knowledge sharing is almost certainly a key element of the complex system, perhaps the main means in which new connections, new mutualisms, and innovations will be made for rural development. Since the objective of having IKS was not done for one interest but for both interest and participation in either side.

Managing iks in IKS

The discussions above alluded to the possibility of applying interdisciplinary knowledge sharing in IKS. It mainly emphasised the element of interdisciplinarity on the premise that development activities are disciplinary in nature. The next step is to ponder on the aspects of sharing, which is more process than conceptual.

This is informed by the study conducted on interdisciplinarity as a measuring factor for business success, which was evaluating the extent in which interdisciplinarity exists within companies. The reason for doing evaluation was decided after the study's
literature review and guided interview highlighted the importance of interdisciplinarity as an indirect measuring factor of business success. The research was to test the hypothesis stating that “there will be no interdisciplinary without sharing knowledge across different functionality of the company”.

Accordingly, the base for interdisciplinarity to exist is from the sharing first. An evaluation study was conducted to find an extent in which this interdisciplinarity is conducted and then a formative evaluation was conducted through survey and interviews within South African private companies and parastatal organisations. The study found that most of organisations have seen the need of sharing knowledge within for success.

Some ways of sharing used included

* Regular meetings and circulars or announcements
* Newsletters and intranets
* Competitions
* Regular dialogues among different groups
* Informal interactions

Some of these could be used in enhancing IKS. However, it is also pertinent to note some of the constraints around interdisciplinary knowledge sharing implementation:

* Inferiority complex - position threat
* Lack of know- how
* Resistance to change in teaching or sharing knowledge
* Lack of understanding of syntax or language used by others

**Conclusion**

The article has provided the basis within which the concept of interdisciplinarity can be applied in indigenous knowledge system. It supposes that aspects of development and to some extent indigenous knowledge are disciplinary in nature. By creating a platform for sharing among different disciplines would extent the potential of IKS in development.

It is also up to all involved in IK research and development flocale people as well as scientists and development professionals - to collaborate and turn the recommendations about development into action for the betterment of people.

**References**


Listening is the best way to get knowledge