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AN INTRANET-ENABLED PLATFORM TO IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE SHARING, COLLABORATION AND CONTENT MANAGEMENT

by

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DISSERTATION

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Dedication

To my dearest mother, I cannot express the gratitude and appreciation I feel for the support and encouragement you have given me in the past years and for giving me the opportunity to study further when things were hard. Thank you for allowing me to focus on my studies and thank you for the love and blessings you gave me. I am blessed and grateful to have you in my life. You are truly a blessing from God and I will forever cherish your love and support. May God bless you abundantly and may his love forever be with you. To my uncle Bheki Khumalo thank you for the support and playing the role of my father, thank you for the words of wisdom.

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Abstract

The full benefit of SharePoint as a Web application for content management, knowledge sharing and collaboration in support of meeting business objectives is not fully realised at Edcon. The implementation of SharePoint within Edcon gives a clear indication that the organisation recognises its potential, however, the requirement for Edcon to determine whether the implementation of SharePoint meets their users’ needs in terms of knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management needed to be investigated within Edcon Limited Group.

The objectives of the study were to determine how SharePoint enables Edcon to share knowledge, collaborate and manage its content; to investigate the value brought by SharePoint within Edcon and to establish the process for improving the use of SharePoint within Edcon. The main research question determined how the current use of Microsoft SharePoint at Edcon addressed the users’ needs for knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management. The study therefore sought to determine how SharePoint can enable Edcon to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management in order to effectively achieve organisational goals.

Interpretivism was used for this study because it aims to interpret the different perspectives of Edcon SharePoint users with regards to their use of the web enabled platform. The ideal sample on whom this research was conducted was two employees of Edcon responsible for the development of SharePoint in the organisation. They helped determine if the implementation of SharePoint was developed considering the users’ needs and to also find out how SharePoint was expected to be applied by the users from the perspective of the developers
(Durrheim, 2002: 123). A further ten users of SharePoint were selected to determine if the application of SharePoint is meeting their needs. An interview schedule was used to collect data to help determine what the SharePoint users’ needs are and whether they are being met on SharePoint.

The findings of the study indicated that employees of Edcon who use SharePoint used the platform more to collaborate through business reports. The findings also indicated that SharePoint is used effectively within Edcon but the organisation needs to improve the knowledge sharing and content management application of the software. Certain users within Edcon do not understand the full capability of SharePoint, possibly ascribed to some users not getting sufficient or any training on how to effectively use SharePoint. Some users stated that there was a need for knowledge owners within the organisation to manage their content management or knowledge management better as it can at times not be adequately ordered. Research findings indicated that the platform does help employees in various ways, mostly enabling them to cut down on the time wasted in doing unnecessary tasks, and also enabling employees to effectively share reports.

This research gave an overview of the how SharePoint is used within Edcon and how its use can be improved in order to ensure that it functions to enable the organisation to achieve its goals and objectives. In conclusion, people using the implemented technology applications need to fully understand them in order to effectively perform their business processes.

Findings further indicated that the platform is a central repository for business information. The platform also enables the organisation to effectively perform project management which allows them to be more productive in their executive projects.
Based on the findings it was recommended that Edcon should consider implementing knowledge management, to help the organisation to effectively manage and share the knowledge that resides within SharePoint. It was also recommended that IT staff should give effective training to all employees of Edcon who are expected to use the platform effectively. Edcon should create a community of ‘super users’ to champion and develop user expertise of SharePoint. The final recommendation was to strengthen the organisational culture within Edcon, in support of creating a community of users and a culture of sharing knowledge across the entire organisation using SharePoint as the collaboration platform.

**Key words:** SharePoint, knowledge sharing, collaboration, content management, knowledge management, organisational culture.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

Cutting edge web technology applications have improved the manner in which business is conducted, allowing organisations to deliver business projects effectively and quickly (Woodgate, 2012: 1). Web applications such as Microsoft SharePoint enable organisations to deliver business applications in an effective and appropriate manner (Hillier & Pattison, 2013: 146). There is an untapped potential to power up SharePoint as a business application platform (Holliday et al., 2007: 4). The use of SharePoint in the business industry has increased rapidly, over 78% companies from the Fortune 500 companies use the web application for business processes (Woodgate, 2012: 2). Many organisations today, consider SharePoint as a web platform that promotes workflow. Microsoft classifies the web application as a critical business application that has the ability to perform and deliver cutting edge business solutions (Goh, Ang & Sikand, 2003: 161).

“SharePoint is an ‘out of the box’ intranet-enabled portal solution from Microsoft which offers search capability, document management and collaborative features (Goh et al., 2003: 161)”. The use of SharePoint as a critical business tool has the ability to enable organisations to effectively share knowledge, manage business documents/content and collaborate during business projects (Herrera, 2008: 89). This can potentially improve the manner in which businesses conduct and execute their corporate projects (Czuchry & Yasin, 2003: 36). Through the use of SharePoint organisations are able to improve their collaboration practices, which will enable
them to share information or knowledge on the project that they are working on (Herrera, 2008: 87). SharePoint can be defined as a tool used to manage business documents, share knowledge amongst colleagues and enable better collaboration within a business (Sy, 2009: 3).

SharePoint is currently in its fourth version, with previous three not focusing on social media and knowledge management. It has developed greatly in the last decade from its original versions of the SharePoint development team, which was created in 2001 (Hillier & Pattison, 2013: 147). SharePoint is still in its development stages and is yet to be advanced to serve as a business solution application (Allen, Bowden, Liemohn, Ryan, Ryan & Skelly, 2010: 4). The development of SharePoint will ensure that business information needs are met, through advanced web content management, collaboration space and integrated search abilities or capabilities (Allen et al., 2010: 4).

Microsoft SharePoint’s online web based platform has various features to share knowledge, collaborate and manage content on the web for the benefit of the organisation (Sy, 2009: 7). Organisations often fail to harness and utilise SharePoint effectively to their advantage, this is due to a lack of proper skills and knowledge about the web application and organisations lack the ability to approach or use the web applications strategically (Woodgate, 2012: 1). Basically SharePoint consists of functionalities that can enable an organisation to achieve its goals and objectives. SharePoint has three significant functionalities, which are knowledge sharing/knowledge management, collaboration and content management (Koplowitz & Owens, 2009: 8). Through SharePoint organisations can share and manage significant knowledge about their business processes (Koplowitz & Owens, 2009: 22). The intranet-enabled platform also allows the employees within an organisation
to collaborate and work collectively on their business projects and business team tasks (Koplowitz & Owens, 2009: 9).

This study on Edcon’s use of SharePoint is therefore conducted in order to evaluate and determine the manner in which Edcon uses the web application and how and if its use can be enhanced. The research project aims to determine how effective SharePoint is used within Edcon, what the Edcon users of SharePoint think about its use, whether it can be enhanced and what are the unmet needs of users are.

Edcon Limited Group is a retail organisation which is based and located in Johannesburg, South Africa. Its retail outlets are Edgars, Boardmans, Prato, Red Square, Temptation, Jet Mart, Legit, Blacksnow and CNA (Elmo, 2011: 12). Edcon’s business in retail has been able to open stationary and houseware brands’ through their recent acquisitions (Elmo, 2011: 14). The organisation also offers financial services, such as various financial service products and credit facilities to over 4 million of their cardholders (Elmo, 2011: 25). Edcon uses SharePoint in order to manage their project documents’ and collaborate on projects in progress (Van der Decken, 2005: 2). Van der Decken (2005: 2) is of the opinion that organisations need to develop unique ideas on how to improve the use of SharePoint to their advantage, which will also be beneficial to Edcon. It is significant for Edcon to recognise the critical business benefit that can be brought in by the appropriate use of SharePoint as a critical business web application (Slabbert, 2008: 2). If Edcon needs to utilise SharePoint better in support of its organisational goals it is essential to know how Edcon is currently using SharePoint.
1.2. Research problem statement

The need for corporate organisations like Edcon to recognise SharePoint capabilities to their fullest is shown to be significant from the discussion in Section 1.1. The implementation of Microsoft SharePoint by Edcon is a clear indication that the organisation recognises and acknowledges the role of the web platform as a crucial business tool that can help it improve its business functions. Edcon needs to be able to ensure that Microsoft SharePoint meets its users’ needs and that the web platform enables its employees to share knowledge, collaborate and manage content. The use of SharePoint by Edcon employees has to be investigated in order to determine if the web platform meets their needs as users. If Edcon fails to develop various knowledge management collaboration strategies in order to use SharePoint effectively or to recognise the vast capabilities of SharePoint, it will fail in ensuring the full exploitation of the web platform as a solution. This research aims to determine if SharePoint is effectively used within Edcon and if it is meeting the users’ needs. This will determine the manner in which SharePoint should be used or enhanced to suit Edcon’s SharePoint users’ needs and the organisation as a whole.

Aim of research

This proposed research aims to determine how SharePoint can enable Edcon to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and document management in order to effectively achieve organisational goals.

Objectives:

(i) To determine how SharePoint enables Edcon to share knowledge, collaborate and manage its documents and content.

(ii) To investigate the value brought by SharePoint within Edcon.
(iii) To establish the process for improving the use of SharePoint within Edcon.

These objectives are identified in order to ensure that the following research question is addressed.

Research question

How does the current use of Microsoft SharePoint at Edcon address the users’ need for knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management?

Research sub-questions

(i) How is SharePoint used within Edcon and does it meet the users’ needs?
(ii) How does SharePoint help Edcon to share knowledge through improved collaboration?
(iii) What are the benefits of using SharePoint to share knowledge, to collaborate and manage project content and documents for Edcon?
(iv) How effective is SharePoint in helping Edcon to execute its corporate projects?
(v) What recommendations can be made to improve the use of SharePoint within Edcon?

To meet the above research questions the following suitable research delineation were identified and used as research instrument to gather and analyse data and information.

1.3. Research delineation

Research design and methods are discussed in detail in Chapter 3, but an overview of the chosen approaches is given to delineate the research. Qualitative data was
collected using interviews and semi-structured questionnaires (Bricki & Green, 2007: 28). Interpretivism guided the research approach to analyse information on effective use of the application from the perceptions of SharePoint users at Edcon.

The principles of evaluation research (Section 3.3) were used to analyse the data through descriptive analysis. Evaluation research was regarded as an appropriate fit due to the research aimed at evaluating the use of SharePoint as an intervention implemented within Edcon.

Purposive sampling was selected, (described in detail in Section 3.4) and data validity was achieved through member checking to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the data collected. Because research is focused on unveiling the value brought in by SharePoint within Edcon and aims to determine how its use can be improved for improved harnessing of Edcon’s critical business applications and projects, a number of limitations have to be noted.

1.4. Limitations

The first limitation is that the research was a single case which means that the findings cannot be generalised to a larger population and is only limited to the specifics of this case at Edcon headquarters. The time frame is cross sectional which means that findings are only relevant to the period of time when the study was conducted and if any aspects in the organisation change it could have an adverse effect on the findings as well and the study would have to be repeated considering the new conditions.

Another limitation is the number of staff that was made available for interviews (Appendix A). Edcon limited the staff that could participate, which limits the number
of views from which an understanding of the users and developers’ perspective could be gained. Considering the limitations focused on data collection, advantages and disadvantages of interviews, it was decided to use semi-structured questions in face to face interviews to collect data. This was done to stay true to interpretivist approaches and to prompt users to gain depth insight into their opinion and perspectives. Although this was deemed the best fit for the study, admittedly any method has inherent limitations and should anonymous questionnaires have been used it could be possible that more or different data could have come to light. Further research is therefore recommended, but there was no indication of a negative impact on the value of data gained in this specific study.

The study is organised according to the following chapters.

1.5. Chapter outline

Chapter 2 is an in-depth discussion on how Microsoft SharePoint enables organisations to manage their organisational documents and, content and share knowledge across the organisation about the projects they undertake. In this chapter SharePoint is discussed as a web-based platform, used for collaboration. The advantages and challenges of SharePoint are also discussed.

Chapter 3 maps out the research design and the methods that were used to conduct the research on the use of SharePoint within Edcon. The research designs selected are discussed on how they supported the researcher in addressing the research questions and problem. Each step of the research design and methods was discussed according to its relevance to the research project.
Chapter 4 reports on how SharePoint is used within Edcon. It further indicates whether SharePoint is used effectively within Edcon to best suit organisational goals and objectives. The analysed findings gathered from Edcon are interpreted in this chapter and highlights the factors that contribute to poor use of SharePoint within Edcon. Perceptions were analysed to provide an indication of how SharePoint can be better utilised in Edcon.

Chapter 5 summarises the study showing how the research objectives have been met and providing recommendations for this research project. Recommendations for future research and a final conclusion of the study are provided.
CHAPTER 2

SHAREPOINT AS A COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM

2.1. Introduction

The literature review evaluates an intranet enabled platform as a tool that can be utilised for knowledge management and, sharing, collaboration, content management and innovation for sustainable competitive advantage. The literature starts by discussing people, processes and technology as the three core elements of an organisation’s agility and transformation to gaining sustainable competitive advantage. Business strategy is then used to elaborate its role in enabling an organisation to gain sustainable competitive advantage. Further discussion is on the role of organisational culture and knowledge management within an organisation and the significance of sharing knowledge for improved business processes and collaboration (Bytheway, 2011: 25). The role of collaboration for improved project management and resource management, is then elaborated on.

The importance of content management and content management systems is explored in detail. The significance of strategic decision making is explained along with the importance and role of innovation within an organisation in order to build sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore a short discussion on the importance of an organisation to develop, sustain and maintain competitive advantage is provided. The literature review then concludes with an in depth elaboration on the role and function of SharePoint as an intranet enabled platform that can facilitate all the above discussed topics. How SharePoint links with the above mentioned topics is explored along with the various tools it possesses.
An organisation can neither operate nor implement any strategy and achieve competitive advantage without the core three elements of people, processes and technology as discussed next.

**2.2. People, processes and technology**

There is finely tuned relationship between people, processes and technology within an organisation and the three can never be separated (Barnes, 2011: 4). An organisation cannot function without people, the processes that help the organisation function and technology as the enabler. It is significant to note the relationship between the three and how they play a huge role in ensuring that an organisation functions effectively to achieve competitive advantage (Barnes, 2011: 4). Therefore it is important to understand the three core elements separately and their relationships with one another. People are important for the productivity of an organisation, they form part of human capital and they ensure that a business functions effectively. People, without the understanding of their processes are not assets for a company, but people need to develop and understand their processes in order to ensure the organisation’s success (Barnes, 2011: 4).

Processes enhance the organisation’s operational efficiency, and enable an organisation to adhere to certain procedures and organisational rules. If the processes are not clearly defined the organisation will fail to function and the people will not understand their duties (Barnes, 2011: 4). Technology forms the core infrastructure for an organisations information and process; it is the foundation that facilitates agility and growth within an organisation (Barnes, 2011: 4). If the technology is not properly designed and its capabilities and functions are not well defined, this will contribute to the failure of an organisation (Barnes, 2011: 4). People
need to understand their technology platforms and address the need of technology for the application of business processes.

People, processes and technology are all governed by a business strategy; the three have to operate in accordance with the business strategy.

2.3. The role of a business strategy within an organisation

Business strategy can be defined as the plans, different choices and the decisions that are used as a guideline for an organisation to gain success and be profitable (Kourdi, 2009: 3). Basically business strategy provides motivation for the success of a company and, it is important for an organisation to develop a well-defined and strong business strategy as this contributes to its success. An organisation should always conduct its processes in line with its business strategy. In this case an organisation performing knowledge management should consider the business strategy beforehand (Kourdi, 2009: 3).

It is significant to note that a business strategy plays a crucial role in positioning the direction of an organisation. Basically a business strategy enables an organisation to identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Choo & Bontis, 2002: 256). This allows the organisation to work on sustaining its strengths, thrive to improve its weaknesses, capitalise on its opportunities and act against its threats. A business strategy gives direction to the organisation and enables it to analyse its industry and position and allocated its resources and function towards achieving certain goals and objectives (Choo & Bontis, 2002: 256).

A business strategy gives employees a sense of duty and ensures that all their actions and tasks are directly influenced by the strategy (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011: 256).
The business strategy guides the day to day functions of an organisation. An organisation is able to commit to the business strategy and it also enables employees to create new opportunities and gain new insights about competitors, customers and suppliers (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011: 177). It also ensures that all the employees of an organisation focus on creating new innovative ideas that are in line with the business strategy. Through a business strategy employees are encouraged to use tools that facilitate the business strategy objectives (Pugh & Bourgeois, 2011: 174). Thus, a business strategy should always support and facilitate an organisation to achieve its strategic goals, create innovation and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

The ability of an organisation to make strategic decisions create innovative ideas and gain sustainable competitive advantage, will always rely on the business strategy. Therefore it is important to recognise the value of strategic decision making and innovation for sustainable competitive advantage.

2.4. Strategic decision making and innovation for sustainable competitive advantage

It is important to recognise the relation between people, processes and technology and how they contribute in enabling an organisation to make strategic decisions, create innovation and achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Burch, 2013: 50). Therefore it is important to understand strategic decision making, innovation and sustainable competitive advantage before defining their relationship (Bowes & Khorakian, 2014: 4). Strategic decision making can be defined as the process of reasoning on clearly defined processes in order to support effective decision making. Strategic decision making is the use of various tools and information in order to aid
accurate and timely decision making (Zarate, 2012: 3). Strategic decision making is the ability of an organisation to take high risk decisions based on particular acquired information (Vermeulen & Curseu, 2008: 177). Strategic decision making supports an organisation’s team to make accurate decision and also to develop innovation (Zarate, 2012: 3).

Although the term innovation has many definitions they all form the basis of what the term stands for. Innovation refers to the process of changing something that already exists and presenting something new. Innovation also is the ability to create a product that adds value to clients in a new way and has never been created before (Sullivan, 2008: 4). It can be said that innovation is the creation of new knowledge for an organisation; innovation is the creation and development of new ideas and products that add value to an organisation and its clients (Sullivan, 2008: 5). With new products and ideas an organisation has leverage to function in a more sustainable competitive way.

The fundamental foundation of a successful organisation is its ability to achieve and maintain sustainable competitive advantage (Sengupta, 2003: 7). Sustainable competitive advantage refers to the ability of an organisation to develop different types of strategies that can contribute to sustaining competitive advantage for a long period of time (Sengupta, 2003: 7). The concept refers to the implementation of different types of strategies that create value and they cannot simultaneously be implemented by other competitors, the present or future (Sengupta, 2003: 7).

Sustainable competitive advantage can only be achieved if an organisation always stays ahead of its competition and continuously generates new knowledge and products. If an organisation is able to tap into its employees, processes and market
insights and knowledge it has a better chance to gain competitive advantage (Johannessen & Olsen, 2009: 560). The integration of technology products with the employees' knowledge and market insights and organisation can achieve sustainable competitive advantage. An organisation’s capability to sustain competitive advantage and create innovation will rely on timely, informed and strategic decision (Frishammar, 2003: 318). It is important to note that strategic decision making ensures that good decisions are made for the creation of innovation making (Frishammar, 2003: 319). Thus, allowing an organisation to sustain its competitive advantage.

Strategic decision making is important within an organisation, it enables an organisation to gain and capture insights and knowledge in order to make accurate and informed decisions. The process of strategic decision making serves a significant role in the creation of innovation and achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Harrison, 1996: 48). All decisions made within an organisation have to align with the objectives of the management and ensures that all alternatives are considered before any decision is made (Harrison, 1996: 48). Strategic decision making has a process that enables employees to capture and access information about their strengths and weaknesses (Harrison, 1996: 49). Threats and opportunities are also accessed in order to ensure that an organisation avoids threats and capitalises on opportunities, thus innovation can be created (Harrison, 1996: 49).

Strategic decision making is important in the creation of innovation and sustaining competitive advantage. The business environment has changed rapidly, in terms of complexity. Gaining information from external and internal sources for innovation is vital; innovation is a strategic product or resource for organisations which contributes
to sustainable competitive advantage. Figure 2.1 shows the strategic decision making process.

Figure 2.1: The strategic decision-making processes (Harrison, 1996: 50)

Strategic decision making relies on processed and accurate information or intelligence. An organisation should know its environment and should know itself as well, this will enable it to assess its gaps. Thus assessing its gap will ensure that various alternatives are available for decision making and that these alternatives are in line with the objectives of the organisation. Figure 2.1 shows that information gathered for strategic decision making should be carefully evaluated and processed.
before it is used for decision making. Knowledge management plays an important role in ensuring that accurate information and knowledge is captured for strategic decision making. Innovation can be created through effective knowledge management practice.

Knowledge management supports the strategic decision process, by ensuring that all relevant knowledge and insight within and outside an organisation are captured and analysed in a systemic way for well informed, accurate and strategic decision making (Geisler & Wickramasinghe, 2009: 5). Knowledge management enables an organisation to gain access to tacit knowledge which in turn may result in gaining access to innovative ideas from the employees within an organisation.

Innovation enables an organisation to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in many ways and according to Hana (2013: 84) there are several characteristics of innovation:

- Building a strong relationship between the performance of the market and new products.
- New products ensure that market is shared and profit is gained.
- Growth in new designs and quality of products.
- Ensures that outdated products are replaced.
- Innovative processes ensure effective and efficient new product creation.

The ability of an organisation to use its technological facilities and business strategies to capture insights and new knowledge is important in the creation of innovation and achieving sustainable competitive advantage Geisler and Wickramasinghe (2009: 560). With technological innovations and the ability of organisations to generate and manage new knowledge and insights, organisations
can create innovative ideas and sustain competitive advantage (Hana, 2013: 84). Organisational culture can play an important role in ensuring that innovation is created and the organisation gains sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore it is important to understand the impact of organisational culture within an organisation.

2.5. The impact of organisational culture on an organisation

Organisational culture can be defined as the foundation that holds an organisation together through shared cultural meaning (Inceoglu, 2002: 16). It is a unity or cohesion of principles, cultural symbols, values and myths that have great meaning to the people who work within an organisation (Inceoglu, 2002: 16). It can also be defined as behaviours that are influenced by certain values and norms within an organisation (Inceoglu, 2002: 16).

In order to ensure good knowledge sharing practices it is important to recognise the importance of instilling a knowledge sharing culture within an organisation (Smith & McKeen, 2005: 3). A knowledge sharing culture will ensure growing knowledge assets and will also enable an organisation to set it apart from other organisations (Smith & McKeen, 2005: 3). Knowledge sharing can also decrease costs and increase and improve customer satisfaction. An organisation should always instil an effective organisational culture, which will help contribute to its performance (McShane, 2000: 505).

Organisational culture can influence the performance of an organisation in various ways. Figure 2.2 illustrates strategies for strengthening organisational culture.
An organisational culture is a form of social control that influences the behaviour and decisions of employees (McShane, 2000: 505). Thus, it is important to note that organisational culture directs employees towards the organisation's expectations. An organisational culture glues together all employees and ensures that they feel part of an organisation. It ties people together, thus allowing them to share expertise and work as a unit to achieve the organisation's goals and objectives. Most importantly organisational culture ensures that employees understand all the events within an organisation. This allows them to know and understand what is expected of them and they communicate effectively as they share common goals (McShane, 2000: 505).

Communication has the ability to strengthen organisational culture and there are five approaches that strengthen organisational culture within an organisation (McShane,
Actions of founders and leaders represent the systems and structures developed by the founders who support individual values (McShane, 2000: 513). Introducing cultural consistent rewards represents the consistency of organisational culture and cultural values and individual inducements. Maintaining a stable workforce represents an organisational culture that is embedded within the minds of individuals in an organisation (McShane, 2000: 513). Managing the cultural network represents an organisation that has an effective network of cultural programmes that promote beliefs and values (McShane, 2000: 514). Selecting and socialising employees represents hiring individuals who have similar values as the organisation (McShane, 2000: 514).

Organisational culture enables employees to do and think according to the manner that an organisation requires (Maull, Brown & Cliffe, 2001: 305). Therefore employees act according to the organisational culture and the business strategy of an organisation. Thus, it is important to understand that a knowledge management strategy supports the business strategy of an organisation and the essence of a business strategy when performing knowledge management.

2.6. Business strategy for knowledge management

Business strategy is probably the most important element of an organisation and to effectively manage an organisation an adequate business strategy has to be in place (Sekulic, 2002: 67). For an organisation to create its portfolio and determine the allocation of resources for competitive advantage, a business strategy is needed. It
enhances the performance of an organisation and creates value for shareholders (Sekulic, 2002: 67). A business strategy emphasises the positioning and gaining or developing of resources that are valuable for sustainable competitive advantage and for long term business performance (Sekulic, 2002: 68). A business strategy therefore provides the foundation for strategic decision making, will drive innovation towards competitive advantage and drives decision making. Information and knowledge is critical in effective management of organisations and in itself requires management.

Knowledge management is therefore another process undertaken by an organisation to ensure the capturing, storing and sharing of valuable organisational content (Robinson, Carrillo, Anumba & Al-Ghassani, 2001: 578). Knowledge management involves the process of monitoring and evaluating the organisation's people, the processes and its products which enables it to collect and share valuable business insight and knowledge for improved performance (Robinson et al., 2001: 578).

2.6.1. Knowledge management

Knowledge management can be defined as the discipline that enhances an integrated manner in order to identify, manage and share all the information needs of an organisation (Geisler & Wickramasinghe, 2009: 4). Knowledge management can further be defined as the process of intelligence through which data is collected and transformed into valuable information components (Geisler & Wickramasinghe, 2009: 5).

Knowledge management is also defined as the field or discipline that enables individuals within an organisation to gather and share knowledge in order to achieve the organisation's goals and objectives. Basically knowledge management can be
explained as a multidisciplinary method or approach that involves a systematic interpretation of information assets of an organisation, through gathering, managing and sharing them. These information assets often refer to the explicit knowledge, for example a database and documents of an organisation and the tacit knowledge, such as employee expertise, skills and working experience (Geisler & Wickramasinghe, 2009: 5). It is therefore significant to understand the benefits of knowledge management within an organisation.

2.6.2. The benefits of knowledge management within an organisation

Knowledge management continues to form the most fundamental tool in achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Magnusson, Nilsson & Valentin, 2009: 1). It is important to consider knowledge management as the tool that meets the knowledge needs of an organisation and the need to capture that knowledge for an improved competitive edge (Magnusson et al., 2009: 1). Knowledge management forms the core base of an organisation’s information management, allowing the organisation to strategise on how to better leverage its organisation information to its advantage (Magnusson et al., 2009: 1).

Knowledge management plays an important role in the creation of innovation. In the ever changing business industry, innovation is the strength of an organisation (Du Plessis, 2003: 1). Innovation has influenced the fast growing economic world in a crucial way. This is because new technologies have been developed; there is a decrease in the product life cycle and rapid growth in the creation of new products. It is significant for organisations to create innovative business strategies that will help them create and maintain a competitive advantage (Du Plessis, 2003: 1). Innovation has been heavily influenced by the amount of knowledge available within an
organisation. Innovation strongly relies on the accessibility of knowledge. Therefore all the richness and explosion of knowledge has to be located, captured and managed effectively for the success of innovation (Du Plessis, 2003: 1).

The combination of knowledge management and innovation determines how an organisation can capitalise and develop new products and knowledge (Du Plessis, 2003: 5). Knowledge management plays a significant role in building a sustainable competitive advantage for an organisation and towards developing innovation. The major role that knowledge management plays in innovation is ensuring the sharing and systematisation of tacit knowledge. Sharing tacit knowledge is central to the creation of innovation; an organisation that creates innovation through tacit knowledge has a better competitive edge (Du Plessis, 2003: 5). Explicit knowledge also plays a role in innovation but it is easy for competitors to replicate strategies (Du Plessis, 2003: 6).

An organisation requires solid and well-built infrastructure for the management of its insights and knowledge. Having knowledge readily available through information systems and actionable insights and knowledge is important (Chikati & Mpofu, 2013: 77). The use of information and communication technology (ICT) enables an organisation to generate knowledge and insight that needs for informed and strategic decision making (De Hengst & Sol, 2001: 41). Knowledge management systems enable all employees to capture knowledge and insight about the performance of a business and ensures that employees share their skills and expertise and use them for competitive advantage (Chikati & Mpofu, 2013: 77).

For an organisation to gain competitive advantage, knowledge management needs to support the organisation’s understanding of where it is coming from and where it is
going (Chikati & Mpofu, 2013: 78). Knowledge management has the ability to drive businesses to greater heights (Chikati & Mpofu, 2013: 78). Thus knowledge sharing needs to be effectively practiced.

2.6.3. Knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing can be defined as central knowledge processes that involve an individual person choosing to share knowledge, or remembering certain knowledge and converting that knowledge into intelligence (Maier, Hadrick & Peinl, 2009: 412). Knowledge sharing can also be defined as the process in which an individual actively shares or transfers knowledge to another person, which recognises the information or knowledge and interprets it in the context in which it is given so that the knowledge is changed and interpreted to another person’s knowledge base (Maier et al., 2009: 412). The process of knowledge sharing involves the communication and interactions between various individuals through a managed process structure within an institution (Menkhoff, Evers & Wah, 2010: 306). The following section consider the benefits of knowledge sharing within an organisation.

2.6.4. The benefits of knowledge sharing within an organisation

Knowledge management has gained much interest from the business sector. The corporate sector is starting to recognise the role and the significance of knowledge and the positive impact it has when harnessed effectively (Goh, 2005: 6). The emergence of new technological solution has fuelled knowledge management and is thus improving the process of knowledge sharing within an organisation. It is important to recognise the benefits of knowledge sharing within an organisation. Knowledge sharing enables the creation of new innovative ideas with the appropriate
use of technology. Sharing knowledge can unlock the innovative and creative human capacity (Goh, 2005: 6). Knowledge sharing facilitates the creation of valuable knowledge, which will ensure the creation of innovation and improvement of production within an organisation. It is important to recognise that humans working within an organisation play an important role in the creation of knowledge (Goh, 2005: 8).

There are basic conditions that have to exist in order to ensure the capturing of tacit knowledge. New knowledge begins with an individual and the ability of an organisation to capture that knowledge for better decision making (Seidler-de Alwis & Hartmann, 2008: 136). Knowledge of an individual within an organisation can be transformed into organisational knowledge, which will be valuable to an organisation. Sharing knowledge should be the core activity of an organisation (Seidler-de Alwis & Hartmann, 2008: 136). According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995: 57) through knowledge sharing an organisation can develop certain critical knowledge sharing methods, which are referred to as knowledge conversion. The following are four types of knowledge conversion:

- **Socialization:** This refers to transferring tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge.
- **Externalization:** This refers to transferring tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge.
- **Combination:** This refers to transferring explicit knowledge to explicit knowledge.
- **Internalisation:** This refers to transferring explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge.
Knowledge created using the spiral process can enable the creation of new knowledge and expand it across the entire organisation (Seidler-de Alwis & Hartmann, 2008: 136).

Through knowledge sharing practices and the application of ICT tools, organisations can be able to tap into tacit knowledge from their employees which will contribute to a productive organisation (Goh, 2005: 13). ICT supports the knowledge sharing process through a system that enhances the creation of knowledge (Goh, 2005: 13). Sharing knowledge promotes the creation of knowledge based assets, such as new products, processes and people with new knowledge about how work can be improved. These ensure that through knowledge initiatives, good harnessing of knowledge is great for innovation.

Knowledge has a number of advantages such as transferring knowledge from one person to another, which has a valuable impact on an organisation’s daily function. Tacit knowledge brings value to an organisation, and have an important role in the processes of innovation, business process and the production of new knowledge (Seidler-de Alwis & Hartmann, 2008: 141). When tacit knowledge is shared effectively it allows for the improvement of processes and technology products within an organisation. Not only does knowledge sharing promote innovation but it contributes a great deal to the creation of intellectual capital (Seidler-de Alwis & Hartmann, 2008: 142).

Knowledge sharing, especially sharing tacit knowledge, is crucial in the creation of new knowledge and innovation within an organisation. Knowledge sharing relies on collaboration to be efficient. Thus the role of collaboration will be discussed in the next section.
2.7. The role of collaboration within an organisation

Collaboration refers to the act of working together within a shared space; it also means working together in order to establish certain organisational goals and objectives. Collaboration includes working on projects with common goals and objectives as a team (Calinda Software, 2010: 06). It includes helping each other as a team to accomplish certain tasks or projects; it is also about improving the capability of the whole team (Ahuja, Tang & Shankar, 2009: 4). Collaboration involves the improvement of each other’s strength when working on projects. It is an act that facilitates the movement from an idea to action as a team, and includes individuals being able to listen to each other and help each other (Seidler-de Alwis & Hartmann, 2008: 142).

Many organisations function with the help of various individuals working towards achieving the goals and objectives of an organisation (Londer & Coventry, 2013: 1). These individuals work in different departments to ensure that an organisation functions effectively. In order for an organisation to be properly managed, each department needs to function to achieve the goals set out by an organisation (Londer & Coventry, 2013: 1). Each department functions according to certain standards and activities of controlling and planning that ensure that goals and objectives are achieved effectively. Through collaboration, individuals within an organisation can support each other in managing the organisation and improving business solutions (Londer & Coventry, 2013: 4). People working for an organisation can also share ideas and expertise. Collaboration enables people to quickly connect with organisational resources and information that will help them to complete tasks that they are working on. Collaboration helps build a collaborative environment that in turn
will improve decision-making and productivity within an organisation (Londer & Coventry, 2013: 4).

The benefit of collaboration is that an organisation can gain higher productivity and improve the visibility of the organisation. Through collaboration an organisation can improve its flexibility and gain customer satisfaction (Kumar & Banerjee, 2014: 184). Collaboration enables an organisation to communicate openly, share various skills and knowledge, share the risks and rewards within an organisation and enable continuous learning (Osterman, 2010: 241). An organisation can be able to quickly identify customer needs and wants when they collaborate and share market related information, which in turn will improve customer satisfaction and improved revenues (Kumar & Banerjee, 2014: 189). Practicing collaboration also improves the free flow of knowledge that enhances decision-making (Kumar & Banerjee, 2014: 188). It is also important that business teams communicate and work together to achieve the goals and objectives of an organisation (Kumar, 2014: 184). Communication is important within an organisation, this is because it enables everyone to be aware of what projects other departments are working on and what they have achieved (Londer & Coventry, 2013: 1). Collaboration involves the process of sharing content amongst employees. Therefore it is important to discuss the role of content management within an organisation.

2.8. The role of content management within an organisation

The amount of content which organisations have to manage is increasing (Bishop, 2007: 2). The cost of managing content is also increasing as the need to manage the content increases. Organisations have a growing need to quickly and easily manage, store and retrieve the organisation’s content in order to provide solutions to business
needs and problems that range from customer satisfaction to disaster management (Goodyear, 2013: 69). Organisations have more content to deal with on a daily basis, as they are faced with having to manage large amounts of data, information and knowledge (Browning & Lowndes, 2001: 3). It is important to recognise the role of effectively managing content as it plays a major role in supporting the information needs of an organisation (Bishop, 2007: 2). Content management can benefit an organisation in various ways and it is a system that functions to ensure that content of an organisation is managed effectively and efficiently.

When content management is done properly an organisation can have excellent information and content management practices which will ensure that appropriate metadata is captured at the time it is created (Browning & Lowndes, 2001: 4). This will ensure that employees have access to current information and content about their organisation which will ensure informed decision making. The objective of content management is to increase the integration and automation of the system and process which facilitates effective and efficient content delivery (Browning & Lowndes, 2001: 4).

If an organisation manages the creation and publication of its valuable content, it can then function in a more effective and efficient manner it can also make better decisions (Browning & Lowndes, 2001: 3). Content management allows an organisation to reuse information by ensuring easy access to content and data from diverse sources within a system or application. Through content management information can be refined and processed for accurate decision making. Information can be maintained by various individuals and still be preserved on an organisation’s central repository (Browning & Lowndes, 2001: 3). Content management and the technology tools used to manage content saves time and is cost effective for
organisations, as the system has various functions that ensure good management of documents and content (Browning & Lowndes, 2001: 3). It plays a crucial role in capturing, managing and using content for decision making.

It is important to recognise that the discussed topics can be supported by a technology tool as an enabler. SharePoint is such a technological enabler and the following section sets out SharePoint as a business tool and how it contributes to the business processes, agility and strategies of an organisation (Capaldo, Flanagan & Littrel, 2008: 36). Understanding the role of technology, the relationship it has with people and processes is vital. The tools that technology offers are valuable to understand in order for an organisation to be able to select the most suitable technological platforms to use.

2.9. The relationship between technology, people and processes

Technology has a distinctive relationship with people and processes. It is the overall infrastructure that builds the fundamental foundation for improvement and agility (Emerson Network power, 2013: 8). Technology provides people with a platform and tools that enable them to perform their business processes and it supports business processes within an organisation. It facilitates the planning and management of an organisation by giving people access to real time information for enhanced decision making (Emerson Network power, 2013: 6).

Information technology supports business processes by providing platforms that ensure the effective communication between various individuals within and outside the organisation. Technology also provides people with access to business insights, supplier insights and customer insights (Emerson Network power, 2013: 10). Organisations have the need to manage their information and knowledge and to
collaborate. Technology has the ability to perform these functions and therefore understanding the significance of using technology, such as SharePoint within an organisation, is helpful.

2.10. Introduction to SharePoint

According to Riley and White (2013: 24) SharePoint is an intranet enabled platform that can assist an organisation to perform various tasks through the function:

- Dashboards and key performance indicator
- User-driven business intelligence
- Data mining
- Document Management (DM)
- Web Content Management (WCM)
- Records Management (RM)
- Document-centric collaboration
- Workflow (WF)
- Document Imaging (DI).

SharePoint can be defined as a web enabled application that is installed on Microsoft Windows servers and that can be accessed from different machines in the network through a web browser (Crane, 2010: 3). On the web site one can store different information, such as documents, e-mails, spreadsheets, etc. It enables an individual to store business information including tasks, projects, calendars and more. It therefore acts as a central repository to store all business information (Crane, 2010: 3). SharePoint is an automated platform and technology system that has the ability to facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management (Sy, 2012: 4).
SharePoint has a reputation for facilitating excellent collaboration and has the ability to support business applications (Krause, Langhirt, Sterff, Pehlke & Doring, 2010: 73). SharePoint consists of features and functionalities that are suitable for an organisation for its workflow, and allows it to work with its clients through customised models that ensure effective and efficient collaboration (Microsoft, 2010: 91).

This customised platform site allows clients and employees of an organisation to gain access to content management through SharePoint (Allen et al., 2010: 19). SharePoint contains various content management functions that include eDiscovery, electronic forms, records declarations, compound documents, user and service level audit logs, business process management and consistent metadata models (Riley & White, 2013: 4). Understanding the various tools within SharePoint is important in this study in order to understand the developer and user perspectives.

2.10.1. SharePoint features and tools

It is vital to identify and understand the various SharePoint features or tools and their functions. The following are the various tools within Microsoft SharePoint:

i) Portal site

The portal site basically is a digital dashboard embedded within SharePoint and consists of web parts and building blocks which are implemented using collaboration data objects which enables knowledge management practices through Microsoft SharePoint. The portal site allows users to share documents they are working on and to be able to communicate with each other online on the projects that they are working on (Laahs, McKenna & Vickers, 2002: 12). The discussion feature allows members of an organisation to constantly share information about the project progress (Fenz, 2012: 238). More importantly Microsoft SharePoint can allow users
to update the content; this is to indicate the number of tasks that are completed (Herrera, 2008: 91). Through SharePoint team members are able to tap into each other’s knowledge of work and be able to learn from one another in order to complete projects (Fenz, 2012: 239).

ii) Exchange public folders

Exchange public folders is a tool within SharePoint that facilitates the sharing and exchange of folders containing more than one document. SharePoint allows users to share files and folders in order to ensure good knowledge sharing practice within an organisation. Employees are able to communicate and share documents that are helpful to one another in making accurate and credible decisions (Laahs et al., 2002: 31).

iii) Best bets

Best bets is a feature that allows the business employees to communicate with their clients and share knowledge about the needs of both the organisation and the clients. The feature is useful because it draws clients to an organisation workspace, were they are able to communicate with the business and share knowledge about how they can enhance business and improve their business relationship. Basically Best bets allow the appropriate categorisation of documents in order to enable readers to gain knowledge and access to the best organisational information (Laahs et al., 2002: 42).

iv) Document libraries

Many organisations work with electronic documents, that vary from Excel spreadsheets and Word documents or any other relevant documents. These
documents remain stored throughout their lifecycle (Herrera, 2008: 87). Documents in the SharePoint libraries are stored and managed in order to ensure effective retrieval when requested (Reed, 2007: 414). SharePoint document libraries provided a collaboration function as a sophisticated interface that has the capability to effectively track documents (Herrera, 2008: 87). The SharePoint document library tool enables individuals to not only see if the document was viewed before but to also see the name of the person who has viewed and changed it (Davis, Adams & Keene, 2002: 23). The tool also allows users to check out and check in files (Herrera, 2008: 87). The tool has various icons that indicate whether various persons are working on the same document (Herrera, 2008: 87). It improves collaboration between colleagues by allowing individuals to improve documents but always saves an edited document as a new one (Herrera, 2008: 88). The following are the functions within document library:

- **Change request:** The tool allows an individual to request different changes in documents or project task.
- **Budget:** Budget as a tool functions to store all manner of content about the project budget.
- **Risk/issue log:** Through this tool individuals within an organisation are able to track various risks and issues during a project.
- **Project documents:** The project documents tool provides a project manager and employees with a repository to store project documents.
- **Project schedule:** Through this tool individuals working on a project have access to project the time line and due date on which the project has to be completed.
- **Content approval:** This tool is used to indicate the approval of certain completed project documents.

- **Version control:** Functions to control different versions of project documents; this includes documents that have been changed.

- **Check-in checkout:** Monitors the checking in and out of various project team members within the platform.

v) **Project tasks and tracking**

This tool is embedded within SharePoint and it improves collaboration. It allows information to be presented using a list through issue tracking tool (Herrera, 2008: 90). This tool allows individuals to gain access to information on projects that they are working on (Tenrox, 2015: 12). This tool allows employees to create tasks and assign the tasks to various team members (Millett, Te'o, Rhodes, Clarke & Carwell, 2005: 122). The managers can also prioritise tasks and set due dates and as team members work on the project they can update information to indicate the project progress (Herrera, 2008: 90). These two tools deliver readily and timely information on project management to the employees (Herrera, 2008: 90).

vi) **Wikis**

Wikis are tools also embedded within SharePoint that enable individuals to work and improve the same documents. Through this tool an individual can view and edit documents within an online-shared space. Wikis provides colleagues within an organisation with a platform and online space that enables them to share ideas, information and knowledge which improves the manner in which an organisation functions (Vasquez & Potter, 2013: 146).
vii) Cloud services

The cloud service tool embedded within SharePoint includes social networking sites, blogs, e-mails and social bookmarking. These tools use all these sites to improve communication within an organisation. Individuals are able to communicate and engage with each other about the work that they are doing. They can even communicate with each other from different locations, which enables timely decision-making (Scale, 2009: 12). Discussing the benefits of SharePoint is vital.

2.10.2. The benefits of using SharePoint

SharePoint has unique workflow features that are out of the box-features such as approval workflow and records routing, this workflow application installed in SharePoint enable the effective workflow within an organisation (Favre, 2011: 4). Ryan (2010: 27) point out that there are many other benefits of using SharePoint and these are discussed in the next section.

The use of SharePoint is growing in the business environment, allowing various companies to improve knowledge management and knowledge sharing (Herrera, 2008: 86). SharePoint users have access to business knowledge and insight. This allows the creation of a workplace driven by best information flow practices (Koplowitz & Owens, 2009: 22). The use of SharePoint enables organisations to execute their knowledge management tasks effectively and efficiently, this is due to the fact that SharePoint allows employees to constantly share information on project progress with one another (Herrera, 2008: 86).

An organisation can benefit extensively from knowledge sharing practices (Russell, 2013: 162). Organisations that use SharePoint effectively will be able to gain access to tacit and explicit knowledge of their employees and workflow will be enhanced, this
will occur through the discussion feature that allows collaboration and the development of new knowledge (Lindvall, Rus & Sinha, 2003: 138).

SharePoint as a collaborative platform enables employees within an organisation to work as a team to achieve the goals and objectives of the organisation. Therefore it is valuable to outline the role of SharePoint in ensuring effective collaboration within an organisation.

The use of SharePoint also comes with a hub that operates and maintains the communication practices within a business organisation for enhanced workflow (Fu, Coogan & Diffin, 2013: 385). SharePoint enables an organisation to complete its projects on time; it also promotes collaboration that ensures the sharing of knowledge amongst employees about the projects in progress (Mckenna, 2008: 4). It offers a unique discussion feature, which allows members of an organisation to comment and reply to documents uploaded on SharePoint. This shows that it encourages collaboration within business organisations (Williams, 2011: 76). SharePoint allows employees within an organisation to manage their business and project documents effectively and efficiently (Bentley, 2012: 11). It is valuable to discuss the benefits of using SharePoint for project management.

There are many advantages of SharePoint and enabling employees to perform project management is one of them. Through SharePoint an organisation can conduct and perform project management (Lester, 2014: 15). Project management needs people, processes and tools (technology) in order to be successful (Sy, 2010: 3). The tool enables an organisation to monitor project activities, analyse and predict the project performance and also control changes in the project (Sy, 2010: 2). The intranet enabled platform gives an organisation access to information about projects
and also ensures enhanced and best collaboration practices; it allows team members to easily work together anytime and anywhere (Sy, 2010: 5).

A project team can perform project management but it makes it easier to perform it through a platform that facilitates effective collaboration for project management (Sy, 2012: 3). SharePoint allows an organisation to set up internal projects (Favre, 2011: 4), to plan its projects, to follow up on its progress (Favre, 2011: 5) and to prepare and plan the project schedules (Favre, 2011: 7).

SharePoint ensures flexibility during the project (Sy, 2012: 60). Through SharePoint a project manager is able to organise and plan project information within the platform (McKnight, 2010: 48). A project manager can use SharePoint to set out project tasks, project calendars, create project related forms and templates and also develop policies and procedures to adhere to during the project lifecycle (Sy, 2012: 61).

The use of SharePoint enables employees and managers to have automated feedback on tasks that are undertaken and managers are able to track all project related aspects using some of the above stated SharePoint functions (Westland, 2003: 58).

Through SharePoint content can be managed in the most effective manner, in order to ensure that the organisation’s operational content is stored and maintained within a sophisticated systems. SharePoint allow various individuals within an organisation to gain access to real time operational content.

Various organisations are even starting to rely on Microsoft SharePoint as their main content management application (McCart, 2012: 6). SharePoint gives employees easy access to information (Koplowitz & Owens, 2009: 8). Through SharePoint an
organisation can appropriately capture, manage and exchange electronic content and reports.

SharePoint as a content management platform supports the management of organisational content, such as the following (Koplowitz & Owens, 2009: 8):

- Contract management
- Human resource management
- Customer relationship management
- Enterprise resource planning.

People can accurately make decisions or quickly respond with information that can be extracted from the SharePoint system for the entire organisation. SharePoint has capabilities that can enable people to create and share valuable analysis straight from their desktops. The platform also has the ability to analyse insights, which can enable people to make smarter decisions and share and collaborate on sensitive business data with colleagues across an organisation (White paper, 2009: 11).

SharePoint has the ability to bring people, information and knowledge together in a single shared space and provide them with searching features, which enables employees to easily gain access to content (Doculabs, 2011: 01). This is because SharePoint stores and organises documents in a sophisticated repository for improved business processes and workflow (McCart, 2012: 7). Besides the many benefits of SharePoint it is significant to also note that it does present certain challenges.
2.10.3 Challenges associated with the use of SharePoint by users

It is important to note that SharePoint is an IT solution that has room for growth and also has its own shortcoming that need to be addressed. There are various gaps that exist in the application and use of SharePoint. Organisations face problems in terms of SharePoint having limitations in its use. SharePoint allows content to be stored automatically in a content databases (Noel, 2011: 7). This means that all content versions are stored into different databases, which is a problem because it facilitates the growth of content databases and this may lead to multiple databases (Noel, 2011: 7). Furthermore, the application of organisation 2.0 tools within SharePoint to improve the sharing of information and knowledge within a shared space also requires continuous development and upgrading.

The manner in which Microsoft SharePoint features are set can be difficult for users to understand, especially when they are not well-trained. This often results in the impression that Microsoft SharePoint is too complicated and complex to work through (Gai, Salli & Andersson, 2010: 05). Organisations need to recognise the value it brings and investigate various methods and develop skills on how to better use it to their advantage (Husman, 2007: 5). Microsoft SharePoint can be difficult and it has equally negative results such as time outs during uploads or downloads, slow page loads, system outages or overly complicated feature sets that upset users (Gai et al., 2010: 05).

Murphy (2012: 3) argues that “regardless of how you use SharePoint, it gives you the freedom and flexibility to change your mind as business needs and goals change”. In this case, it is important to evaluate the manner in which SharePoint is used within
Edcon and if it meets the users’ needs, this will help determine whether its use should be enhanced (Duffy, 2011: 153).

A research study done by IDG shows that 53 percent of CIOs are using SharePoint in their organisation and the adoption of SharePoint will still continue (Warren, 2010: 1). These CIOs confirm that SharePoint has its limitations and the main limitations were related to information access needs of certain business users. According to Warren (2010: 1) Social Knowledge Network (SKN) is developed and should be integrated with SharePoint to bridge the information access gap. SKNs are virtual environments that support innovation through knowledge sharing practices and competitive intelligence. They focus providing the right information or insight to the right users, in order to enable them to address specific business needs (Warren, 2010: 1).

The challenge is getting users to understand the platform and learn to collaborate more and share knowledge in the platform (Cisco, 2011: 2). Many users find the platform too complex and they end up using it only as an information repository instead of realising its full potential. SharePoint is sometimes complex and does not accommodate the users’ skills, especially if the right training is not given. It is also important to develop certain strategies on how to better use SharePoint through a framework. The challenge is that proper frameworks are not developed which can guide the use of SharePoint for knowledge management and enhanced collaboration (Cisco, 2011: 2). Many users face the problem of not being able to gain access to valuable business insights through SharePoint. Wiki and share networks are often used but they limit the process of information access (Warren, 2010: 2). One of the challenges of SharePoint is that it is complex and requires effort to understand (Prabhakar, 2012: 5).
Employees are allowed to use only certain specific tools within the platform, which limits users from exploring the full capability of the web enabled platform. SharePoint also has a security challenge, this means sensitive business information can be viewed by other employees who are not supposed to have access to it (Evelyn, 2013: 33).

Another challenge is that most developers have certain skills sets and expertise, they write codes and they want their developments to be appreciated but they do not have the skills to apply what will significantly benefit the users. The developers expect users to understand the full capabilities of SharePoint and they do not fully equip them with the right knowledge about the platform (Grazioli, 2012: 144). It is also important to understand the challenges faced by developers with SharePoint development and implementation.

2.10.4. Challenges associated with use SharePoint by developers

In the implementation of a new Microsoft SharePoint model, where the organisation has minimal Microsoft SharePoint experience, classic common errors in the development consist of both too much Microsoft SharePoint environments and underbuilding them (Gai et al., 2010: 05). SharePoint can provide a complex Microsoft SharePoint environment, with numerous servers and with an overwhelming number of features that are beyond the ability of IT staff to support them (Gai et al., 2010: 05).

Many employees have a challenge in using SharePoint because they are not allowed to use other resources offered by the platform. The other challenge is that users are not informed about the integration available and sometimes users are misled about the full capabilities of the platform.
The features and the service of SharePoint enable various developers to be able to develop solutions easier and faster. The ability of SharePoint developers to deliver useful solutions comes with challenges. SharePoint users have certain needs within their business units and they can transfer those needs to the developers within an organisation. SharePoint often addresses the needs of the users by providing the best solutions, and in most cases once users grasp and understand the power of SharePoint to meet their needs they start to make more requests related to the platform. Most of the time the requests exceed the functionality of the platform, which require out-of-the-box features. The developers end up facing a challenge of having to keep up with the requests and still maintain the custom solution which is SharePoint. The developers of SharePoint end up having many demands from the users of the platform and extremely tight deadlines (Fulan & Wilkins, 2012: 4).

The other challenge faced by developers is that they often design the solution to be complicated and end up having a large number of users who do not understand the platform and these users end up not knowing what the value of the application is (Fulan & Wilkins, 2012: 5), or are not able to use the platform at all.

2.11. Summary

SharePoint is a technology enabled platform to facilitate the bringing together of people and processes. To have one place where people can go to find content and collaborate to make better decisions towards managing a strategic outcome. The technology platform connects people with their processes and enables them to gain access to content and collaborate. It promotes knowledge sharing within an organisation, thus ensuring that team collaboration is improved for better a strategic outcome. The intranet enabled platform allows an organisation to manage its content
and gain insight, this is due to the fact that people have access to business databases and reports.

It is important for people within an organisation to easily gain access to organisational content for well informed and timely decision making. SharePoint provides people with easy access to content in order for them to make timely decisions. Managing and sharing business knowledge and insights and team collaboration is important for an organisation to create innovation and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. SharePoint has the capability to enable an organisation to manage its knowledge and insights for good decision making and for sustainable competitive advantage.

The need for an organisation to have a single platform that gives its employees the opportunity of accessing valuable content and to connect with their colleagues is growing rapidly. SharePoint as a technology enabled platform enables people to be connected with their process and organisation insights for good and timely decision making in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The following chapter will outline the research design and the various research methods used to conduct this research.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Research can be defined as the search and quest for knowledge (Kothari, 2004: 1) and as an organised and scientific search for applicable information on a particular topic (Kothari, 2004: 2). The purpose of doing research study is to answer the questions through the application of research procedures and methods. This study aims to unfold the perception of SharePoint users at Edcon on how effectively they are using SharePoint, what their needs are and if they are being met. The primary objective of research is to unfold the truth and gain new insights. The other objective of research is accurately describing the characteristics of an individual or group of people within an institution (Kothari, 2004: 2). The objective of this research study is to determine how SharePoint enables Edcon to share knowledge, collaborate and manage content.

This chapter will discuss the research design and methodology employed in this research project. The ontological and epistemological assumptions or consideration for this study will be described and discussed. Axiology assumptions concerning values and ethical considerations for this research study are also highlighted.

3.2. Ontological assumptions

The science of ontology can be defined as the study of assumptions that are concerned with the nature of social reality. It looks at what exists, what are the units that make up the whole and how these units interact (Mack, 2010: 5). Objectivism
and constructivism are two broad and contrasting positions of ontological assumptions. Objectivism holds the independent reality and constructivism assumes reality as a product of a social process (Tuli, 2010: 101). The ontological assumption for this research study is interpretivism. The interpretivist nature of this study which positions itself within constructivism or subjective ontological assumptions, ensures that certain approaches and strategies are considered in order to effectively gather insight and understand the SharePoint users' perspective (Gerring, 2003: 08). Interpretivism is suitable for this study as it aims to unfold the perception of SharePoint users at Edcon on how effective they are using the tool. The ontology is chosen because this research study aims to construct the reality of SharePoint users at Edcon through interpreting their reality and their situations.

This research therefore aims to understand the users’ social reality or events with regard to the use of SharePoint and will interpret whether the web-enabled platform meets their needs as users in terms of knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management. Interpretivism is suitable for this research because it aims to determine the value brought in by the use of SharePoint, to unfold and interpret the reality faced by SharePoint users. This will allow the researcher to interpret the meaning behind the value of SharePoint within Edcon from the users’ perspective.

The main premise of interpretivism is that research cannot be observed objectively from outside but can only be observed from inside through direct experiences of human beings and interacting with them. Thus the role of researchers in interpretivism is to know, articulate and clarify the social reality using the different participants (Mack, 2010: 8). Interpretivism assumes that meaning and knowledge are pieces of interpretation and objective knowledge is independent of human reasoning and thinking. Researchers who are interpretivists believe that access to
reality is through social constructions such as consciousness. Interpretivism assumes that observation is a method to collect information about certain events whereas interpreting is making sense and meaning of information and events (Thomas, 2010: 296). For these reasons this study make sense of data collected using an interview schedule in an attempt to gain an inside view of the social reality and understand the data from the perspectives of the users involved in SharePoint.

The following section elaborates on the epistemological positions of this research study.

3.3. Epistemological assumptions

Epistemological assumptions can be defined as the theory or body of knowledge embedded within theoretical perspective and thus in the methodology (Mack, 2010: 5). It is also concerned with explaining a philosophical ground that influences the decisions about which types of knowledge are possible and what can be done to ensure that the types of knowledge are legitimate and adequate (Ahmed, 2008: 3). According to Mack (2010: 8) Table 3.1 show the key ontological and epistemological assumptions of the interpretivism paradigm.

Table 3.1: Key ontological and epistemological assumptions (Mack, 2010: 8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontological assumptions</th>
<th>Epistemological assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The reality is indirectly constructed based on the individual interpretation and is subjective.</td>
<td>• Knowledge and insight are gained through strategies that respect the difference between people and objects of natural science and require social scientists to grasp the subjective meaning behind social action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People interpret and make their own meaning of events.</td>
<td>• Knowledge and insight are gained inductively to build a theory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All events are distinctive and can never be generalised.</td>
<td>• Normally knowledge arises from certain situations and is never reducible to simple interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multiple perspectives are given on one incident.</td>
<td>• Knowledge and insight are also gained through personal and individual experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interpreted meaning and symbols mostly determine causation in social science.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
This research study mainly aims to use qualitative research approaches to understand how SharePoint enables Edcon to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management in order to effectively achieve organisational goals (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaung, 2001: 42). A qualitative research approach is suitable for this project, as the research will be conducted through interview schedules.

The suggested research strategy is evaluation research. Evaluation research intends to answer the proposed questions of whether an intervention was implemented appropriately and if it has met the user’s needs or requirements (Mouton, 2001: 158). “Evaluation research is a form of applied research aimed at assessing whether interventions have been well conceptualised and properly implemented” (Mouton, 2001: 159). Evaluation research was used to conduct this research study to gain knowledge and insight on the way that Edcon SharePoint users utilise the web-enabled platform that was implemented, whether SharePoint is used effectively and whether it meets the users’ needs within Edcon. The individual experiences in using SharePoint within Edcon was investigated (Wahyuni, 2012: 19).

To determine this, the data collected was analysed through descriptive content analysis and interpreted to make sense and gather meaning from the data, as discussed in the next section of methodological assumptions.

3.4. Methodological assumptions

Methodology is defined as a strategy that outlines the plan of action, the process or the design that supports the choice and the use of certain research methods, the connection of the choices and the use of the methods for the desired results or outcomes (Gray, 2012: 19). Its key aim is to evaluate and explain various methods
used to conduct research and it also justifies the purpose of choosing specific methods for particular research (Ahmed, 2008: 5). Furthermore methodology can be described as a research strategy that describes the ontological and epistemological assumptions through guidelines that illustrate how research will be conducted. It focuses on the procedures, principles and practices that guide the research (Tuli, 2010: 102). The following paragraphs discuss data collection, data analysis, sampling, validity and reliability of the data collection process.

3.4.1. Data collection

Qualitative data was collected from SharePoint users at Edcon. The research was conducted using interview schedules (Appendix B and C). Due to the qualitative nature of this study, data was gathered using semi-structured questions during face to face interviews (Anderson, 2006: 23). Questions that were close and open-ended (Muise & Olson, 2011: 02) allowed the interviewee to slightly stray from the question, which provided more in-depth data (Muise & Olson, 2011: 02), but also allowed the interviewer to keep the interviews focused on topic (Remenyi, 2011: 72).

Interviews were conducted with active SharePoint users and individuals who work with improving SharePoint. Permission was sought to conduct fifty questionnaires and with ten follow up interviews. However, permission was granted for only ten interviews of SharePoint users at Edcon and two developers (Appendix A). The interview schedule was then revised to ensure that all aspects that would have been covered in the questionnaire could be covered with in-depth interviews with those participants for whom permission was granted. This helped the researcher to determine whether SharePoint meets the user’s needs in terms of knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management and it also helped determine what
improvements could be made for better use of SharePoint. Figure 3.2 illustrates the research process used for this research project.

3.4.2. Data analysis

Data was analysed through descriptive content analysis. This type of data analysis is appropriate for this research project as the research aims to evaluate the implementation and use of SharePoint as an intervention within Edcon from users’ perspectives (Spens & Kovacs, 2006: 30). To support the analysis and interpretation of the data collected, qualitative descriptive content analysis was done using Atlas.ti to identify the most relevant data to address the research objectives (Durrheim, 2002: 128). Descriptive content analysis on Atlas.ti was used to identify themes and make

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**Figure 3.2: Research methodological process framework of the study**
sense of the data to understand the user’s perception when using SharePoint. The suggestions for improving SharePoint were analysed and are presented in Chapter 4.

3.4.3. Sampling

Permission was granted to interview two developers and ten active users of SharePoint. The developers were interviewed to determine if the development of SharePoint considered the user’s needs in attaining the organisation’s objectives and to also find out how it is supposed to be used by the users (Durrheim, 2002: 123). The ten active users of SharePoint within Edcon were interviewed as a source of information to determine if the application of how SharePoint was implemented is meeting their needs in practice. Thus purposive sampling was used to focus on accurate selection of the right informants for the research (Dolores & Tongco, 2007: 147), in a deliberate attempt using thoughtful choice of informants suitable for the research project (Bernard, 2002: 8). The criteria for this sample were the inclusion of the most active users of SharePoint within Edcon as well as those responsible for development. All relevant permission and ethical clearance were sought as described in Section 3.5 and data validity and reliability were treated according to the discussion in the next section.

3.4.4. Data validity and reliability

The term validity is concerned with measuring the extent to which the data addressed the purpose of the research (Bashir, Afzal & Azeem, 2008: 37). Validity focuses on whether the research findings or data collected is trustworthy and credible for use (Bashir et al., 2008: 37). On the other hand, Golafshani (2003: 602) states that validity can be described in many ways in a qualitative study. The concept is a liable
construct and although some researchers (Golafshani, 2003: 602) argue that it is not applicable in qualitative research, the choice in this research was made to use member checking and to verify the validity and reliability of the data collected (Harper & Cole, 2012: 510). The method of member checking was used to improve the credibility and the accuracy of the data collected from the SharePoint users by allowing them to check the corrections of the analysis and interpretation of their expressed views from the interviews.

Reliability is further concerned with the reliability of the measurement tool used in research. It is defined as something that is seen as reliable and will produce good results. Reliability focuses on the measurement of performance and how reliable the data collection tool is that has been used. Consistency of the interview questions that were used to interview the users involved in SharePoint ensured stability and reliability of the data collected (Bashir et al., 2008: 37).

Golafshani, (2003: 601) argues that even though the concept of reliability is used for assessing and testing quantitative research, the idea behind the concept is mostly used in all types of research projects. The idea of testing is seen as the elicitation of data or information, thus the most significant test in a qualitative study is the quality of the data or information.

In this study verification of the reliability of data collection tools and the data collected was done throughout the data collection and analysis stages of the research to continuously check whether the chosen method of interviews were delivering quality data that was addressing the research problem, research question and sub-questions, to ensure that the main research question was addressed.
Generalisability is not implied in this study even though many companies face the challenge of having their employees not fully benefiting from the potential of their implemented technologies for improved knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management (Falk & Guenther, 2006: 68). The lessons learnt from this study, could therefore be beneficial to other companies. Ensuring the reliability and validity of the data is intertwined with ethics in research, thus axiological assumption is discussed next.

### 3.5. Axiological assumptions

Axiology can be defined as the branch of philosophy that studies decisions on value (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009: 116). This also focuses on the ethics and values that are considered when conducting research. It is concerned with the social values and ethics along with the individual moral values and ethics when conducting research (Saunders et al., 2009: 116). According to Mertens (2012: 3) axiology assumption is concerned with the significance of respecting different historical cultures, values and norms when interacting with participants during research. Researchers often need to understand the historical background of the environment, group and society in which they are conducting research and the challenge of that social reality.

One of the most important parts of research is the ethics and values of conducting research (Mertens, 2010: 12) and researchers should take these seriously when conducting research. Values play an important role throughout the research and ethics guide the behaviour of humans when conducting research. Axiological skills possessed by researchers guide them carefully to articulate their values when intending to do research (Saunders et al., 2009: 116).
The following section sets out the ethical consideration and issues that were addressed during the study.

a) Permission to conduct the study

Formal permission to conduct research at Edcon Limited was given by the Edcon project manager and SharePoint developer through a written document (Appendix A).

b) Informed consent

The participants were informed about the nature of the research study and what it intended to cover (Appendix D and E). They were also informed about the data collection instruments used and how the data would be presented. This was done in order to assure that all participants were properly informed about their role in participating and to show them the scope of the research study (Appendix E). All participants were recorded with permission.

c) Confidentiality and privacy

Participants did not mind stating their names but all the participants were kept anonymous. The participant’s names were not revealed under any circumstances.

d) Voluntary nature of participation

The researchers clearly addressed the fact that the research was for academic purpose and the data and report would not be used for any purpose other than scholarly publication.
3.6. Summary

Research is based on different assumptions during the research process. The assumptions are often necessary in understanding human knowledge and making sense of experiences and realities (Moody, 2002: 251). These assumptions influence the manner in which the researchers make sense of the research question, and also influence the research methods selected and used to interpret the results and present findings. The types of research philosophies determine the way researchers see the world and its reality. Thus, these assumptions play a crucial role in ensuring quality research findings and outcomes.

The three ways of thinking, ontology, epistemology and axiology, involved in research philosophy are important in research to firstly understand the reality in nature and the social world we live in. Interpretivism assisted the researcher in unfolding the perception of SharePoint users at Edcon on how effective they are using the tool, what the benefits of using it are and if it is meeting their needs. Epistemology is concerned with the type of knowledge that can be accepted and which knowledge is adequate and legitimate. The evaluation research strategy was chosen in order to evaluate the use of SharePoint within Edcon, through which insightful knowledge from Edcon SharePoint users and developers could be gained to get the most quality insight. Axiology is concerned with ethics, values and principles, to ensure good ethics, through seeking permission, informing participants’ ethical research practices and maintaining those throughout. All the above-mentioned assumptions play an important role in influencing the researcher’s thoughts during the research process.
The following chapter addresses the research findings gathered throughout the research process as described above.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This research study was focused on uncovering the Edcon user’s perspective on the use of Microsoft SharePoint. The purpose of this research study was to find out how SharePoint can enable Edcon to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and document management in order to effectively achieve organisational goals and objectives. The main objectives were to investigate the value brought by SharePoint within Edcon, to determine how SharePoint enables Edcon to share knowledge, collaborate and manage its content or documents and to establish the process for improving the use of SharePoint within Edcon.

Technology plays a vital role in the modern business environment and has enabled various organisations to automate their business processes, for faster and improved productivity and agility (Kerravala, 2009: 35). People, processes and technology play an important role within an organisation (Section 2.2) and the combination of the three enable an organisation to function towards reaching its desired goals and objectives. People play a major role as the core decision makers on the types of processes to apply in business and the type of technologies suitable for certain functionalities or processes within an organisation.

This research brought to the surface valuable insights on how Edcon employees use SharePoint and that there is still unmet potential in how they use SharePoint. There are various reasons why the platform is not used to its full capability and these findings are presented and discussed in this chapter.
The chapter is organised to first discuss how SharePoint is used to meet users’ needs, followed by how SharePoint can enable Edcon to improve knowledge sharing, through improved collaboration. The benefits of SharePoint to share, collaborate and manage content are followed by how effective SharePoint is in executing corporate projects. Recommendations for improvements to SharePoint conclude the chapter. The chapter headings are therefore aligned to the sub-questions identified for the study in Section 1.2.

4.2. How SharePoint is used within Edcon to meet the users’ needs

Based on the findings for this research, Edcon SharePoint users shared their experience about the intranet enabled platform and how they use it within the organisation and if it is meeting their needs. It was found that various users utilise the platform for different purposes according to their line of work within the organisation. Edcon is a retail organisation that sells branded clothing and with various facilities, so they deal more with reports and the sending and receiving of reports. Most users apply the platform to collaborate on business related reports: they also use it for workflows, automated processes and also to track the progress of store sales and projects. SharePoint users; also stated that they used the platform to extrapolate reports and give feedback to stakeholders and their business partners.

They also use the platform to draft various reports and to collaborate through those reports. They use the platform to keep track of the people they send out to stores, for example they used to send out twenty people to collect information on stores and they have to e-mail all those reports back to their manager. This means that the manager would have twenty different e-mails with twenty different reports, but now they use SharePoint to send all the reports in shared space. The platform enables
the users to work on the same document at once. The platform is also used to
develop organisation websites and to maintain them. Some of the Edcon employees
use SharePoint to build reports quickly and efficiently. For example, they used to
physically go to stores every day to gather information about the sales and progress
of the stores but now all reports are automated through the use of SharePoint.

Edcon employees mostly use the SharePoint platform as a knowledge repository,
some use it to facilitate knowledge exchange, meaning they use it for exchanging
knowledge and business related information. It was also found that all employees
within Edcon do not use the platform in the same way and one employee uses the
platform to disseminate and broadcast the work done within Edcon similar to a
management information system. The platform is used as an information dashboard
for strategic decision-making and as an early warning indicator. Others use the
platform to search for other employees’ contact details. Some employees interviewed
use the SharePoint platform for project management, where they track the progress
of the projects they work with. They use the platform to track the progress of the
stores when they are built and opened. The most credible response from the user in
terms of how they use the platform was that they mainly use it for daily reporting,
collaboration and as a central repository for all business related information.

Project management is one of the functions the employees use the platform for and
they normally set various team calendars, thus allowing all individuals working on a
project to add their information on the platform in order to track their daily progress.
The platform has cut down communication by e-mail, and allows employees to
communicate through the platform. Although it is used within the organisation, most
users indicated that it is not used to its full capability. One of the employees does not
even use the platform at all, the employee said that it is due to the fact that the
interaction with the platform is only limited to an intranet. The developers of the platform also agree that most users use the platform as a central repository and for project management.

The users do use the platform well in terms of collaboration and content management but they do not use it effectively for knowledge sharing. The platform has various capabilities and also functions effectively to ensure good communication within the organisation.

Some of the interviewed users of SharePoint state that the platform does meet their needs but a fair number of the users disagree on the platform meeting their needs. It was also shown that out of the twelve interviewees (two developers and ten users interviewed) six participants believe that the platform is meeting their needs and four of the interviewees do not agree that the platform meets their needs. This is a clear indication that SharePoint use and development have room for growth in order to ensure that all the users’ needs are met. Based on the findings the majority of the SharePoint users state that it does meet their needs and only a few people think that it does not meet their needs fully, but only for certain functionalities and activities.

Below are some of the direct quotes taken from the research interviewees on whether SharePoint meets their needs as users.

“I think [SharePoint is] very effective especially we’ve began a new way of work here, where we trying to streamline our activities [to] cut down [on time] would take a user ten minute[s] to find they now [find] within a couple of seconds. So that [gives] us some productivity, stopping e-mailing, silly calendars on [Microsoft] Excel”. The participants indicated that in the absence of a proper calendar management tool in the past they had little choice but to use Excel for that purpose. Employees also
lacked skill to use MS Outlook properly, but since having been trained to use SharePoint properly it has significantly reduced the number of e-mails it would take to accomplish a specific task. “There’s no sending back and forth e-mails. Previously twenty people would send to one secretary, one secretary would open the e-mail of twenty different spreadsheets, copy and paste it would take them couple of hours to do whatever it was, now doing it in a couple of minutes. So in terms of efficiency and productivity putting everything in one place it’s already helped us achieve something”. (Participant 1)

Another participant agrees that needs are met: “Obviously it’s a central point, we don’t have to distribute reports via e-mails. You don’t have to wait for that e-mail. You usually just subscribe to a report or one of the documents on the site and whenever an update comes through [users] will get it”. (Participant 2)

Participants recognise SharePoint as being effective in meeting their content sharing needs as seen by this response from Participant 3:

“For me if I think back on how we did things in the past, information sharing is quicker, a lot of our meetings start at eight or nine and in the past we had to wait for the information and the meetings would be based on previous weeks’ information because it wasn’t available at that stage. So now with SharePoint you can click you got your information straight away”. Participant 3 also sees a time saving benefit in SharePoint. “[The] information sharing is great, it cuts my travelling time out for my guys, it cuts out office administrative issues. In [the] past my consultant would spend on average about eight hours a week gathering information just to go conduct an audit on a store, so that would now be eliminated. I actually did a time management study in my department and we spend on average three hours a day pulling reports
for people so now that time can be used more productive somewhere else”. This participant therefore reports an average of five hours per day being saved as a result of SharePoint functionalities.

However, this is not the case for all participants being interviewed, as can be seen by this response from Participant 4:

“At the moment it does not meet my needs on any of them. It’s because my interaction with it is limited to the intranet”.

It is possible that this participant’s role does not require her to work beyond the intranet portion of SharePoint and from the remainder of her interview it had become apparent that few of her needs are with the currently developed SharePoint platform at Edcon.

It is important to note that based on the findings SharePoint users do use the platform but perhaps not to its fullest extend as found in the rest of the findings.

4.3. How SharePoint helps Edcon to share knowledge through improved collaboration

The findings in Section 4.2 revealed mostly how users’ document sharing needs have been met. However, with regard to knowledge sharing the findings show that certain users agree that SharePoint enables them to share knowledge in the form of reports and communication about the work they do. Some users share knowledge through SharePoint by supplying information to one another through shared documents that contain significant knowledge or information related to the business. Other users state that the platform enables them to improve collaboration through the various documents they share and creating libraries that contain knowledge of the
organisation that is of value to the organisation. There seems, however, not to be consensus on exactly what the knowledge sharing and collaboration capabilities on SharePoint at Edcon are.

Participant 5 indicated that although he is aware of many of the SharePoint capabilities he has no experience with a knowledge sharing functionality on SharePoint. This is possibly due to this feature not being fully developed or utilised on Edcon’s SharePoint site, as evident from Participant 4’s answer:

“I’m aware of the knowledge sharing capabilities of [SharePoint] because in my previous employment we used SharePoint 2010 and we deployed quite a bit of the functionalities. We deployed all the social networking capabilities of SharePoint so we were using a lot more than we actually using here [at Edcon]. So I am aware of the functionalities that SharePoint has, I might not be aware of what the newest and the latest functionalities are but I am aware of the broader capabilities of SharePoint”.

Participant 6 also has knowledge and experience with knowledge sharing and collaboration capabilities of SharePoint:

“I know all of them, the sites and social and collaboration where you have your pop ups, then you talk about your background, the skills set you got and the projects you work on [in a professional capacity]”.

Participant 7 claims that he uses the functionalities of SharePoint at Edcon:

“Most of it I know. How to create shared documents, I know how to create libraries, I can administer my own site. Our entire intranet site is built on SharePoint. The challenge that we have with knowledge management [is that] you need the people who own the knowledge [content owners]. [If] you don’t have content management
owners the knowledge management can be a mess and I think that’s our biggest problem. We haven’t had built the capability to say we now have content owners who are responsible for [their] own bits. So currently I manage that content myself but across the rest of the organisation there’s a lot of domain knowledge that’s sitting there because we have never clearly identified knowledge owners. A knowledge owner is a business processor”.

From Participant 7’s answer it is clearly not enough to have built knowledge sharing capabilities without capacitating users to also be knowledge owners.

According to the users SharePoint allows them to work as teams, share knowledge on the projects they are working on, therefore improving the collaboration aspect of it. It is important to note that the users responded that they hardly use the platform for knowledge sharing but mostly for collaborating through reports.

Edcon SharePoint users relate the sharing of reports they work on as part of sharing knowledge about business functions and SharePoint allows them to effectively create and share those reports. Some of the users state that SharePoint improves their collaboration by allowing them to cut down on the time spent sending out e-mails, allowing reports to be uploaded or shared through the platform, thus efficiently improving collaboration. Users responded that SharePoint improves their collaboration, allowing them to create libraries within the platform. These libraries allow the users to store all business related knowledge within the platform in order to ensure the effective access to the organisation’s knowledge. Users also state that the platform has discussion forums and blogs which enable employees to ask question related to the business when they do not understand their work.
The discussion feature enables the users to share knowledge and promotes effective communication between various employees within the organisation. The discussion blogs are normally used to help users to work as teams and share business related knowledge along the way. One of the most stated responses from the users about how the platform enables them to improve knowledge sharing and collaboration is documentation flexibility. The platform allows users to check in and check out documents thus improving collaboration in an effective manner. The documentation feature within SharePoint enables other employees to know that a certain user has checked out a certain document. In this case users can work on the same document with the knowledge of who else is working on the document. They also use the platform to create repositories for knowledge and the repository contains project related information from the start to finish of a project.

It is clear, however, that users utilise SharePoint for document management purposes, rather than to utilise knowledge sharing capabilities to its fullest extent. They do, however, apply it for knowledge sharing purposes when they use it for reference, which enables them to improve future projects by extrapolating knowledge about how other projects in the past were conducted. What is clearly a fact at Edcon is that a fair number of users do not use the platform for knowledge sharing and the reason behind that is that they are not aware of the knowledge sharing capabilities or exactly what knowledge sharing itself is:

“I would have to say no, not all of them”. (Participant 1)

The confusion of what is meant by knowledge sharing is evident from Participant 3’s answer to how SharePoint helps Edcon share knowledge through better
collaboration. Her answer clearly relates to the SharePoint information management capabilities rather than knowledge sharing:

“I have consultants that do a lot of travelling and I can use the travelling schedule to see where they at. You can use it to gather information from different people, so you can load documents and request feedback and get it back. You can supply information to the entire company [the push of a button]. If you want to see an area, you can type in the area and [the] information would appear. It’s basically information sharing and it makes it easier on a smart phone just to access the link and you have got your information instead of going to five different routes just to get one answer”.

Three of the ten users interviewed were not at all aware of the knowledge sharing capability of SharePoint.

However, the fact that some users were aware of the knowledge sharing capability does not mean that they performed credible knowledge sharing activities. Knowledge sharing encompasses the sharing of various business ideas on how to improve the business process. Edcon deals with selling clothing, cosmetics, and other products through various stores, they usually focus on sales and various strategies to sell more products or increasing sales. So the organisation’s employees normally share knowledge related to the reports about sales and store performances. This is a clear indication that the platform has the capability to perform knowledge management but there is a lack of knowledge on content owners. There should be people responsible for the management of content and knowledge within the platform.

Although some Edcon SharePoint users are aware of the knowledge sharing for improved collaboration, these is a clear indication that Edcon employees need to be
capacitated to effectively apply knowledge sharing and collaboration capabilities on SharePoint for its full potential to be reached.

The responses from Participants 3 and 8 show that they incorrectly equate the sharing of reports as knowledge sharing:

"SharePoint is relatively new to us. So what we are doing is we are putting all our daily reports onto SharePoint. We’ve also developed a few of our own reports on SharePoint, stuff that normally took us days to prepare…we are using visual studio in connection with SharePoint to develop the reports and then we deploy it to SharePoint. So SharePoint to me is basically just the vessel, instead of us using to manually build a report, then e-mail the report, now its automated report that can be accessed via SharePoint". (Participant 8)

“So I’m one of the builders for SharePoint…that’s what I use it for, I build reports for my staff and stores and all the different business partners, so they can access the site. But I access it myself for the reports I have created anyway, because it’s automated and easy to go that route [compared to] the older route”. (Participant 3)

Although some users use the platform to collaborate, extrapolate and share reports only, other users are aware of greater knowledge sharing capabilities, seemingly not currently utilised to its full extent at Edcon.

There is clearly room for improvement in the use of the platform for knowledge sharing for improved collaboration.
4.4. The benefits of using SharePoint to share knowledge, to collaborate and manage project content and documents for Edcon

There are various benefits that come with the use of SharePoint and this sub-question is aimed at understanding the manner in which Edcon employees recognise the benefits of using the platform in meeting their business needs. According to the users SharePoint enables them to build reports about the operational activities and collaborate on these reports. The platform enables Edcon employees to access their information on their smartphones and this enables them to perform their work better even when out of the office. It supports the information more effectively, and subsequently the information sharing process through the platform is quicker through the platform.

Users of the platform state that it helps them to work in teams when working on projects and they do not have to physically share reports of information but can easily exchange reports or edit the reports that they are working on. Responses show that before the implementation of SharePoint users used to take an average of two days to create reports whilst it now only takes them an hour to finish building the same reports. They also state that before starting meetings about the performance of the stores they used to wait for information to be collected, analysed and reported, and this resulted in the meetings being based on past redundant information. SharePoint has enabled users to base their meetings on real time information, because current information about the daily activities and current performance of the store are available. Participant 3 stated that “I think it's having that information at your fingertips” that is how beneficial the platform is to the user, enabling the effective sharing of business related information.
The platform has helped users to collect information quicker than before, when they used to physically go to stores in groups and collect information, an activity that could take up to a week to complete. This same information collection process now takes about an hour to collect via SharePoint. They are also able to inform the store manager about the percentage of the store performance in terms of sales. This in return ensures effective knowledge sharing and collaboration within Edcon. The platform also enables the users to be more collaborative in business related projects, thus giving information to the members involved in the project about how far the project is. It helps users to track progress of the projects and who have completed their parts of the projects.

The users of the platform also state that in terms of content management it is beneficial, because it allows them to upload documents and any content can be stored in the platform (Hill, 2010: 61). The users are to store documents containing content about the budgets, floor plans and financial status. It makes it easy for employees to gain access to well organised information. According to certain users the platform allows them to work on the same document at the same time, thus ensuring that no documents are mixed up and lost. In this case everybody works on the same document, avoiding loss of content and confusion about different versions of documents. SharePoint is clearly effectively applied in terms of content management at Edcon.

This results in the platform being time and cost effective, reducing time and money spent on travelling for information. Data is collected and analysed in a much shorter period of time, enabling users to gain insights, knowledge and recommendation from employees much quicker than before. The platform also enables users to meet their deadlines in time, due to the platform sending notifications when certain tasks have
not been completed or ticked to indicate their completion. One user also stated that SharePoint enables users to depend less on other individuals within the organisation, now being able to extract reports from the platform work when needed.

Users can furthermore streamline their activities, thus helping them cut down on doing unnecessary tasks. In terms of their stores and store management, users would search extensively for operational procedures and it would take them some hours. If they did not know what they were searching for, it would take them longer by phoning and e-mailing people. The platform is now more intuitive which means that information is always readily available. The platform has allowed users to make quicker decisions based on the timely and available information about how much stores have sold and what orders are outstanding; this available to users on predetermined reports.

SharePoint allows users at Edcon to create teams for learning, thus allowing them to learn and discuss the problems they face within the organisation. The quote from Participant 9 indicate how beneficial the implementation of SharePoint within Edcon, has been:

“I think the business has now moved into the whole SharePoint idea, a lot users have taken to it and they’re using it more often. Especially with, how we managing our projects like store openings, we do clothing sheets for stores, its doing quite well”.

The platform tends to be used as a project management tool. Certain users stated that they use SharePoint to perform project management and it does the work well as stated by Participant 6:

“And then in terms of projects management it’s serving its purpose to a certain extend for project management in IT within a certain functional area but it’s not used
extensively throughout the business Participated 9 also recognised SharePoint project management capabilities”.

“With projects we are using it for tracking system, for new store openings. So in terms of building the new store right from there and all the internal operations right up until store opening”. (Participant 9)

From what Participant 5 reported the benefit of SharePoint as a mechanism to track projects and give feedback was clear:

“We use it for tracking projects, in terms of the workflows. So that we can track progress on projects. And then obviously also we extrapolate reports from it using the information on SharePoint so that we can give feedback to business in terms of where the problem is”.

The use of SharePoint has played a significant role within Edcon, yet it still needs improvement for other users. Some users do not see the benefit from the use or implementation of SharePoint, due to reasons stated as:

- Not sufficiently trained or not trained at all.
- Shying away from the responsibility of using the system.
- Reluctance to use the system, due to time and ease of use to be developed with the system.

Regardless of these identified challenges with the system, users stated that the platform is aligned with the business strategy. Users recognise that much finance was invested in the platform. Edcon is striving for efficiency and effective productivity and the platform provides just that. Edcon is also striving to acquire more knowledge about its customers and SharePoint ensures that customer information is always
available. Edcon is aiming for a paperless office and SharePoint ensures that all forms of documentation are stored in one central space. Edcon is also striving for connectedness and improved communication and the platform also provides that.

Participant 3 reports on the initial uptake after SharePoint was implemented and associated benefit realisation:

“I definitely agree, because our strategy and shared services is to work together and by enabling to get information together we able to get information where previously I wasn’t able to see projects or property information, I had to go physically to ask and that’s a week’s work. Now I can see the whole bigger picture in shared services were before if I was on leave no one would see it. So now it’s more available to everybody”.

Participant 5 also sees alignment of SharePoint with organisational goals and associated benefits:

“Everybody is going paperless or aims to go paperless and to embrace technology and SharePoint is working perfectly for us, because we have cut down massively on time wastage, e-mails, because the information is there available. The amount of phone calls suddenly reduced to find something [out]”.

Based on the evidence collected from the users of the platform, it is clear that the tool plays its role in helping the organisation to fulfil its business strategy. Most users stated that the platform helps them perform their daily tasks and on the projects they perform, the organisation is slowly moving towards a more effective and efficient culture.
The platform supports the organisation’s initiative to become more productive, to save time and money and to contribute its part in ensuring that the organisation is able to achieve its goals and objectives.

Only Participant 7 saw room for improvement in SharePoint’s alignment to the business strategy:

“I don’t think there’s much alignment yet, I think we purchased the tool, the tool will only be of full use to the organisation and supporting its intent and direction, when we start creating a community [of] super users, and you start to enable them to the fullest extent”.

The evidence gathered from the users’ perspective provides a clear indication that SharePoint has a number of benefits for the user and although some have seen the alignment with the organisational goals there could be an improvement in this alignment.

4.5. How effective SharePoint is in helping Edcon to execute their corporate projects

When the users of SharePoint were asked whether the platform helps them to execute their corporate projects, seven of the interviewees states that it did, with the exception of two interviewees and one being neutral. The platform is effective because it has cut down on the time spent on unnecessary tasks. Users stated that the platform was effective in helping them execute their projects faster as it enabled meeting deadlines on tasks assigned to them. When deadlines are overdue, the platform escalates the tasks to the manager, who can then immediately respond with reminders or corrective action.
The platform also shows the lags in the project procedures and enables users to build and share reports quicker than before, thus helping them execute the projects effectively and efficiently. Preparing reports took much longer before as reported by participants in Sections 4.2-4.4. And with the implementation of SharePoint the decision process has improved due to the mentioned notifications and the automation aspects of SharePoint.

Participant 8 reports in this regard: “Very effective, would take me about thirty minutes, to prepare I can go into SharePoint and it constantly updates itself on what is happening on the business”.

Some users stated that the use of SharePoint is effective in streamlining their activities and to cut down on doing tasks that were not important. For example users stated that the platform helped through calendar management, (Participant 1 in Section 4.2) thus helping users to be aware of calendar dates of other Edcon employees. Sending of reports rarely happens through e-mails any longer, thus avoiding the sending and receiving of different reports from employees, which lead to draft and version confusion.

It is also fair to state that some users disagreed that SharePoint helped them execute their corporate projects. According to Participant 2 the limitation and organisation policies associated with the use of SharePoint prevents them from performing and executing their projects effectively through the platform. He ascribes this to the suspicion that developers switched some features of SharePoint off thus preventing them to fully explore the platform. Another reason why Participant 7 does not think the platform is effective, is that there is a lack of content or knowledge managers to effectively manage the knowledge and content. He specifically stated that the
knowledge management within the platform could be in disarray at times (Section 4.3). This is due to the lack of content owners who are responsible for their own content within the platform. Participant 4 is of the opinion that the benefit is fairly lacking:

“Corporate projects, well it doesn’t help me complete my projects, I complete my projects in another way. I suppose, a project would have to be created in that project management office site but from an effectiveness perspective it don’t use [it] that way, it’s not effective [for] me completing any of the projects that I do”.

Users stated that some Edcon knowledge within SharePoint was just sitting there and was not used, because it had no owners responsible for updating it. This affects some users when they need to execute their projects because content is always readily available.

Judging from the perception of some users that there is a lack of benefit from the platform in terms of executing projects, it is fair to say that Edcon SharePoint developers will benefit from engaging these users to determine how the platform can better meet their needs. It might merely mean that the developers give these users access to “switched-off” functionalities of the platform.

Users were asked whether the platform enabled the organisation to gain a competitive advantage. A divided opinion was also received in this regard. Eight interviewees believed that the platform enabled them to gain sustainable competitive advantage, one user did not respond to the question, and one user was of the opinion that there was not much that SharePoint is contributing towards competitive advantage. The platform seems to enable users to gain access to business related reports that in turn will help employees to make timely and credible decisions. Users
of the platform stated that the platform had allowed them to stop doing certain tasks and helped focus on doing the most important ones, while enabling them to gain access to information quicker.

Some users therefore stated that the platform was effective in enabling them to gain competitive advantage over other businesses. The platform for example helps them to open stores in time in order to compete with other stores to get product to the market. One user stated that many of the Edcon stores always open late when new malls are opened while other stores would open on time. Their reason is because certain sections would not have items, like cosmetics and there was always something missing. Since the implementation of SharePoint it is easy to find out why and see if the situation can be remedied. Because the platform monitors the project, with information recorded into SharePoint every day of the project, it allows the organisation to open in time and enables it to remain competitive in this regard (Porter-Roth, 2006: 212).

Participant 5 reported as follows:

“Well, it’s actually quite easy, because with SharePoint what we have done is, we wrote process. So every store has a process that they then convert to workflows, so the workflows are allocated at the beginning of a project to an individual, so there’s one individual responsible for a task. Those tasks are then issued to them by e-mail via SharePoint and once they have completed they need [the task] confirm that they have done it or if they have not been able to complete the task they must put in [a] column, [to notify us] that they didn’t see what they were supposed to do and they couldn’t do it. Also what it enables us to do is to put a central repository in terms of all the information, [floor plans, documents and budgets]. So it’s got one central point
where we store everything, which makes it a lot easier for everybody. It’s cut down dramatically on e-mails because every time you want to distribute a new floor plan, you had to e-mail 60 to 70 people and now you upload it send out a reminder saying that this is now been done and it’s there for everybody to see. So from a project management point it is a workable tool, we are happy with it, it’s made huge in roads into having the most updated information as well, everybody works with the same document. You don’t have one person working on version A and another one on version B”.

Participant 9 indicated the contribution of SharePoint in executing corporate projects towards getting products to the market. She refers to the fact that in the past when new malls opened, Edgar’s stores would always be lagging behind other stores due to products not being on time. Since SharePoint has been implemented they can compete with their competitors by opening on time.

Participant 7 agreed that the platform supported him by saying: “In my world it’s helping me very much”. The fact that eight users believe that the platform is good for sustainable competitive advantage and only one user disagrees indicate that the effectiveness of the platform in project execution is realised and it is clear that SharePoint is helping the organisation to gain a sustainable competitive advantage through improving project execution. SharePoint is a versatile platform with the ability to meet users’ needs, even though not all users are satisfied with the platform, it still provides more advantage than disadvantages. SharePoint developers could engage users who see little benefit in the platform and see that they are supported or capacitated better in utilising the platform in supporting their collaboration needs.
SharePoint is a system with the capability to perform various functions. The users of the platform within Edcon stated that it helped them to manage their document libraries and this helped them to gain access to readily available business insight and knowledge. To show that the platform plays a major role within the organisation, when the users were asked if they would choose a different platform they all said no. All the users stated that the platform had everything and could accommodate all the business functions of an organisation. The organisation just needs to fully explore the platform and use it effectively. With the effective use of the platform Edcon can improve its level of information management within the platform for improved decision-making.

The users provided valuable insight and knowledge on how the platform enabled them to effectively execute corporate projects and also gain competitive advantage. This is a clear indication that SharePoint meets most of the users’ needs in terms of collaboration, content management and knowledge sharing. This does not necessarily mean the use and the development has no further room for improvement. Certain Edcon SharePoint users face many challenges with the use of the platform and they managed to come up with recommendations for better development and use of the platform.

4.6. Recommendations that can be made to improve the use of SharePoint within Edcon

Although the platform has many benefits, it also has challenges associated with its development and use. Some users presented their version of evidence on how challenging the platform can be at times. The users of the platform faced many frustrations that prevented them from exploring and using the platform effectively.
They were asked to provide some solution and recommendation for the challenges they indicated.

Some users do not completely understand the full capability of the platform. Because the platform is complex and at times difficult to use, one user specifically calls the platform “ScarePoint”, giving the reason that if one uses the platform more, it becomes a complex and user-unfriendly platform. Some users who understand the platform, still indicate room for improvement in terms of ensuring that all users understand it, saying that the manner in which the platform is developed is complex and only a few well-trained individuals are able to understand it.

It is always advisable that during the development of a system the intended users are involved. Users stated that the platform should be more intuitive and user friendly for all employees within the organisation. Making the platform easy to use will ensure that all users explore the full capabilities of the platform. The further developmental investment in the platform will benefit the organisation further if the platform is easy for the users to operate. If gaining access to the platform is easy, users will be able to cut time on searching for business related information, thus promoting real time decision-making.

It was not recommended to replace the platform but rather to invest in improving the use of the platform. The platform contains everything that users need to perform their internal business processes. However, it does not accommodate external partners of Edcon, because external partners cannot access information through the platform. Employees of Edcon would prefer to have readily available business related information for their suppliers on the platform, by giving external suppliers permission to access only certain information that is relevant to them.
Participant 8 recommends improvement to SharePoint users’ capacity saying “all the functionalities, all the reporting bits is there. It depends on the knowledge of the person using the system. I don’t think there would be any other platform, because if you got the necessary coding skills, you can [get used to coding]”.

This response clearly suggests better training and experience for the users of the system rather than changing the platform.

Participant 4 recommends that the application of SharePoint is task specific and should be recognised as such: “If we do put things out on SharePoint there shouldn’t be a need for any other platform to be honest. I think SharePoint should be able to cover all those base needs for everybody. [From] a project management perspective SharePoint will only help in terms of making sure that the documents are all in the same place and they are accessible for the people who want to access them. I think SharePoint is the tool to help you manage projects on a daily basis, SharePoint is fantastic in terms of actually making sure that your documents are in the same place. So for now I really don’t think there is any other platform that is required, I think SharePoint has got the right functionality for what we want to do”.

Participant 3 requires additional functionalities not currently applied in SharePoint as Edcon:

“I don’t know if it’s accessible in visual studio, what I wanted to do is have a map of South Africa, [because] we’ve got obviously international and different areas and I wanted to map my consultants in areas. Then if I would click, basically the stock losses, it must give me the worst area [of] stock losses. So I think that could be available and that’s available on visual studio, so if we created it in there it will be
available on SharePoint. So all the things I want to do I can do on visual studio or on another application and just make it available in SharePoint”.

Participant 9 requires external stakeholder access to relevant SharePoint documents:

“We have [external] people. They can’t access SharePoint [and we] can’t get their involvement into SharePoint, so there were some way that we could share it with them, that would [be] awesome but I don’t know how we could if possible”.

“I would like [to know] how do we get the external suppliers input, [without having] to use an external platform. [SharePoint] an Edcon internal based [platform], so I’m not sure how that would work”.

Another issue Participant 9 raised has to do with policy of use. The design of SharePoint rests with the developers while the SharePoint users seems not to be allowed to design aspects in SharePoint:

“I want to build a site [but] I must ask IT to do it because they have got the rights and I don’t”.

This response begs for greater inclusion of user needs and where the need and capacity exist to develop sites, developers should acknowledge and address this. Edcon has to determine if more such cases exist and adjust policies and procedures to accommodate and capacitate such users.

Complains were raised that users were not given equal rights to use the platform to the fullest, being restricted when they have the need to fully explore the capabilities of the platform. The platform has the capability to enable individuals to create their individual and team sites but because of restrictions associated with the use policy of the platform at Edcon, users cannot develop and manage their own sites. This aspect
needs to be renegotiated between developers and users in terms of permission to
the users to develop their own sites and manage their sites according to their
business needs. From the interviews it was gathered that some users could design
their own sites while others could not. This disparate user capability should be
accommodated in the development and implementation of the platform and willing
users should be capacitated to improve their skills. Participant 10 concurs by saying
that better training is needed:

“Check in and out of documents can become a little bit confusing to certain people”. He also recommends improvements on the user-interface and giving an upfront view of who physically has a document: “From a user perspective, make it funkier, because it is really boring and it's bland”.

Participant 10 also suggests more flexible user rights governed by policy and procedures:

“I would suggest, to make it a lot more flexible, that users can change and manipulate what the system is doing and don’t need experts to do it. Because you set up a structure, with its folder structure, then after the change is does it become very difficult from an administrative perspective for an administrator of a SharePoint site to administer it. So I would [like] to see change[s] in the administrative burden and [as a user] make it a lot easier to be able to manage your SharePoint site”.

Participant 7 recommends the establishment of a user forum which can act as “a center of expertise that will share with the super users across the business. Once you are done with the [training of users] you have to equip [them and] somebody must help [them when they] need help. Review the IT policy on the restriction, I think
the IT policy restricts what functionality is being deployed. Making sure that the IT policy aligns with the business needs.

The findings gathered from the SharePoint users within Edcon shows that in terms of training related to the platform, there is inequality. If users are not trained on the capabilities of the platform, how can they use it effectively to their advantage? The users that are aware of the full capabilities of SharePoint are so because they were involved in the developmental and implementation phases of SharePoint at Edcon. One user stated that users even had to go on YouTube to learn how the platform works and to use it to their advantage. It is therefore recommended to provide formal training opportunities to all employees of Edcon who are expected to use the platform.

The communication process used to translate user needs to the developers is inconsistent. At times users call the developers directly to discuss their needs and needs are collected pro-actively by the developers from the IT department. Although all users stated that there is a single process to transfer users’ needs, some individuals were reported that they do not comply with the process. Procedures need to be followed consistently on how to translate the needs of users to the developers.

The recommendation is to ensure that developers constantly gather users’ requirements throughout the entire organisation. If the users need something from developers they need to be able to log calls through their business analysts, to enable them to have a clear process to communicate their needs to the developers.

Feedback from the interviews with the developers was that they must be consistently checking the progress of the implemented platform. Feedback analysis must be
performed by the developers to ensure that the implemented platform is meeting the needs it is intended to.

Participant 11 recommends that “a needs analysis beforehand will help in knowing the users’ requirements before they even start to build or implement SharePoint. Normally one of the business analysts on one area would ask us they need a solution for something. We would then sit down with them and try and sort out what the requirement is. [The] analyses would come in and say ok this is how we going to do this implementation for SharePoint. It’s normally the business owner who has the say not really the developer. So I do more of the recommendation and the business owner has the end say”.

Participant 12 also reports on them discussing user needs with the business analyst:

“By actually going and sitting with them and doing a full analysis of what they perceive their problem to be, obviously next upon to that is that if SharePoint can be used and is it good for their problem, so then we would start a project. We call them NPR here, which is just a New Project Request”. (Participant 12)

Judging from the feedback from users’ reasons why some of them do not fully explore the platform because their requirements are normally unattended, it is recommended that the communication process between users and developers is tended to. In cases where certain users face challenges because there were not fully trained, it is important to note that users need to understand when experts need to provide proper knowledge of the platform to all users. If there are certain users capable of developing their own SharePoint site without the input and training from the developers then the policy and process need to make allowance for such needs.
Edcon SharePoint developers and users need to re-evaluate the process that they use to communicate their needs and ensure that needs are translated effectively. Judging from Participant 8’s feedback on how needs analysis communication takes place the perception on how the process unfolds differs from those of Participants 11 and 12 as reported above:

“Obviously, the user will identify the need, the need will go to the IT department and the IT department will look at these needs and decide what system is going to assist you with your requirements, so they will come up with a solution”. (Participant 8)

From Participant 6 it is obvious that the process differs from the opinion of the users to the opinion of the developers:

“[In] gathering the requirements, what we typically do is a more fragmenting way to approach it. When we see some interest in certain functional areas, [HR or stores], [when] they want systematic tools to help with collaboration or the sharing of knowledge then we will use teams to try and help propagate the whole SharePoint and collaboration theme [for them]. Although that’s the approach I don’t know that it’s going to be effective but that’s most like the way we get a lot more users to actually start using the tool and doing a lot more with it”.

The gathering of requirements or needs is a process that differs at Edcon in how the users’ needs are translated. A twelve interviewed employees stated that gathering requirements or needs is a standard process, but the process is explained so differently it requires a process of re-evaluation to ensure that the formal gathering requirements are effectively communicated and translated into usable relevant solutions on SharePoint. This will enable the employees to use the technology tools to improve their business process, and work towards helping the organisation
become more productive, execute its business projects and gain sustainable competitive advantage.

4.7. Summary

This study focused on uncovering the Edcon users’ perspective on the use of Microsoft SharePoint. Finding out how SharePoint enables Edcon employees to improve knowledge sharing, collaborate and manage content was important. The main objectives were to investigate the value brought by SharePoint within Edcon, to determine how SharePoint enables Edcon to share knowledge, collaborate and manage its content or documents and to establish the process for improving the use of SharePoint within Edcon. The findings indicated that SharePoint does bring value to the organisation as it enables staff to perform various tasks and collaborate.

The adoption of SharePoint within Edcon has its benefits and challenges as gathered from the users’ perception of the use of SharePoint and whether it is meeting their needs as users. From the findings it is clear that certain users are familiar with the capabilities of SharePoint and they recognise its capability to help them perform knowledge sharing, content management and improve collaboration while other users lack training and experience in using SharePoint to its full potential. Based on the research results SharePoint seems to be beneficial to the organisation but the challenges that come with its implementation and use need to be further investigated and addressed.

This research brought to light valuable insights on how Edcon employees use SharePoint, but there is still unmet potential in how they use SharePoint. It is important to Edcon to improve the training given to the users in order to ensure
maximum outcome from the platform, in terms of knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management.
CHAPTER 5

SYNTHESIS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this research study was to find out how SharePoint can enable Edcon to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management in order to effectively achieve organisational goals. The main objectives of this research study were to determine how SharePoint enables Edcon to share knowledge, collaborate and manage their documents and content. The study investigated the value brought by SharePoint within Edcon. Furthermore the study aimed to establish the process for improving the use of SharePoint within Edcon. The research conducted with Edcon’s SharePoint users and the developers provided valuable insights to answer the main research question namely: “How does the current use of Microsoft SharePoint at Edcon address the users’ needs for knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management?”

It is important to note that the research intended to understand the users’ perception on the implementation and use of SharePoint, in an attempt to understand the value brought in by SharePoint.

Interpretivism was used for this study because it aims to interpret the different perspectives of Edcon’s SharePoint users with regard to their use of the web enabled platform. The ideal people whom this research were conducted on were two employees of Edcon who are responsible for the development of SharePoint in the organisation. This is to help determine if the implementation of SharePoint was developed considering the users’ needs and to also find out how it is supposed to be
applied by the users (Durrheim, 2002: 123). A further ten users of SharePoint were selected purposefully and used as the source of information to determine if the application of SharePoint is meeting their needs. An interview schedule was used to interview them and to help determine what the SharePoint users’ needs are and whether they are being met or not.

This chapter provides a synthesis of the research findings based on the research objectives and shows how the research questions were answered through the findings. This chapter also contains recommendations for Edcon and ideas for future research, with a final conclusion.

5.2. Synthesis

The research objectives of the study set out to determine the following three objectives:

(i) To determine how SharePoint enables Edcon to share knowledge, collaborate and manage its documents and content.

(ii) To investigate the value brought by SharePoint within Edcon.

(iii) To establish the process for improving the use of SharePoint within Edcon.

The synthesis discussion will show how the research objectives were met through the findings from the sub-questions as discussed in Sections 4.2-4.6.

5.2.1. SharePoint enables Edcon to share knowledge, collaborate and manage its documents and content

The research investigated the use of SharePoint within Edcon and it was focused on how the users can use the platform to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management. This research enabled the researcher to discover various
events or situations that prevent the organisation from using this technology to its fullest advantage. Organisations often invest much funds in technology but they do not always place enough emphasis on ensuring that it helps to achieve their goals and objectives. SharePoint being an intranet-enabled platform helps Edcon to facilitate its business processes by supporting knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management.

The research findings showed that SharePoint is used within Edcon but not to its fullest capability. The findings indicated that the web-based platform is mainly used for collaboration and to share knowledge through various business-related reports. Users were asked what they used the platform for and the findings were that most users used the platform for collaboration by mainly sharing business reports. The platform enables Edcon employees to share business reports effectively, which in return improves collaboration on the projects. Furthermore, the findings showed that most employees of Edcon are aware of the knowledge sharing capabilities of SharePoint but not all of them use them to the fullest. They use the platform in order to create reports and share those reports with the key decision makers within the organisation.

The findings also indicated that the platform is mainly used as a project management tool, which enables the users to keep track of the progress of projects that the organisation works on. The platform is mostly used as a central repository for all business related information to be shared. Thus Edcon employees mainly use SharePoint as a content management platform.
Because knowledge sharing, the management of content and collaboration play an important role in an organisation, it is important for individuals to share business related knowledge, to effectively manage business related content and to collaborate in order to ensure that projects are effectively and efficiently completed. The implementation of SharePoint has the ability to improve the manner in which an organisation shares knowledge, manage content and collaborate. The research showed that the focus of users are mostly on content management but that they are aware of the knowledge sharing capabilities of the platform, but not yet utilising knowledge management and knowledge sharing capabilities (Section 4.3).

5.2.2. SharePoint brings value within Edcon

Even though knowledge sharing is not effectively practised through the platform within Edcon, the platform does meet certain business needs. The research indicated that SharePoint enables its users to cut down on the time wasted on unnecessary tasks which are stated in Section 4.5. The platform makes it easy for users to carry out their projects, by ensuring real time access to business information and reports.

The research showed that even though some users do not fully understand the full capability of the platform they still prefer using the platform as they all stated that the platform is consistently in line with the business strategy of Edcon, because the organisation is also aiming to cut down time wasted doing unnecessary tasks and the organisation is also going paperless. The findings indicated that users do believe that the platform is aligned with Edcon’s business strategy as it enables them to effectively collaborate and execute projects. It also enables certain users to perform effectively and help Edcon gain sustainable competitive advantage. SharePoint helps Edcon to always keep track of their projects’ progress and to keep track of what is
needed to ensure that Edcon’s stores open on time, which helps the organisation to keep up with their competitors.

Based on the research findings SharePoint brings value to Edcon by helping the organisation to share knowledge in the form of reports, to manage its business related content and to also collaborate on projects. This is a clear indication that SharePoint does play its part in helping the employees execute their projects and achieve their goals and objective. Certain users stated that they would like to have improvements to the platform in addition to the manner in which the platform currently meet their needs in terms of their internal business functions (Section 4.5).

5.2.3. Process established for improving the use of SharePoint within Edcon

It is important for any technology implemented within an organisation to be aligned with the organisation’s business strategy. The business strategy of an organisation plays a significant role in shaping the direction in which the organisation intends to embark. Technology should only be implemented within an organisation if it is aligned with and will support the attainment of the vision of an organisation.

The findings from the users indicated that there is a need to effectively manage the content within SharePoint. They stated that sometimes it is hard to find business related content in time due to the complexity of the platform. Certain users struggle with the use of SharePoint because training on the use of the platform was not distributed equally across the entire organisation (Section 4.6). Furthermore the findings revealed a lack of an adequate needs analysis within Edcon, and users not sufficiently involved in the process of developing SharePoint. Although some users
were involved, perhaps greater involvement is necessary to ensure better buy-in and uptake of the technology.

The findings also indicated that certain users have challenges with the use of the platform, limitations when it comes to using the platform, due to them being restricted from using certain applications within the platform (Section 4.6). They cannot create their own sites and certain features are blocked from use. This limits the users from fully exploring the capabilities of SharePoint. These restrictions prevent the platform from meeting the needs of capable and experienced users within Edcon in terms of knowledge sharing and content management. It is important to note that users indicated that mostly the collaborative capabilities of the platform have restrictions. This limits them to collaborate only through sharing reports and not through other tools such as social media.

It appears from users that the IT policy is the cause for restricting them from using all the features within the platform. IT therefore needs to review its restriction policies and align these to the needs analysis of the users in order to achieve business goals. This will enable the users to fully explore the platform and to power it according to the business strategies, goals and objectives. IT should constantly gather feedback from all users across the organisation to ensure that all user needs are met by the implementation of the platform.

SharePoint has the ability to enable an organisation to share information effectively and also store and manage all business content. All users interviewed prefer to use SharePoint rather than a different platform because SharePoint has all the capabilities they need to perform their tasks, apart from the expressed need to improve the knowledge sharing part and the effectiveness of content management.
SharePoint is just a technology enabler and, if people do not use it effectively to improve their business processes it will not return value for money. Based on the findings SharePoint is effectively used by some individuals while not all employees understand the full capability of the platform. A technological platform is therefore only as good as it is used and the manner in which it is developed and implemented across the entire organisation determines how well it is used. This links back to the literature on how SharePoint can benefit the organisation if used to its fullest capability (Section 2.10.2).

The findings also indicated that SharePoint has features that are somewhat difficult for users to understand. Which points back to training and users’ personal drive to explore the platform to their advantage. With further training users may be able to effectively utilise more features of the platform in order to help the organisation achieve its goals and objectives. Users interviewed remarked that further training was required to use SharePoint more effectively. While some users had difficulty in using SharePoint other users have prior experience and developed capabilities to allow them to develop their own SharePoint site without the developers’ help and training. The reality of differing skills and capabilities has to be managed to allow skilled users to leverage the platform to their advantage, while developers and experts should provide further knowledge sharing or training workshops in order to develop less experienced users of SharePoint. Through such support and training a centre of expertise can be developed in Edcon where “super users” can help less skilled employees on the effective use of the platform.

SharePoint developers also face the challenge of differing skills capabilities and if aspects of SharePoint are too complex for even the developers to understand then skills development should be addressed for the developers. This will prevent the
notion of development to only train users on what they understand, which limits the use of the platform to its fullest capability. Developers often get more requests from the entire organisation than what they can provide and the developers end up facing the challenge of providing the solution to the entire organisation, providing training on the platform and also maintaining the platform.

This research indicated that users within Edcon often have many requests related to the solution and often these requests are complex and different. This becomes a challenge as the developers cannot attend to all the requests at the same time. Developers stated that it was often hard to work on improving the platform while trying to attend to the entire organisations’ requests. It may be necessary to give additional support and human resources to the developers when needed to support their endeavours to get the organisation trained and equipped.

Furthermore the research revealed that there is a need for the identification of content owners within the organisation (Section 4.6). Certain users stated that there is a need for individuals to be responsible for the data, information and knowledge they create. The need was also expressed for each and every individual in the organisation to manage their knowledge effectively within the platform in order to share that knowledge with other employees when they need it. One employee specifically said “knowledge management within Edcon can be a mess at times” (Section 4.5). If people are responsible for their knowledge and effectively use the platform they will be able to benefit from the SharePoint investment, and spread the responsibility and accountability further lightening the burden of developers.

Based on the findings the research showed that users of the platform did not only indicate the need for knowledge management but also the need to put revised policies and regulations in place in order to secure and protect the knowledge
managed within the platform. Edcon developers should improve the security measures within the platform without increasing the restrictions. Certain information might have to be protected from being viewed by employees who are not supposed to see it, without restricting use to applications of the platform. The findings indicated that users do not perceive that there is problems with SharePoint as a solution but that processes to support the solution to make a valuable contribution to the organisation might need revision. This is a clear indication that the platform functions effectively as a technology tool but there is a need for concrete processes that can support how the platform is utilised to its fullest.

A user forum needs to be created as a centre of expertise where users can share their experiences and knowledge of applying SharePoint with the entire business. There must be people to help other employees who do not understand not only SharePoint but also the processes within the organisation.

SharePoint is a technology tool that supports business processes but people need to play their role in ensuring that it is understood and used effectively. Edcon needs to invest in equipping its employees with the necessary skills and knowledge on SharePoint and this will enable the organisation to gain a return on investment.

If SharePoint as a technology tool is utilised effectively, it can help an organisation to manage and share knowledge effectively, work as a unit and manage content properly. The research showed that there is further research to be done to improve the study. These findings focused on understanding users’ perception on the use of SharePoint within Edcon. The aim was to ascertain whether SharePoint meets the users’ needs in terms of knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management. From these findings, a number of recommendations can be made.
5.3. Recommendations

The following recommendations firstly focus on recommendations specifically from the findings where after recommendations for future research is discussed.

5.3.1 Recommendation from the findings

Based on the findings gathered from Edcon on the organisation’s current use of Microsoft SharePoint and whether the platform does addresses the users’ needs, the following recommendations for Edcon are proposed.

Edcon should improve the manner in which they implement their SharePoint site, this means that the developers should provide proper, equal and adequate training on how to use the platform effectively. The developers of SharePoint should ensure that they train users in a way that they will understand their terminology and concepts of IT. Training has to be given to every individual within Edcon on the use of SharePoint. Even considering that training was done the need for further training was clearly expressed.

Edcon should consider developing a fixed and standard process framework that will be used to translate the needs of the users to the SharePoint developers for the development of business solutions, according to the expressed needs. There needs to be a formal framework designed in order to help the developers to address the needs of the users. The framework must also enforce the gathering of feedback based on the experience of the users towards the implemented technology applications within the business. This will help users’ needs to be effectively and efficiently addressed and for the business processes to function flawlessly, by providing a feedback loop to adjust solutions accordingly where necessary.
Edcon should also consider reviewing its IT policies and regulations in order to ensure full accessibility of the platform for experienced users. Users of SharePoint raised an issue of restrictions within the platform that prevents them from utilising the platform to the fullest. Edcon should also consider reviewing policies around training and development of their staff in terms of technology implementation and use. This will ensure that employees that require additional training do receive it.

Knowledge management can help an organisation to manage its content and knowledge through the use of SharePoint. In the organisation knowledge is created and shared daily. It is therefore important for the knowledge to be managed effectively in order to enable employees to use and make business decisions. The implementation of technology tools within business allows all knowledge created to be stored within them. So it is important for Edcon to develop a knowledge management strategy in order to support the use of its technology applications.

The centre of expertise where skilled users can support knowledge sharing to support less skilled users could form the start of such a knowledge management culture. The recommendations further suggest Edcon implements knowledge management, to enable it to have knowledge or content owners. This will help users to take responsibility and accountability for knowledge or content generated on platform.

Another recommendation, vital to knowledge management in any organisation is to improve the organisational culture within Edcon, to promote knowledge management and encourage knowledge sharing. This study cannot be exhaustive and the following recommendations are made for further research.
5.3.2. Recommendation for further research

The following are some of the recommendations for future research based on the limitations of the study.

- Further research should be conducted on different organisation who utilise SharePoint, in order to generalise findings to a larger population of organisations, beyond a single case.

- Research at Edcon should also be repeated after a specific period of time, in order to determine if recommendations resulted in the improved realities as expected.

- Future research could also be considered using a larger sample size from the entire Edcon and not limited to the number of staff to whom permission was given to participate in the study. A greater sample size could help in generalising the findings to the entire Edcon organisation in future, giving a broader view of user needs and suggestions.

- Future research could also be conducted using another type of data collection tool, not only interview schedule but also using questionnaires, which could ensure that more data that could be generalised.

5.4. Conclusion

The cutting edge of web technology applications have changed the manner in which business conduct their processes. Microsoft SharePoint has the ability to deliver effective business applications that enhance the manner in which business processes are conducted. There is a need to tap into the full capability of the platform, in order to ensure that it delivers its purpose within an organisation. The use of this web-enabled platform has increased across the entire business industry with
various organisations using SharePoint to share knowledge, collaborate and manage their organisational content.

This research gave an overview of the how SharePoint is used within Edcon and how its use can be improved in order to ensure that it functions to enable the organisation to achieve its goals and objectives. It is important for SharePoint users’ needs to be considered and met when technology applications are implemented, this is to help improve business processes. People and processes play a significant role within an organisation’s ability to implement technology applications to effectively meet the needs of its users.

In conclusion, people using the implemented technology applications need to fully understand them in order to effectively perform their business processes. Individuals’ behaviour within an organisation should always be focused on understanding every business process and the types of technology applications to use when performing these business processes.
REFERENCES


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Williams, J.S. (2011). *SharePoint site eases information flow for clinical engineering team*. Maryland: AIIM.


APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to confirm that Sithembiso Khumalo has approached Edcon Pty to ask permission to conduct an analysis of the way that SharePoint is used throughout our organisation.

Permission has been granted on the basis that Sithembiso limits his research to no more than two SharePoint developers, no more than five SharePoint users and the Edcon SharePoint Architect.

Access to live systems will not be granted and Sithembiso will provide his own equipment.

Please feel free to contact me directly if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

David Wilkinson – Edcon Group IT Project Manager
011 495 4227
dwilkinson@edcon.co.za
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DEVELOPERS

1. When developing SharePoint how did you consider the users’ needs?
2. How do you ensure that the users’ needs are met?
3. What is the purpose of developing SharePoint at Edcon?
4. How do you create awareness of SharePoint and its capabilities to the users’?
5. How do people use your SharePoint site?
6. How would you think people should be using it?
7. What type of information or content should be the users’ be:
   a. Sharing,
   b. Managing and
   c. Collaborating on through SharePoint.
8. What improvement can be made to ensure the effective use of SharePoint by the users’?
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR USERS OF SHAREPOINT

1. How do you use SharePoint or what do you use it for?
2. Are you aware of all the knowledge sharing capabilities of SharePoint? What are they?
3. How do you think SharePoint meet your user and business needs in terms of the following:
   a. Content management,
   b. Knowledge sharing,
   c. Collaboration and
   d. Project management?
4. What is the process that Edcon use to translate your user needs to the SharePoint developers?
5. In your opinion how effective is SharePoint in enabling you to complete or execute your corporate projects?
6. In what way does SharePoint help Edcon employees perform their work to gain sustainable competitive advantage?
7. In what way is SharePoint in line with enabling Edcon to fulfill its business strategy?
8. What improvements can you recommend in ensuring that SharePoint meets your needs as users?
9. What recommendation would you give for better and improved use of SharePoint?
10. What other user needs do you have in terms of content management, knowledge sharing, collaboration and project management that you think SharePoint will not be able to meet and that should require a different platform?
APPENDIX D: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Title: Needs analysis of an intranet-enabled platform to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management.

Department of Information and Knowledge Management

University of Johannesburg

Investigator(s): Mr. Khumalo Sithembiso

Supervisors: Prof. M. Mearns, mearnsm@uj.ac.za.

1. The main purpose of this study:

This research project aims to find out if SharePoint is effectively used within Edcon and if it is meeting the user's needs. This proposed research aims to find out how SharePoint can enable Edcon to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management. The overall study design will require that I participate in an interview using a semi-structured questionnaire for the data collection of the research project indicated above.

2. Confidentiality:

I understand that the information provided by this study may be used for research purposes, including publications in research journals. All individual information will be coded and at no time will my personal identity be revealed.

3. Voluntary Participation:

The purpose of the study has been explained to me. I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I may terminate my participation at any time I choose, without penalty. I understand that I may withdraw from participation at any point in the study with no penalty.

4. Benefits of Participation:

The benefits of participating in this study are to further research only. The University of Johannesburg will not receive any money to conduct this study. My participation will make a contribution to further understanding of the use of SharePoint as a platform for sharing knowledge, collaboration and content management at Edcon.

5. Remuneration: I understand that I will not receive money or any other reward for participation.

In acknowledgement of informed consent please place your initials here: __________

Date: __________
APPENDIX E: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Letter of Introduction

August 28, 2014

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

It is my privilege to introduce Mr. Sithembiso Khumalo as the principle researcher in an approved project titled: Needs analysis of an intranet-enabled platform to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management.

He is a Masters student enrolled in the Department of Information and Knowledge Management at the University of Johannesburg under the supervision of Prof. M. Mearns.

This research project aims to find out if SharePoint is effectively used within Edcon and if it is meeting the users’ needs. This proposed research aims to find out how SharePoint can enable Edcon to improve knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management.

The overall study design will require sampled Edcon employees to participate in interviews and a semi-structured questionnaire for the data collection of the research project indicated above.

Mr Khumalo has permission from Mr David Wilkinson (Edcon Group IT Project Manager) and all University of Johannesburg ethical requirements have been adhered to. The study aims to make a contribution to further understanding effective application of SharePoint as a knowledge sharing, collaboration and content management portal and findings from the research will be communicated back to Edcon for their benefit.

As supervisor I wish to thank you for the valuable contribution that participation in this study makes to the personal development of Mr Khumalo as well as the body of knowledge on Information and Knowledge Management and to our associated industry.

Kind regards,

Prof M Mearns
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