MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

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Information captures the relations between data in a meaningful manner. Similarly, knowledge captures the patterns around information and the pattern that represents knowledge. It also provides, when the pattern is understood, a high level of reliability or predictability as to how the pattern will evolve over time. Patterns that represent knowledge have completeness to them which information simply does not contain. Information provides description, definition, or perspective (what, who, when, where). In contrast, knowledge provides strategy, practice, method, or approach (how).

The managerial meaning of Knowledge

The topic of Knowledge Management (KM) initially promotes us to some sort of philosophical thinking on what knowledge is and how it differs from data, information, and wisdom. There is also a deep-set belief that knowledge is essentially tacit and individualized and therefore one gets confused when we see terms like organizational knowledge, knowledge assets, and management of knowledge. The term 'Organizational Knowledge' can be an oxymoron in this context.

The consensus of the meaning of knowledge is that it is not a mere collection of information.

The human Brain is far more suitable to create patterns around information than computers. According to Thomas H. Davenport, "when we seek to understand knowledge, to interpret it within a broader context, to combine it with other types of information, or to synthesize various unstructured forms of knowledge, humans are the recommended tool". Knowledge Management presupposes heavy human involvement and human aspects matter far more than technology.

However, increased realization of knowledge as the core competence (Prahalad & Hamel 1990), coupled with recent advances in information technology such as intranets and the World Wide Web have accelerated organizational interest in knowledge management. Examples of known knowledge

management initiatives include Andersen's Knowledge Xchange, Booz Allen & Hamilton's knowledge On-Line, CAP Gemini's Knowledge Galaxy, Ernst & Young's Center for Business Knowledge and Monsanto's Knowledge Management Architecture.

Managing Knowledge

According to Prof. Ron Sanchez, Eskimos use more than 50 words to differentiate among various types of snow. They have this sophisticated knowledge because they manage environmental conditions involving extreme cold. We have not, in contrast, created any differentiation on the concept of knowledge since we never thought of managing knowledge. Traditionally we thought of acquiring knowledge and imparting knowledge. Managing knowledge is a different ball game.

When organizations started collecting organizational information on large, enterprise-wide, computerized databases, realization became acute that something serious is still lacking. While computers are quite adept in capturing, transforming, and distributing highly structured knowledge, it is a common fact that you and I do not turn to computers when we want an overall pattern, the big picture, on what is happening around us. Effective management of knowledge requires the symbiotic relation of human resource along with it.

According to Mike Davidson[6], what is truly important to corporate management are:

- Mission: What are we trying to accomplish?

- Competition: How do we gain a Competitive edge?

- Performance: How do we deliver the results?

- Change: How do we cope with change?

Any management concept, including Knowledge Management, is of value only in the context of these objectives.

As a practical manager, I might often think why I should share my knowledge with others. This might seem to be an unnatural act for most of us especially when we consider that knowledge is power. It is in this sensitive area that KM techniques will have to support the organizational drive for acquiring, capturing, sharing, and institutionalizing knowledge.

Global organizational Initiatives:

Lotus Development, now a division of IBM, devotes 25% of the total performance evaluation of its customer support workers on knowledge sharing. Buckman Laboratories recognizes its 100 top knowledge sharers with an annual conference at a resort. ABB evaluates managers based not only on the result of their decisions, but also on the knowledge and information applied in the decision–making process. IBM, India, provides in their performance appraisals, due weightage for the sharing of knowledge. The IT group of Microsoft has focused heavily on the issue of identifying and maintaining knowledge competencies. Neil Evans, the former head of the Microsoft IT Group, is now addressing the issue as a researcher on a National Science Foundation project at the Northwest Center for Emerging Technologies. Conway had developed similar competency programs at Computer Sciences and Texaco before coming to Microsoft. Microsoft has distinguished four types of knowledge competencies: foundation level, local level, global level, and universal level.

Again under each of these four levels of competencies, there are two types: explicit and implicit types. Again under each of these two types, there are four defined skill levels: basic, working,

"To conceive of knowledge as a collection of information seems to rob the concept of all of its life…..knowledge resides in the user and not in the collection. It is how the user reacts to a collection of information that matters."

- Churchman

leadership, and expert. Microsoft has also developed a whole set of procedures and systems to rate employee competency levels, building an employee online competency system and linkages to educational resources. Implementation of this skills planning "Und" Development (SPUD) Model is on for over 1000 people in Microsoft.

American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) has done seminal research on KM metrics in organizations. APQC collaborates with Corning, Dow Corning, and Siemens AG, to find out real world examples of KM metrics. A KM maturity Model has been created similar to CMM Model for software development. The four levels are: Enter and Advocate, Explore and Experiment, Discover and conduct pilots, Expand and support.

Infosys has developed a KM Maturity Model, much on the lines of the Software Engineering Institute's Capability Maturity Model (CMM). The KMM model defines five knowledge maturity levels: Default, Reactive, Aware, Convinced, and Sharing. Each maturity level is characterized by a set of Key Result Areas on each of the three essential prongs of KM: people, process, and technology.

Infosys maintains an organization-wide Body of Knowledge (BOK), which enshrines experiential learning gained by past projects. Infosys employees contribute entries and a review mechanism screens their content, applicability, and presentation aspects. Each employee should declare that the work is experiential, and that it does not violate third party IPR – in case the IPR belongs to a third party such as the customer, clearance from that party must be obtained. This system is available in the intranet. Since only a small proportion of employees will distill and write their experiences, "as–is" project deliverables must be captured too. As a part of project closure, a Project Leader fills in a brief description of the project. Infosys also follows Dr. Karl-Erik Sveiby's Intangible Assets Monitor framework and publishes data on some of its internal and external intangible assets in their annual accounts. A knowledge directory, providing pointers to expertise available within the organization has been developed and deployed. A web based virtual classroom has been developed and deployed on the intranet, and allows access to various internally developed courses.

KM – Where to begin?

Active involvement with knowledge happens when a person summarizes and explains a key experience to others. This form of knowledge sharing deems to be made a systemic feature in all knowledge intensive organizations. For example, Project Managers in software and engineering consultancy firms, after the successful completion of their projects, should summarize their key experiences around problem zones and explain how they acted, by learning through mistakes, to mitigate such problem issues. These knowledge forms should also be warehoused into corporate databases. Managers, who participate in knowledge sharing, should be encouraged just as academic institutions encourage their academic faculties for publishing in journals.

Jane Linder, an information (and market research and strategic planning) manager for a division of Polaroid Corporation, worked with a supportive division president to create a "War games" exercise for division managers and professionals. Participants digested market research and then played roles as competitors of Polaroid in making sales presentations to customers. The market – oriented exercises were a big success, and now Polaroid is assessing the use of information engagement approaches for their types of knowledge. Toyota and Nissan have both sent car designers to the United States to receive tacit knowledge by fraternizing with particular customer segments.

Managing knowledge first presupposes that the organization is capable of categorizing the knowledge forms appropriate to their strategic objectives. One possible form of the classification could be know–how, know–why and know–what. Ron Sanchez has developed a product - process - knowledge

modular architecture, not only to manage knowledge effectively but also to use this modular architecture to concentrate on core capabilities and to create a wish list of new capabilities to be acquired in order to create new product – process possibilities.

Every organization should take a stock of their knowledge base sources. These could be defined systems and procedures about employees and other process variables. These will have to be identified. Thereafter capturing, sharing, and creating knowledge should be anchored through a specific knowledge manager. To begin with, the information manager could be trained to assume this role.

Knowledge management is a hot subject today, but most of us do not know how to integrate this powerful tool with organizational objectives. As most organizations are confused even about their objectives, there is a tendency to embrace these hot conceptual tools as an end in itself and wishfully think that these "ends" would deliver their dreams. To make effective use of these conceptual tools, one should understand them in the real sense of the word. I would like to contrast the word, "understanding" as different from "overstanding".

Understanding means to go beneath the subject and see it in all its dimensions, patterns, and even potential patterns that could evolve in future. In fact, this is the definition for knowledge itself.

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