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What Is Knowledge Management – Knowing What We Know?

By Colin Mc Cullough

The paper aims to identify the role human factors play in determining the success or failure or knowledge management initiatives.

A growing realisation in both the private and public sector is the worth of human capital as an intangible asset. In a society transcending the boundaries from information to a knowledge society, it is essential to find adequate and successful means of processing and exploiting the knowledge within the heads of its members. Research literature shows a strong link between knowledge management and the creation of a sustainable competitive advantage, because of the tacit nature of an organisation's knowledge (Gupta & McDaniel, 2002). The growing body of literature on KM has tended to emphasise the technical aspects at the expense of the people management aspects and it is indicative in itself that the vast majority of literature resides within the Information Technology (IT) field (Bank, 1996; Cole-Gomolski, 1997; Finerty, 1997). Scarbrough et al.'s (1999) IPD report provided an extensive overview of existing literature which demonstrated a growing gap in the literature in terms of people issues in favour of a concern with the technological and system aspects. Likewise Johanessen et al. (1999) explore the inadequacy of firms investing in new technology hoping that KM will simply emerge as a result. Instead they suggest it is the employees themselves who will be the impetus behind the transition from functional organisations to knowledge organisations.

Fundamentally frequent KM attempts end in failure. The assumption that knowledge is an object, and can be codified and distributed underpins the linked field of computer science and information systems. As a result of this knowledge management has been closely tied to ICT. Yet even within the computer science fields, it is increasingly recognised that most current software for knowledge management have more to do with new ways of storing and communicating information than with actual ways in which people create, acquire and use knowledge (Milton et al., 1999). Likewise as McDermott points out, using ICT rather than a solution to knowledge management may "represent the great trap in knowledge management" (McDermott, 1999: p. 104).

An analysis of current academic literature on obstacles to knowledge management reveal three main groups of factors - flaws in the organisational process, misconceptions of the role of technology in the process and lastly, and that which I seek to elucidate as a principle component - a large disregard of

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the importance of the human factor in achieving a successful knowledge-sharing and knowledge managing culture.

A failure to understand clearly the terms of reference (i.e. what is knowledge management?) fogs entirely the picture of what factors can enhance or reduce the chances of successful knowledge management within an organisation. As Thomas, Kellogg and Erickson (2003) point out the view of knowledge management as a passive, fact-storing procedure which ignores the context in which knowledge is embedded and which relies solely on information technologies is a common misconception of the whole process. Soo, Devinney, Midgley and Deering (2000) likewise stress that the knowledge management process is not something simple which can be bolted on to conventional business models as mere storage models.

The vast majority of academic research into knowledge management, concludes, as do Dominguez, Laverde, Lizzaralde and Arregui (2003) that while there is a general difficulty for companies to explain

what they mean when they use the term knowledge management, they are in a position to identify common aspects such as the sharing of knowledge and of transforming individual into organisational knowledge. They admit, however, that a lack of clarity over the concept while generating certain confusion, has led to a greater flexibility in its application in the private sector. It simply means different things in different contexts. De Jarnett (1996) states that knowledge management is knowledge creation, which is followed by knowledge interpretation, knowledge dissemination and use, and knowledge retention and refinement. Brooking (1997), however, in his definition stresses that knowledge management is the activity which is concerned with strategy and tactics to manage human centred assets while Quintas et al (1997) in their definition claim that KM is the process is critically managing knowledge to meet existing needs, to identify and exploit existing and acquired knowledge assets and to develop new opportunities. As Ariely (2003) points out even nowadays there is no full consensus on definitions and perceptions of knowledge management. She concludes, however, that the differing definitions expose the problems industry is having with defining and commonly understanding such a combined term. For this reason she favours the definition by Brooks (2000) of organisational knowledge management through correlating the aim of KM in the organisation with those of the organisation. Ultimately the test is the success achieved in enabling knowledge creation rather than managing it. As von Krogh (2000) points out the dilemma can perhaps be best approached by managing the processes relating to the domain of knowledge management rather than presuming to manage the knowledge itself.

Knowledge management is inextricably linked to the sharing of knowledge between individuals and to the collaborative processes involved. The factors and environments which enhance this all relate to the human factor in the KM process.

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Golf Course Management

By George Gabriel

Playing a good round of golf comes with a lot of good golf course management. Sure it is great to know how to have a great golf swing, but if you haven't got course management, then you haven't got a game plan.

Have you ever noticed a professional golfer standing beside their caddie in a discussion about the next golf shot at hand? You can rest assured that they were not talking about Larry King live, unless he was in the pro-am the day before and he was leading the tournament. They are discussing the previous results and golf placement on where they hit their golf shot the prior hole before in the practice round or regulation round. Course management is what they are talking about. Every golf shot is tagged to the nearest yard. If you want to play a good golf shot, you have to know your distance and what type of situation you're up against. This is where good golfers with a good course management excel over their competition.

Taking all the great golfers and great golf swings into consideration, without the proper knowledge about distance, wind, uphill, downhill and all the great earthly weather that is always a surprise at times can be quite demanding to the best golfer at times. If you think that all you need is a great golf swing and a great set of golf clubs, you should rethink your game again. A lot of great golfers fall prey to a golfer with better course management. These same golfers with good course management do not need to out distance their competitor. They just need to place their ball where the next golf shot is a walk in the park.

If you haven't got a clue about course management, your handicap is going to soar into the high double-digit figures. When you are talking about the shot at hand, you must take in consideration the prior distance and weather condition on your previous shot with the club selection at hand. Was the golf shot uphill with a wind behind you or against you? When choosing a golf club, one must ask a series of questions before making a formal decision. Do I want to play my next shot over a sand trap? Do I want to play my next golf shot with a pitching wedge or a 7 iron? In other words, do I want to fly the golf shot into the green, or place it where I can bump and run the next golf shot into the green?

Course management requires the golfer in paying attention to golf holes that are next to the hole that they are playing. They are constantly looking for good golf position for the next hole before they even tee up the golf ball. They are also checking out greens as far as slope and surrounding sand traps. Knowing where pin placement is, way before you're sitting out in the middle of the fairway will definitely help on club selection. You may decide to play less club, because of the simple fact of a two-tier green and the pin is sitting on the bottom level. You would never have that knowledge at hand if you did not eye the situation on the prior hole unless you played it once before. It is called course management.

Take a good look at the golf terrain and conditions that you are playing in and pay attention to golf holes that you walk by. Knowing the golf terrain well in advance will make it a lot easier on golf club

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selection and help drive confidence going forward.

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