Knowledge Management :Present Preview

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Knowledge management is a new concept in Library and Information science. Knowledge is considered as a rich asset these days. The dictionary defines knowledge as the facts, feelings or experiences known by a person or a group of people. Knowledge Management as a new branch of management for achieving breakthrough in business performance through the synergy of people, processes, and technology, its focus is on the management of change, uncertainty, and complexity. K. Navalani said "Knowledge Management caters to the critical issues of organizational adaptation, survival, and competence in face of increasingly discontinuous environmental change.... Essentially, it embodies organizational processes that seek synergistic combination of data and information processing capacity of information technologies, and the creative and innovative capacity of human beings." Information can be considered as a message. It typically has a sender and a receiver. Information is the sort of stuff that can, at least potentially, be saved onto a computer. Data is a type of information that is structured, but has not been interpreted.

Knowledge might be described as information that has a use or purpose. Whereas information can be placed onto a computer, knowledge exists in the heads of people. Knowledge is information to which an intent has been attached. In the eighteenth century Dr.Samuel Johnson (1709-84) wrote 'Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves or we know where we can find information upon it'.

In the new millennium, however, it is apparent knowledge management is emerging as a dominant force in the overall strategy of organizational management. In July 1999 Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister said, "The knowledge economy is the economy of the future". In knowledge economies, knowledge, expertise and innovation rather than land and machinery are the primary assets of an organization. Such assets must be effectively managed. Knowledge Management caters to the critical issues of organizational adaptation, survival, and competence in face of increasingly discontinuous environmental change. Essentially, it embodies organizational processes that seek synergistic combination of data and information processing capacity of information technologies, and the creative and innovative capacity of human beings. Clearly the goal of knowledge management has sustained individual and business performance through ongoing learning, unlearning, and adaptation. Technologies of computing have inherent limitations. They have difficulty in generating meaningful insights from data as they can't question or re-interpret their programmed logic and assumptions. Given inherent limitations of the technologies of computing, human users of such systems have at least an equally important role in knowledge management.

Knowledge management is a part of the continuous business improvement process. It relates to the way an organization works and develops. It recognizes corporate capability and enables skills, knowledge and processes of the organization to be used effectively and creatively to improve business performance. It is more useful to consider

the concept of intellectual capital within knowledge-based organization and it the information economy generally. In the learning or knowledge based organization the most valuable component is the knowledge. Knowledge need to be identified and valued as intellectual capital assets which is intangible. Knowledge is re-usable and can be used by more than one person at a time. Knowledge is that resource which is ever growing and increasing. Such features of knowledge make it powerful. Lessons learned from the world's greatest organizations show that even simple technologies can generate great performance when empowered by smart minds of motivated and committed humans. Conversely, 'intelligent' technologies may produce dumb results if those smart people are missing as evident from the cases of companies once considered great in the past. Importantly, unless data and information are translated into 'meaningful' decisions and actions for sustained performance, there is no point of the whole exercise... whether you call it knowledge management, wisdom management, creativity management, or something else.

Knowledge needs to be managed so that the organization knows what it knows and that it owns what it knows. It needs to be identified and managed because a successful knowledge management can provide a number of potential benefits to the organization; better decision making ; faster response time; increased profit and improved productivity ; cost reduction; sharing of best practice; increased market share and share price etc.

Knowledge management programme is a long term project and requires significant commitment form the organization. Knowledge management requires a corporate culture that is open and committed to sharing. A visible commitment to knowledge management is essential at senior management level. The knowledge relevant and appropriate to the organization and its activities must be identified and then electronically captured. It needs to be structured for easy retrieval as and when it is required by those who need it, and also so that pieces of knowledge can be combined in new and different ways.

By the early nineties, it was clear that there were two distinct branches of Knowledge Management.

First generation Knowledge Management

First generation Knowledge Management involves the capture of information and experience so that it is easily accessible in a corporate environment. An alternate term is "knowledge capture". Managing this capture allows the system to grow into a powerful information asset. This branch had its roots firmly in the use of technology. In this view Knowledge Management is an issue of information storage and retrieval. It uses ideas derived from systems analysis and management theory. This approach led to a boom in consultancies and in the development of so-called knowledge technologies. Typically first-generation Knowledge Management involved developing sophisticated data analysis and retrieval systems with little thought to how the information they contained would be developed or used. This led to organizations investing heavily in technology that had either little impact or a negative impact on the way in which knowledge was used. A typical scenario might have seen an organization install a sophisticated intranet in order to categorize and disseminate information, only to find that the extra work involved in

setting up the metadata meant that few within the organization actually used the intranet. This occasionally led to management mandating the use of the intranet, resulting in resentment amongst staff, and undermining their trust in the organization. Thus first generation solutions are often counterproductive.

Management theory functions as a branch of economics, and to a large extent it adopts econometric standards. When it became apparent that it would be useful to be able to manage knowledge, it was natural for managers to attempt to apply their preferred econometric methods to the cause. But econometrics is about commodities and cash flow. It found it therefore necessary to treat knowledge as if it were a commodity.

This, of course, was a surprisingly difficult thing to do, essentially because knowledge is not a commodity but a process. Its failure to provide any theoretical understanding of how organizations learn new things and how they act on this information meant that first generation Knowledge Management was incapable of managing knowledge creation.

Second Generation Knowledge Management

Faced with the theoretical and practical failure of first generation techniques to live up to its promise, theorists began to look more closely at the ways in which knowledge is created and shared. Along with this realization came a change in metaphor. Organizations came to be seen as capable of learning, and so a link grew between learning theory and management. At the same time hierarchical models of organizational structure were replaced by more organic models, which see effective organizations as capable of structural change in response to their environment. The advent of complexity theory and chaos theory provided more metaphors that enable managers to replace models of organizations as integrated systems with models of organizations as complex interdependent entities that are capable of responding to their environment.
Second generation Knowledge Management gives priority to the way in which people construct and use knowledge. It derives its ideas from complex systems, often making use of organic metaphors to describe knowledge growth. It is closely related to organizational learning. It recognizes that learning and doing are more important to organizational success than dissemination and imitation.

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