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Introducing the Education-focused Knowledge Management Newsletter

For the past couple of years, knowledge management has been a hot topic. The measurement and maintenance of intangible capital is becoming increasingly important to businesses all over the globe. Interestingly, as hot as knowledge management is, you find (1) that there are relatively few real world examples of significant knowledge management efforts and (2) that these efforts are largely confined to larger business enterprises. Why is this?

I believe there are a couple of reasons for this. First, it is very difficult to explain what knowledge management is. After all, knowledge management deals with intangible assets. If these assets were tangible then managing them would be like managing any other asset. Second, knowledge management, if perceived as a technology problem can be very expensive, and unless your business is specifically a knowledge business, it may be difficult to understand why a knowledge management effort should be part of the strategic agenda for the business.

My own interest in knowledge management began years ago with my efforts to develop expert systems. For me, knowledge management is not a new field, discipline, or technology. Businesses have tried to manage expertise for years. Knowledge management has arisen because companies realize the importance of the collections of informal knowledge that reside within all individuals in a business.

When you look closely at what is called knowledge management, you cannot help but conclude that it is something we all do all of the time. Whether it is conscious or unconscious the volume of information that passes before us these days is tremendous, and growing greater each and every day. As we make decisions about new information, and integrate it into our own personal knowledge bases, we are doing a kind of knowledge management on a personal basis.

Organizationally, groups of individuals put their knowledge together to form a body of knowledge necessary to

carry out their business tasks. Products that arise from activities of organizational groups are realizations of the knowledge required to produce the products. An automobile for example is the manifestation of all of the knowledge needed to manufacture the automobile. This knowledge is as valuable, if not more valuable than the actual product. Unfortunately, understanding the value of this knowledge is a complex problem, and one not always seen as germane.

As I look out into cyberspace and survey the information available about knowledge management I see several different kinds of information. There are certainly a host of newsletters that identify developments in the knowledge management arena including company efforts and products to support knowledge management efforts. One can also find web sites dedicated to knowledge management containing many resources and discussions about the subject. Looking elsewhere into cyberspace, you can travel to company sites of Anderson and Deloitte & Touche - two companies that have invested a great deal into formal knowledge management programs. These sites provide a couple of white papers along with suggestions that you might engage these firms to create a knowledge management program for your company. Essentially, these companies want to sell you their intellectual capital about intellectual capital and knowledge management. Seriously lacking in all of this cyberspace information is "How-To" information.

I believe that understanding what knowledge management is and how it can be used in organizations is critical to its successful use in business. I also believe that in order to support organizational knowledge management we must be individual knowledge managers - i.e., there must be a personal payoff. This newsletter will be dedicated to providing educational resources for businesses wanting to investigate and/or implement programs in knowledge management.

On a weekly basis, in up and coming issues of this newsletter, I hope to define some of the basic concepts of knowledge management to create a standard for discussion. I will also discuss some practical knowledge management problems and provide solutions for them. At times, I may identify other resources in cyberspace and elsewhere that may be useful to the knowledge management practitioner. I am very interested in responding to questions from my readers. On a regular basis we will devote issues of this

newsletter to "questions from its audience." It is my desire that readers become active participants in the content of this newsletter. From time to time I will also identify products of interest to the knowledge management practitioner. Lastly, I hope to provide interviews with some of the leaders in the field of knowledge management.

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I would appreciate your comments and suggestions. Please send mail directly to me at rkaplan@accsys-corp.com. Stay tuned for issue 2 of the ACCSYS KM Newsletter, "Setting a Context."