

Table of Contents

1. KnowBits

Artificial Intelligence Growing Up, An Article by James Allen

2. Knowledge Work As the Contributor Sees It

KnowBits

Artificial Intelligence Growing Up, An Article by James Allen

If you have been with this newsletter since the beginning, you know that part of my background was as a researcher in artificial intelligence. Also, one of previous columns attempted to make some connections, albeit more conceptual than practical, between the field of knowledge management and artificial intelligence. So much about both of these fields strikes me as similar and that is why I would like bring to your attention, the article in the Winter 1998 issue of AI Magazine entitled, "AI Growing Up" by James Allen. I highly recommend this article to you because of the articulate way the Dr. Allen handles the transition of artificial intelligence from childhood to adolescence.

Although I believe there are many lessons that we as knowledge work professionals and practitioners can learn from this article, I draw your attention to the fact that to this day, we are still trying to define what artificial intelligence is and what it is not. Dr. Allen goes a long way to provide a simple and yet accurate definition. I wonder how many researchers would agree with this definition. No definition and you can track the origins of artificial intelligence to the late 1940's. Just some food for thought.

Knowledge Work As the Contributor Sees It

Imagine yourself as part of some organization that is beginning a knowledge management initiative. How might you view your and others' relationships to this effort? Although there can be many different responses and points of view, I would like to propose several typical examples in this newsletter. To understand what we might encounter, I will describe some of the stereotypical characters.

1. The Champion

Of all of the possible participant views, the champion may be the most desirable. In a knowledge work effort, a champion will understand the process, buy into the process, and become an evangelist for the process. As an evangelist, a champion will help spread the word about your effort and assist in gaining participation in the effort.

2. The Participant

Participants are willing to engage in the knowledge work effort. Whether they accept the effort intuitively or seek to understand it, participants generally exhibit behaviors that make efforts a success. They see value in knowledge work efforts for both themselves and the organization.

3. The Skeptic

Skeptics can be of two types -- discrete and continuous. Discrete skeptics are ones who question the effort up front and either have their skepticism resolved or not. Once their questions are resolved, discrete skeptics may undergo a transformation into participants. On the other hand, if their issues are not resolved, they will remain skeptics and may not participate at all.

Continuous skeptics are those whose skepticism is resolved at some point, but who continue to find reasons to be skeptical. Continuous skeptics may become an interfering faction throughout the effort.

4. The Partial Participant

Partial participants enter and exit the game at will. Consider, for example, someone who is willing to share part of his knowledge but considers other aspects of his knowledge as private. People who need to remain in control are likely to become partial participants.

5. The Interferer

Interferers are individuals who will get in the way of the knowledge work effort. They don't see the value in the effort and may even believe that any such effort would benefit management and no one else. Interferers interfere.

As I mentioned above, skeptics can become interferers. Interferers sometimes will attempt to change other participants into skeptics and interferers.

6. The Pontificator

Knowledge work, and knowledge management in particular, is fertile ground for pontificators. Pontificators like to express their opinions -- the grander the point, the greater the pontificator. Pontificators come with attitude, and the attitude is always my opinion is better than anyone else's. Usually, although not always, pontificators don't really contribute. There is often an inverse relationship between their contribution and the amount of disagreement that their opinion generates.

7. The Debater

In the same way that pontificators enjoy the pontification, debaters enjoy the debate. If anyone defines something one way, debaters will define it another way. Because knowledge management is so ill-defined, debaters enjoy expressing alternative views and debating them. Some amount of debate is necessary and valuable during any on-going effort. However, it is necessary to reach closure in a debate once all opinions have been expressed. Debaters, however, enjoy the debate too much to want to reach closure and will continue to question basic definitions and disagree with fundamental assumptions long after these issues have been resolved. Like skeptics, debaters often become interferers.

Summary

Champions

Contribute knowledge: YES

Accept process: YES

Question process: Maybe, but it will be constructive questioning

Interfere: NO

Lead process: YES

Participants

Contribute knowledge: YES

Accept process: YES

Question process: Some (but to increase and improve understanding)

Interfere: NO

Lead process: Possible

Skeptics

Contribute knowledge: Possible to no

Accept process: Discrete, YES. Continuous, probably NO

Question process: YES

Interfere: Possible

Lead process: Possible

Partial Participants

Contribute knowledge: Possible

Accept process: Some acceptance

Question process: Possible

Interfere: NO

Lead process: NO

Interferers

Contribute knowledge: NO, may even make a negative contribution by supplying incorrect knowledge

Accept process: NO

Question process: YES

Interfere: YES

Lead process: NO

Pontificators

Contribute knowledge: Slightly

Accept process: Possible

Question process: YES

Interfere: Possible
Lead process: NO
Debaters

Contribute knowledge: Possible
Accept process: Slightly
Question process: YES
Interfere: YES
Lead process: NO

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