

knowldgWORKS News Number 39 March 2001
Management Thinking About Knowledge Management

+++++

Table of Contents

KnowBits

- A. New knowldgWORKS Report - On Building a Potential Knowledge Base

This Week's Topic - Management Thinking About Knowledge Management

+++++

KnowBits

- A. New knowldgWORKS Report - On Building a Potential Knowledge Base

The second special topic report will be released shortly. This one focuses on key issues of building a knowledge base. The table of contents follows for your consideration. This report, like the last will be available for purchase from the ACCSYS Corporation web site.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

POTENTIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE

- A. FORMS
- B. ATTRACTION
- C. USES
- D. SOURCE
- E. RELEVANCE
- F. DISTANCE
- G. PAYMENT
- H. BUSINESS VALUE (ROI, CONTRIBUTION TO THE BOTTOM LINE)

MAKING THE KNOWLEDGE USEFUL

- A. CONSIDERING THE AUDIENCE
- B. WHERE TO START - IDENTIFYING CONTENT POSSIBILITIES
- C. A SHORT LIST OF POSSIBILITIES
 - 1. List of Experts
 - 2. How To Do's
 - 3. What's Going On
 - 4. Where Is It?

STRUCTURE AND REPRESENTATION

- A. HOLISTIC ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES
- B. FORMAL ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES
 - 1. Taxonomy and Ontology
 - 2. Ontologies
- C. PRACTICAL ORGANIZATION PRINCIPLES
 - 1. File Folders
 - 2. Classification Systems
- D. REPRESENTATION PRINCIPLES
 - 1. Representation Types
 - 2. Un-Structured Knowledge
 - 3. Semi-Structured
 - 4. Structured Knowledge

THE PEOPLE, THE PEOPLE

- A. BY EDICT
- B. BY REWARD
- C. AS PART OF PROCESS
- D. GROUND UP

+++++

knowldgWORKS News Number 39 March 2001
 Management Thinking About Knowledge Management

At various times through the life of this column I have tried to address important issues in knowledge management. For example, knowldgWORKS #8 dealt with the people aspect of knowledge management, #3 identified the key issues of knowledge management, and #22 discussed what it takes to be a knowledge management professional. I have also discussed the idea of personal knowledge management. For me, one of the interesting characteristics of knowledge management is that people do it all the time. As I have said before - it is like breathing - we do it to live. But the true home for knowledge management - the reason it is in the public view - is because of its application in the business world. After all, the idea was/is that if you can capture the stuff in people's heads then that stuff becomes an asset to the business. But if it were as simple as that we would not now be part of the second, or is it third (?) generation of knowledge management thinking.

Because knowledge management is "in business", it falls into one or more manager's hands to create a program in knowledge management. , I decided to address a column specifically to the management portion of the knowldgWORKS audience. What precisely should a manager be thinking when considering launching a knowledge management project?

As luck would have it, when I was thinking about writing this column, I encountered a book that I think forms an excellent basis for management thinking about knowledge management. The book, a recent one, is entitled, "The Knowing-Doing Gap," by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton. This book should be on the reading list of both those that are involved in knowledge management and those who are not. It speaks to the question of why some organizations are successful in what they do, and why some organizations may not be so successful.

Being a manager myself and wanting to leverage the knowledge that those who work for me is a constant challenge. It is not enough to collect knowledge and put it somewhere and then expect the people to use the knowledge - call this the first generation knowledge management approach. Even if you put the knowledge in an easily accessible place, how can you be sure that the people in a group or organization are putting the knowledge to use? Pfeffer and Sutton address this question in their book.

As a manager thinking about this very question, one of the first considerations that comes to mind is CULTURE. Each and every person in a group or organization will be influenced by the CULTURE of the organization. The CULTURE comes from the top of the organization and, good or bad, that CULTURE will define major aspects of the behavior of individuals in the organization. If the CULTURE of the organization is not one that supports the idea of cooperation then you can be relatively assured that people won't cooperate. Knowledge management requires cooperation and CULTURES not supporting cooperation create a significant barrier for managers wishing to create programs in knowledge management. Pfeffer and Sutton, through their discussion of organizational characteristics clearly show that cultures that support cooperation are those that have a chance of being successful at using their knowledge. Any manager thinking about knowledge management needs to understand the CULTURE of the organization and identify the nature of the behavior that the culture promotes. When such an analysis is in hand, it will give insights into creating a successful knowledge management program.

Acting vs. Knowing

The knowldgWORKS definition of knowledge management makes tangible key considerations of knowledge management. Thus, the idea of "that which enables us to do things," and "controlling, organizing, and arranging resources" is key to an important consideration for a manager in the formulation of knowledge management efforts. Using the example of the knowledge repository again - just because "it is out there" does not mean that people will do anything with it.

Make the Manager Happy

One way to start a knowledge management effort is for a manager to let his group know they will be doing knowledge management. The manager defines knowledge management as putting knowledge in a common place where everyone in the group has access to the knowledge. The manager gives everyone a deadline and makes everyone know that they are expected to meet the deadline. Everybody makes his or her contribution to the repository. Nothing happens after that. The manager looks at the repository and sees that there has been no activity since the initial assignment, so she issues another assignment. And so it goes. The group is acting to make the manager happy.

The Knowing-Doing Gap discusses an important distinction between knowing and doing. In the example above, everyone in the group knows that the repository contains a representation of what they and their co-workers know, but that does not mean they will do anything with this knowledge. The gap between knowing and doing is not reduced by simply introducing a source to know more. The gap is reduced by knowing how to do something with that knowledge and by doing it. In the case of the example, knowing how to "do" knowledge management is an extremely important consideration when doing knowledge management.

To a manager knowing how to do knowledge management means not only how to "get and manage" the knowledge but also how to derive value from the getting and managing of the knowledge resource. Value from the knowledge resource is derived from people using the knowledge, extending the knowledge, and transferring the knowledge throughout the organization. A manager should focus on the people involved in the knowledge management effort as opposed to the knowledge of the effort. Knowledge management is not simply a task to be added to the other tasks people currently are

doing. It is something that becomes part of how people will do what they need to do.

The Measurement Aspect

Managers thinking about knowledge management should also think about how they will measure the effectiveness of their knowledge management effort. Here again, knowing how to measure something and actually measuring it are two entirely different things. One of the issues Pfeffer and Sutton pointed out is that the nature of the measurement can actually be an impediment to doing. For example, if the measurement is complex and onerous this could result in people avoiding the effort because of the complexity of the measurement. Or if the outcome of the measurement might be pejorative action on the part of the management, then this, too, could also be a deterrent to the knowledge management effort.

One often hears about the metrics that define whether knowledge is being used, how often knowledge is used, and how the knowledge repository grows. What do these metrics actually have to do with the doing? These metrics seem more applicable to the knowing than the doing. Instead of measuring knowledge management, it seems more appropriate to measure changes in the activities that the knowledge management effort is suppose to support.

Consider, as an example, software development. Software development is a knowledge intensive task. When large software projects are implemented it is extremely important for the project team. This coordination comes in the form of knowledge about the project that is passed between members of the team. If the team develops difficulty with the quality aspect of the project, this could be attributed to several different characteristics of the project. One of these could be a lack of consistent communication about the effort among members - i.e., the members are not adequately sharing knowledge about the project. To improve the quality, the project manager could undertake a knowledge management effort. All of the team members could partake in this effort formalizing the knowledge sharing process. How can the manager measure the effectiveness of the knowledge management effort? In this case, the most appropriate measure is one that considers the quality of the software - typically the number of bugs identified in the software being developed. If the knowledge management effort has the desired effect, the

number of identifiable bugs should be reduced, thus improving the quality of the software. If a measurement of software quality such as the number of bugs in a software product is used, then the measurement of the knowledge management effort is based on the activities of the project.

These three issues -- culture, acting, and measurement -- seem obvious. Unfortunately, things that are obvious are often overlooked in complex projects. A manager thinking about knowledge management should consider these issues carefully because the failure of any knowledge management effort can always be associated with any one or more of the issues of culture, acting, and measurement.

+++++

The knowldgWORKS News is written in its entirety by Randy Kaplan and edited by Harriet Trenholm. Suggestions for the newsletter should be sent to rkaplan@accsys-corp.com. All suggestions will be considered and always appreciated.

If you are interested in learning more about knowledge work, subscribe to this newsletter by sending email to:

knowldgWORKSNews-on@lists.webvalence.com.

To unsubscribe send an e-mail to: knowldgWORKSNews-off@lists.webvalence.com.

You may type an x in the subject or body if your e-mail program requires.

Previous issues of the knowldgWORKS News are archived at <http://www.accsys-corp.com>.

+++++

Published by Dr. Randy M. Kaplan, and ACCSYS Corporation. This newsletter is the property of ACCSYS Corporation. No part may be reproduced in any form or media without permission from ACCSYS Corporation. Copyright (c) 1999-2001 ACCSYS Corporation. All rights reserved.