

INTRODUCTION TO KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

By

Judith Smith

Centre for Knowledge Management, The Robert Gordon University,
Garthdee, Aberdeen

What is Knowledge Management?

- 'Knowledge Management caters to the critical issues of organisational adaption, survival and competence... Essentially it embodies organisational processes that seek synergistic combination of data and information processing capacity of information technologies, and the creative and innovative capacity of human beings'

Definition of 'Knowledge'

- 'A fluid mix of framed experiences, values, contextual information and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers'

Explicit Knowledge

- Often referred to as 'hard' knowledge
- Embedded in documents, databases, records and drawings
- Easily identified
- Relatively easy to place a value on explicit knowledge

Tacit Knowledge

- The knowledge that we, as individuals have acquired through experience and learning
- Because it is highly personal it is difficult to formalise and communicate
- Enables us to recognise familiar patterns and helps us to make connections between what happened before and what is happening now

Knowledge as a Corporate Asset

- People are valuable to their organisation because of their experience more than because of their educational qualifications
- Knowledge Management is the only lever which can give sustainable advantage
- Knowledge assets increase with use
- How can organisations 'know what they know'?

Knowledge Capital

- Assets captured in the experience and learning of individuals
- Intellectual capital can include patents, trademarks and copyrights

- Intellectual capital is 'the sum of everything that everybody in a company knows that gives it a competitive edge; a collective brainpower, a composite of knowledge, information, intellectual property and experience' (Tom Stewart)

The Learning Organisation

- Adaptive learning
- Continuous experimentation and feedback
- A culture where people are not afraid to admit mistakes and learn from them
- Sharing knowledge through informal and formal communication

Mapping an Organisation's Knowledge

- Using 'maps' which point people to where information and knowledge resides
- Identifying crucial relationships
- 'Yellow pages'
- Databases

Working Culture

- Fostering an environment where people feel their contribution is of value
- What are the drivers for people at work?
 - earning a good salary
 - feeling that they can contribute something
 - recognition
 - continued support

Encouraging A Culture of Knowledge Sharing

- Linking career reviews and salary increments with contribution to the knowledge pool
 - creating a culture which does not attach blame to mistakes
 - giving people the opportunity to share their experiences
 - using Knowledge Champions

Methods of Knowledge Capture

- Buying it in
- Creating communities of best practice
- Changing the management structure
- Using individual diaries and logs
- Debriefing sessions (AARs) and exit interviews

Methods of Knowledge Sharing

- Storytelling
- Using IT solutions
 - intranets
 - databases
 - e-mail discussion groups

Government Recognition of Knowledge Management

- White Paper on competitiveness emphasises the shift towards a 'knowledge economy'
- Enterprise and Knowledge Management unit within the DTI
- Creating a Competitiveness Index
- Establishing a Competitiveness Council to advise the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Changes in Working Patterns

- Working population is ageing
- People change careers more often
- Organisations are losing knowledge and experience as people leave, retire or are made redundant