

Chapter 5.20

Knowledge Management Governance

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INTRODUCTION

There are many barriers to the implementation of knowledge management (KM) strategies. These include the lack of time and financial resources allocated to sharing knowledge, a lack of organizational understanding of the philosophy and the benefits of KM, and a lack of skills in KM. However, survey data show that the greatest acknowledged obstacle to the implementation of a KM strategy is the management culture of the organization (Chase, 1997; Zyngier, 2001). These obstacles reveal a problem in the implementation of an organizational KM strategy. The problem lies not in the implementation of a given strategy per se, but in the lack of governance of that strategy.

The governance process is a framework of authority that ensures the delivery of anticipated or predicted benefits of a service or process (Farrar, 2001). The operationalization of that strategy is

therefore executed in an authorized and regulated manner. Governance mechanisms must be invoked to guide both the initial implementation and the ongoing control and authority over KM strategies. A governance framework will provide the management of risk, review mechanisms and fiscal accountability in leveraging tacit knowledge, and the sharing of explicit knowledge within an organization. Knowledge is not simply a series of artefacts to be managed. This article identifies the processes in KM that are subject to governance. KM governance centres the decision-making authority as an executive framework to deliver the expected benefits of the strategy and for these benefits to be delivered in a controlled manner. This is achieved by the establishment of checks and balances in the implementation of the strategy. It ensures that evaluation measures feedback that enables deliberate adjustment of the delivery of the strategy, and that needs and expectations are being met. If the needs and expectations of the

organization cannot be met, then the governance process should then be able to establish and manage the cause.

The first part of this article discusses KM strategy development and shows the origins of KM governance in the concept of the use of governance principles and practices. The second part will discuss the central issues in KM governance, being authority, evaluation, measurement, and risk management. The third part will suggest a structure or model for KM governance explaining how this operates in an organizational context, and suggests future trends for this research.

BACKGROUND

The Role of Leadership

Executive management leads and establishes the culture and consequent ability of an organization to capture, share, and manage its knowledge. In the past, leaders in organizations were empowered to order changes, and then all that was required of the organization was to implement the plan (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). The culture of an organization is developed by the structure, attitude, and example of management. Krogh, Ichijo, and Nonaka (2000) describe how effective management and the support of knowledge creation depends on the physical, virtual, and emotional context in which they are manifested. Where there is a strong commitment at the level of executive management to change organizational culture, an organization is able to begin to create the values that lead to knowledge sharing across boundaries (Hackett, 2000; O'Dell, Grayson, & Essaides, 1998). Currently, interpretations of knowledge management leadership (Rumizen, 2002; Tiwana, 2002) endow the leader with the responsibility to direct, conduct, or guide functions in the implementation of such a strategy.

The terms knowledge champion, leader, and sponsor are used interchangeably in the knowl-

edge management literature. The terms variously indicate a person who initiates a KM strategy, or one who supports and promotes the initiation of such a strategy. Therefore, the person or persons responsible for the implementation of a KM strategy may have the sole responsibility for the development and implementation of a KM strategy. This cannot ensure buy in from the organization as a whole. These risks are revealed as found in Australian and international surveys that have disclosed some of the obstacles to KM strategies (Chase, 1997; Davis, McAdams, Dixon, Orlikowski, & Leonard, 1998; DeLong & Fahey, 2000; Ewyk, 1998; Fang, Lin, Hsiao, Huang, & Fang, 2002; Hackett, 2000; IC2 Institute at the University of Texas at Austin, 2001; McAdam & Reid, 2001; Zyngier, 2001).

KM Strategy Development

KM literature describes many approaches to the development of a strategy or plan to be implemented as a means of achieving the organizational objectives of sharing tacit and explicit knowledge within the organization. Strategies are usually grounded in a theoretical methodology that will provide the greatest leverage in implementation (Zack, 1999), with each meeting perceived needs in the organization. There are two categories of strategies: deliberate and emergent strategies. Deliberate strategies must be articulated in a plan that must then be implemented. Emergent strategies are those that emerge in the organization as part of the process of learning what works well and what does not. Mintzberg (1994) suggests that strategic planning processes fail when they are not constructed to understand, internalise, and synthesise, that is, to learn from the successes or failures of the strategic process as it is implemented. In this sense, strategic planning would be a static and inviolate process. This is where the concepts of strategic approaches to KM are vulnerable unless the strategy is conceived of as a learning or evolutionary process. This being

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