



Chapter VII

Management of Knowledge in New Product Development in Portuguese Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter uses key concepts in the knowledge management literature to analyse the procedures and practices used by a team during a new product development project. More precisely, the knowledge process or knowledge cycle is used as a means to examine issues relating to knowledge identification, creation, storage, dissemination, and application in new product development.

Results from the case study also suggest that the knowledge process may be valuable in assessing the structural elements of knowledge management, but fails to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the dynamics and

complexities involved. This suggests that more elaborate models are needed to explain how knowledge is created, shared and used in knowledge-intensive processes.

INTRODUCTION

Recent focus on knowledge management (KM) has been stimulated by the idea that companies must increase their ability to learn if they are to operate successfully in an environment characterised by rapid technological and societal change, globalisation, and increased competition (Senge, 1990). However, despite the attractiveness of the concept, there is no consensus on how knowledge can be efficiently managed. This is not surprising since knowledge is a pervasive and difficult concept to observe in organisations.

This chapter tries to overcome shortcomings associated to the practical observation of knowledge in organisations by focusing on a specific new business-project: the implementation of an e-Learning portal using new product development (NPD) tools and systems.

Our aim is to explore KM practices used by the project participants during development of the new business, therefore offering an interpretation and understanding of the sequence of events upon which participants in the project team assessed the relative success of the new business development process.

This chapter proceeds as follows: the first section reviews central concepts in the KM literature and offers a framework to analyse and assess the implementation of effective KM practice within an e-Learning project. The following section encompasses the method and study design, as well as the context of the case material. The case material is then evaluated in light of the notions and main ideas behind the current thinking in KM. The final section puts forward a summary and tentative conclusions.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge Management: A Strategic Imperative?

In recent years, the management literature has emphasised the prominent role of knowledge in organisations. This distinction has led to reassessing previous contributions to the broad areas of management and economics as well as resulting in the development of new research streams, e.g., the knowledge-based view of the firm (Brown & Duguid, 1991) and learning in organisations (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Much of this interest has been triggered by two trends. The first one suggests that organisations rely more and more on massive information transfers and consequent intensive use of information and commu-

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