

Collaborative Knowledge Management (CKM) and Enterprise Knowledge Management

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INTRODUCTION

This article will describe the background, basic infrastructure, and future trends of collaborative knowledge management (CKM) and enterprise knowledge management (KM) systems. CKM is about capturing the information that is in people's heads and sharing it in a collaborative manner (e.g., an open, application-independent framework that allows all to have access to it) across the enterprise. In order to take advantage of the knowledge that exists in organizations, an authoring process must be undertaken that categorizes and places important information into a shared resource (often referred to as a "knowledge repository") that can be accessed by all relevant stakeholders. Collaboration should be across departments, various types of employees, and different types of projects within the enterprise. Some of the important topics that will be discussed in this article are the focus on the benefits of CKM and enterprise KM systems and the recent attempts to define the return-on-investment (ROI) of sharing knowledge across organizations.

BACKGROUND

Knowledge is defined by the *Encarta Dictionary* as "general awareness or possession of information, facts, ideas, truths, or principles." KM is defined in this article as "the collection of processes that govern the creation, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge" (Newman, 2005). The importance of KM is that it is the key to deriving productivity from Drucker's (1959) archetypal "knowledge worker" (defined as a person who can make a living based on the knowledge in her head). If a "knowledge worker" can have access to key information, this can potentially lead to an increase in individual innovation, productivity, and, ultimately, the company's profitability.

According to Laise, Migliarese, and Verteramo (2005):

Knowledge workers represent people who constantly enrich and enhance their knowledge and skills to create value. Knowledge workers can use their competence to create value by transferring and converting knowledge to create better processes, new designs for products, licenses, trademarks, patents, customer relationships, brand awareness, reputation and consumer satisfaction and so on. (p. 125)

The problem is, according to Plewes (2004), that:

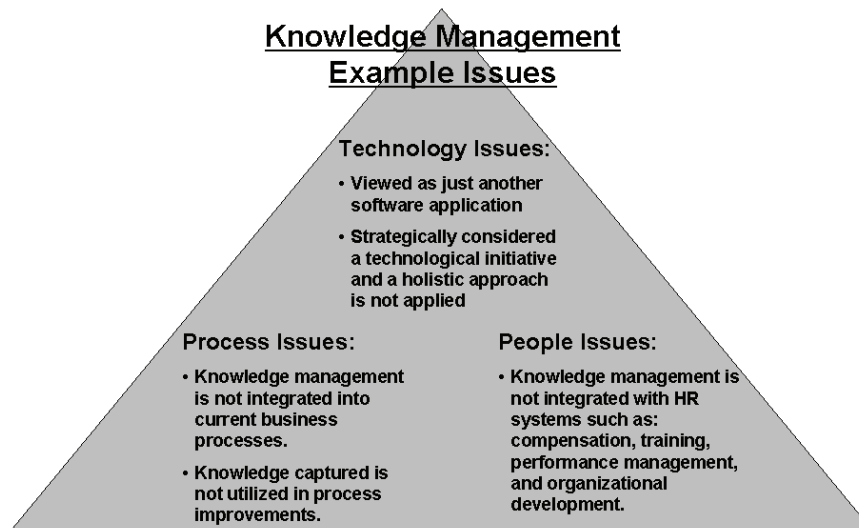
companies have long tried to both make sense of all the information that they have collectively accumulated over time and try to capture the business-critical information that resides in the heads of their key employees. Knowledge management promised to provide the wherewithal for capturing and disseminating this business-critical information.

However, many companies have been unable to convert upon the promise of KM because of various technology, process, or people issues (see Figure 1).

These issues (most of which can be solved by good strategic planning and project management) can lead to ineffective KM systems. In fact, Tanner (2004) suggests that one third of major enterprise KM solutions do not meet expectations. Even when effective, theorists believe that the real payoff for KM comes when it is shared across the organization in a collaborative manner. Making the information available to all relevant stakeholders can lead to increased innovation and learning across the organization.

Collaborative knowledge management is about capturing the information that is in people's heads and sharing it in a collaborative manner (e.g., an open, application-independent framework that allows all to have access to it). In order to make use of the knowledge

Figure 1. Some common issues organizations have while implementing knowledge management systems



that exists in organizations, an authoring process (also referred to the content management process) must be undertaken that categorizes and places important information into a shared resource (often referred to as a knowledge repository) that can be assessed by all relevant stakeholders. According to Plewes (2004), CKM differs from “navigational knowledge management,” which is more focused on trying to glean knowledge (typically through using search tools) from the information that companies have collected.

Collaboration should be across departments, various types of employees, and different types of projects. An effective CKM system should have access points across the entire organization (Dove, 1999) similar to a matrix structure (which leads to some interesting system security and access/platform issues). One of the potential difficulties that some authors see in CKM is that knowledge does not exist in a vacuum but comes loaded with various sociocultural meanings as well. In an article entitled “Knowledge Management, Response Ability, and the Agile Enterprise,” Dove describes the following situation:

Think of an American product development manager receiving a Chinese-language email message explaining a product innovation methodology rooted in the Taoist teachings of Lao-Tse—even though it was translated perfectly ... cognition is shaped by culture in general

and language in particular. Think about it—and you’ll think in words—and only those that your socio-cultural background gives meaning to. ... Now think about a culturally diverse, or even global, corporation—and its need to speed up the acquisition and mobilization of knowledge. (p. 12)

An organization cannot solve this problem by eliminating cultural diversity because, as Dove points out, “that would impair the important innovation potential” (p. 12). So, as new knowledge is added into the repository, the authoring tools and processes must find a way to quickly and effectively transfer it into a format that can be utilized by multiple people within the organization. This authoring process, if effective, will create a common language of knowledge or a “collaborative culture” (in the words of Dove, 1999). This theoretically should increase the ability to collaborate together across the organization and increase the amount of common organizational knowledge (potentially increasing the overall corporate IQ). This common knowledge shared in a collaborative manner across the organization should lead to an increase in the competencies (e.g., knowledge, skills, and abilities) of the individual members of the firm. However, managing these human assets is an area that is typically outside the purview of CKM.

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