

# Barriers to Successful Knowledge Management

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## INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and Knowledge Management (KM) are gaining more and more attention in theory and practice. This development can be observed by an increasing number of publications since the 1990s, addressing the question of how knowledge in organizations can be organized and managed (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). It is argued that knowledge is becoming the pre-eminent source of competitive advantage compared to the traditional factors of production, labour, capital and land. This theoretical discourse is accompanied in practice by an increasing number of KM initiatives. In many cases however, the results of those KM implementation projects have not lived up to the high expectations associated with them. Reasons for that are manifold. In this article, we will present the results of an extensive analysis of KM literature identifying the major barriers to KM. Those barriers represent current challenges during any holistic KM implementation that includes knowledge management systems (KMS).

## BACKGROUND

KM, as an area of research is influenced by many disciplines such as information systems research, strategic management, organization science, psychology and human resources. Due to that, a wide array of different concepts and methods does exist. With the personification and the codification strategies two main perspectives on KM can be identified. The personification strategy, represented mainly by Japanese authors (e.g., Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) deals foremost with implicit knowledge embedded in human actors and aims at leveraging knowledge creation and sharing through informal and cultural mechanisms. The codification approach, which is dominated by U.S.-American authors (e.g., Bhatt, 2001), mainly considers the explicit aspects of knowledge and thus focuses on knowledge explication and reuse. The unbalanced focus on one of those perspectives has been made responsible for the failure of many KM initiatives. Because of this insight

it has become more and more accepted that it is critical for successful KM to pursue a holistic approach. From that point of view KM is considered to be a management discipline that "(...) embodies organizational processes that seek synergistic combination of data and information processing capacity of information technologies, and the creative and innovative capacity of human beings" (Malhotra, 2005). Thus, whereas an overemphasis on technology is often problematic, a well balanced combination of technical and social approaches can be a rewarding departure (Alavi & Leidner, 1999).

## BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL KM

Table 1 shows the barriers to successful KM, which are detailed in the following and categorized according to their origin along the dimensions technology, organization and human factors (Richter, 2006).

### Technological Barriers

The balanced use of information technology is seen as a factor that can beneficially support different KM processes (Wiig, 1995). Typical examples for information technology aiming at the support of the codification aspects of KM include, for example, database solutions acting as knowledge databases or repositories. The personification aspects of KM can be supported by information systems that foster interpersonal communication, such as chat clients and groupware. Some of the most important barriers touching the technological domain of KM are highlighted in the following.

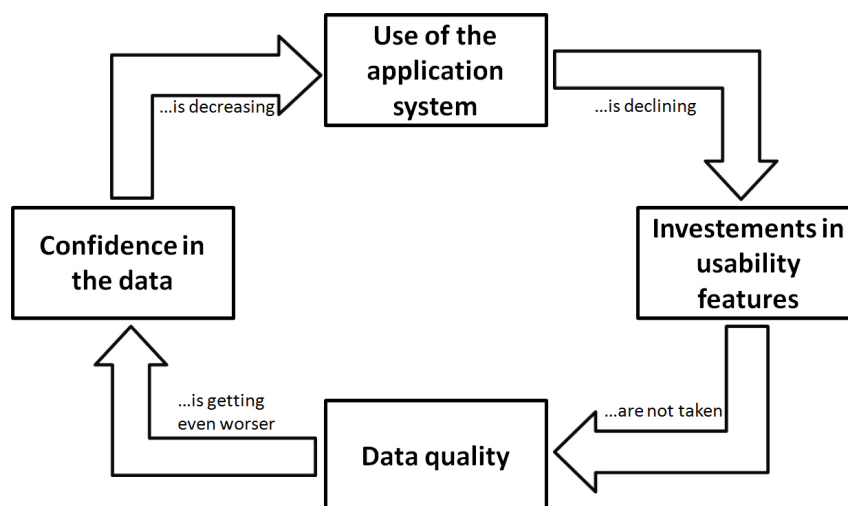
#### T1: Lacking Acceptance

Reasons for lacking acceptance can be found in a user-unfriendly application system, unsatisfying trainings and support granted by the software manufacturer, lacking stability and reliability and bad performance. Further, if the personal benefit for the individual user is not clear or the use of the system implies extra effort, many systems are insuf-

*Table 1. Synopsis of all barriers*

“T,” “O“ und “H“ stand for the three dimensions “Technology,” “Organization“ and “Human“	
Category	Barrier
T 1	Lacking acceptance
T 2	Information overload and redundancies
T 3	Missing instruments for integrated planning and evaluation
O 1	Linguistic problems
O 2	Lack of time
O 3	Unfavourable company-and knowledge culture
O 4	Missing or diverging goals
H 1	Cultural influences
H 2	Personal fears and uncertainties
H 3	Inadequate motivation

*Figure 1. Problem circle in the context of an electronic knowledgebase<sup>1</sup>*



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