

Chapter 12

Aligning and Valuing Data-Based Wisdom Projects

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ABSTRACT

Data-based wisdom projects in the form of Knowledge Management System (KMS) initiatives exhibit a high degree of failure. These failures are caused by technical, people, and organizational challenges. Although the literature provides some degree of guidance for improving the success of KMS initiatives, an overall approach to ensure the KMS meets the needs of the organization does not exist. In this chapter, the common challenges to KMS implementations are discussed and the factors leading to more successful KMS implementation evaluated. Using the findings from the challenges and success factors, a conceptual framework is presented as an approach to increase the success of KMS initiatives. The proposed framework uses strategic alignment and organizational value as drivers in the KMS efforts. The framework applies a multi-dimensional strategy and the Project Portfolio Management (PPM) approach to govern KMS initiatives in an effort to maximize the value offered by the KMS and to ensure the KMS supports the organization's strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management system (KMS) implementations supporting organizational wisdom initiatives often fail to achieve the desired objectives. The percentages of unsuccessful KMS implementations have improved over the years yet remain low. Unsuccessful KMS implementations were reported as high as 84% (Storey & Barnett, 2000) but later reduced to 70% of KMS implementations (Akhavan, Jafari, & Fathian, 2005). More recently, unsuccessful KMS implementations have been further reduced to 50% (Rathor, Thapliyal, Gupta, & Gupta, 2011). While reductions in the rate of unsuccessful KMS projects is significant, a 50% failure rate creates a high degree of uncertainty for organizations wishing to invest in information systems and other resources supporting the acquisition, transfer, reuse, and management of organizational knowledge.

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There are several challenges contributing to the lack of success in KMS implementations and these challenges are frequently categorized as technical, people, or organizational challenges (Bishop, Matsu-moto, Glass, & Bouchlaghem, 2008; Butler, 2003; Mason & Pauleen, 2003; Riege, 2005). The category of technical challenges include incompatibilities between systems and a lack of process integration (Riege, 2005). People challenges consist of insufficient time to share knowledge and a lack of awareness for the value of the knowledge (Riege, 2005) as well as the unwillingness to share knowledge due to a perceived loss of power within the organization (Butler, 2003; Gupta, 2008; Marks, Polack, McCoy & Galletta, 2008). While the technical and people challenges to KMS implementations are commonly reported and are significant factors to KMS success, the main challenge is an organization's supportive culture. Organizations are often unable to support the culture of trust, collaboration, and recognition required to encourage knowledge building and sharing (Gupta, 2008). Without this culture in place, organizations struggle to gain the participation needed to develop and share new knowledge.

Although each of these challenges is manifested through different means, the root cause of these challenges can be attributed to a lack of strategic alignment and planning for the KMS implementations as well as the data-based wisdom initiatives in general. The technical issues of system incompatibilities and lack of process integration are linked to insufficient long-range and strategic planning over the information sources and knowledge processes used to develop and apply organizational knowledge. The personal issues of insufficient time and lack of knowledge value awareness are associated with the organizational priorities communicated to employees. The organizational challenge of culture is a result of inadequate integration of knowledge development and application with the organization's strategic priorities and the failure of the organization to demonstrate an appreciation for the value of employee contributions to organizational wisdom. These technical, people, and organizational challenges for KMS implementations are associated with a gap in the long-term planning where the need for developing and applying wisdom in the organization is not fully considered.

The need for improved planning is also an overall theme in many of the factors attributed to successful KMS implementations. These factors contributing to the success of KMS implementations include developing a unified definition of knowledge management, fitting KMS into existing workflows, and communicating the benefits of knowledge management (Bishop et al., 2008). The connection between long-term strategic planning and KMS implementations was made through du Plessis's (2007) assertion that organizations should associate knowledge management with strategic value and align knowledge management efforts with organizational priorities. Successful KMS implementations therefore require the organization to view data-based wisdom initiatives as part of the organization's strategies and mandate careful long-term planning to ensure knowledge development and application is infused in the organization's processes and culture.

The purpose of this paper is to establish a connection between strategic planning and data-based wisdom initiatives and propose a framework for ensuring this planning successfully addresses the challenges associated with KMS implementations. The framework is used to emphasize the business value of the knowledge, information, and data elements of data-based wisdom initiatives and to allow this value to drive the objectives for the initiatives as well as the success measures. The framework is applied to further decrease the failure rates of KMS projects and the associated data-based wisdom initiatives.

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