

Chapter 8

Patents and Logocentric Differences: Protecting the Competitive Advantage

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ABSTRACT

The discussion progressed in this chapter is about the protection of organizational knowledge in competitive environments. Knowledge can leak in the value creation networks embedded in knowledge-intensive firms, and a collaborative approach can be utilized to minimize risk and increase sustainability. For knowledge to be preserved from unintentional outflow, its confidential nature and description must be understood at all levels. Loss of knowledge can occur at any point; whether it is through the process of consultation or when employees do their work. Forfeiture of information can be unintended or a planned effort. To prevent such unintended leakage, it is important to develop a shared mindset among employees to minimize the risk. The socio-technical system is a philosophical framework that enables companies to simultaneously consider both ethical and technical systems in order to best match the technology and the people involved. In this paper we show how the socio-technical system can be applied to prevent knowledge leakage.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge-intensive companies are those that deploy intellectual capital to provide expert advice to corporations of all types. Since knowledge is the “capital” of most modern organizations, maintenance, protection, and optimization of this capital, has become a business necessity. Knowledge leakage is an

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important issue that modern organizations have to deal with. This paper is arranged in four sections in an attempt to answer two questions (1) how can knowledge leakage be prevented?; (2) How should managers construct their discourse on knowledge leakage? The first part provides an introduction and explanation of some of the key terms used in this discussion. The notion that knowledge is a fundamental driver of the value creation process compels the organization to put a stop to knowledge leakage. The second part reviews a carefully selected literature to understand how knowledge is created, diffused, and distributed in pervasive socio-technical systems to avert risk of losing proprietary knowledge. The third part provides a socio-technical system (STS) framework to contain risk. We conclude in the last part by showing how STS can be applied to prevent knowledge leakage.

BACKGROUND

Explanation of Some of the Key Terms

In defining the term “epistemology,” we draw from Armstrong (1989), and Lehrer (2000), among many others. Epistemology is the study of all types of knowledge such as tacit knowledge which is derived from experience. Armstrong (1989) posits that the theory on knowing can be divided into segments to make sense in learning and organization. It is these segments that are of interest in building effective talent in organization. Armstrong (1989) propounds that the knowledge expedient in a business can also be separated by subject to understand its expediency. It is then important to recognize what stakeholders imply when they say someone knows or fails to know. If this type of knowing leaks to the competition what does that also mean? Arguments projected by Prahalad & Hamel (1990) designate that companies compete on what they know best. Their best foot forward is dependent on the intellectual assets of the business. If those chattels are compromised the business could lose its livelihood. In the knowledge-intensive firms an epistemic community can be created composed of the experts in the organization. Its purpose will be to generate a pragmatic nuts-and-bolts competence that will help the organization to design innovative practices to make differentiation real.

In the second definition of knowledge, Armstrong suggests that tacit knowledge derived from the collective experience of the people doing the job, can be put into context in the value creation process (see Figure 1). In this debate an epistemic community or community of practice (COP) are defined as groups of individuals who collaborate on many fronts to advance productivity. It can be the role of the COP to contextualize tacit knowledge and turn it into explicit knowledge. The COP can be situated in areas where goods demanded by customers are made. When an order is received, it follows a process in which each man has a defined role to play. The COP can analyze the job description and the job specification to understand many things including tooling and equipment requirements in the business model (see Figure 1). They can also understand the skillfulness and technology required in making certain products. By taking the socio-technical systems approach, a COP can shift the things that are often taken for granted to combine the interest of the people doing the job and the business. The socio-technical systems (STSD) approaches have strong roots in collaboration in the value creation processes in organization (Eijnatten, 1993).

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