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Chapter XII

The European Challenge of KM and Innovation: A Skills and Competence Portfolio for the Knowledge Worker in SME's

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ABSTRACT

Globalization, bringing about universal and dynamic transformations in every sector of the economy, is placing organizations everywhere in new and different competitive situations. In this context, the improvement of enterprise performance and economic growth makes increased demands for timely knowledge in the workplace to deliver competitive, knowledge-intensive work, enabling institutions and nations to maintain their vitality

through economic growth and increased productivity. This chapter highlights the European strategy towards a knowledge-based society where innovation and competitiveness are the goals to be achieved. The Portuguese scenario concerning small and medium enterprises and the creation of a Portuguese knowledge and information economy are also described. Some approaches to knowledge management (KM), contributing to understanding the scope of this emergent domain, are introduced. The skills and competencies that a knowledge manager should develop in order to perform his/her job are discussed. The chapter concludes by mapping the main areas of study and practice that the authors consider as relevant to performing an effective knowledge management function.

Introduction

In a contemporary world, where markets, products, technology, competitors, regulation, and even societies are undergoing universal and dynamic transformation, demands have increased for customised and more sophisticated products and services. Innovation, together with the knowledge that enables it, has become a vital source of sustainable and competitive advantage, that is, the basis of economic growth and productivity increase.

Information and knowledge are creating new industries around them and, at the same time, are pervading all sectors of economy (Skyrme, 1999, p. 12), assuming a vital role in the economic change taking place over recent years, together with “technology, information, business processes, quality control, human capital and corporate capabilities and competences – all knowledge related factors” (Burton-Jones, 2001, p. vi).

Globalization has created a business environment where components/inputs are available to all firms at similar prices. Through the Internet, firms can reach distant markets at competitive prices, enabling innovative firms to respond to regional specialization and to the expansion of long distance relationships and markets.

Increased virtualisation in business activities, facilitating new ways of working, such as self-managed teams, virtual teams, flexible offices and teleworking, is prevailing as a consequence of information and communication technologies development (Skyrme, 1999, pp. 20, 34).

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