

Chapter III

Knowledge Management Leaders' Top Issues

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the results obtained after reaching a consensus among 100 knowledge leaders on their critical issues. These issues include the perceived knowledge management benefits and obstacles, the knowledge leaders' roles and skills, as well as the technologies they used for implementing knowledge management initiatives. Using a Web-based Delphi method, the results indicate that an increase in internal knowledge sharing is judged to be the most significant of all perceived knowledge management benefits. Their most important role is to foster a knowledge sharing culture in their organization in order to overcome the most important obstacle: organizational culture. They also suggest that the key abilities they should possess are those of strong interpersonal and leadership skills. Finally, portals and information retrieval engines are found to be the most widely used technologies to develop and/or implement knowledge management initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge leaders are hired by organizations to create and maintain knowledge management (KM) environments supported by various technologies, which bring their potential of difficulties and technological issues. However, these individu-

als' perceptions of KM top issues appear to be imprecise and ambiguous when referring to the literature. As the need for organizations to manage and extract knowledge increases, so does the demand for identifying KM leaders' top issues that they deal with on a regular basis.

Using a Web-based Delphi method, this chapter presents the result of a worldwide consensus found among KM leaders regarding their top issues. These issues include KM leaders' perception of KM benefits and obstacles, their roles and skills, as well as the technologies they used for implementing KM initiatives. These issues were first retrieved from existing KM literature and then presented to KM experts in order to be validated. A stable level of agreement among 100 KM leaders was reached on these issues, which are discussed below. These results put together a baseline allowing KM leaders to better understand, plan, and execute future KM initiatives. It provides a comprehensive view of the reality of KM leaders by addressing those five critical issues at the same time and by the same respondents.

The next section offers a description of what was found in the literature. The methodology used to find a stable understanding of the top issues for knowledge leaders is then explained. Next, the findings are depicted and discussed. Finally, the last section provides conclusions along with implications of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge management's recent emergence is mainly due to the nomadic working lifestyle of today's employees. It has been asserted that employees change their jobs once every two years, carrying with them the knowledge they have acquired through years of experience. To alleviate this problem, KM's main objective is to maximize organizational knowledge sharing, while minimizing knowledge loss. In order to initiate KM, organizations need individuals to undertake the responsibility of developing and maintaining a KM environment. Accordingly, organizations need knowledge leaders. Unfortunately, the amount of academic literature that

has researched and analyzed knowledge leaders at this point in time is very limited, although the frequency of KM research is increasing expeditiously. The following subsections provide a definition of knowledge leaders, the benefits and obstacles they encounter when they implement KM initiatives, the roles and skills that they need to be successful in such an endeavor, and the most important technologies that they used to foster the use of KM.

Knowledge Leader Definition

Chief knowledge officers (CKOs) are defined in general terms as "the leaders of their organizations' knowledge management initiatives" (Bonner, 2000, p. 36; Rasmus, 2000, p. 5), and as "senior executives responsible for ensuring that an organization maximizes the value it achieves through one of its most important assets—knowledge" (Skyrme, 1997). More specifically, a CKO is "the catalyst for a knowledge-sharing culture, owner of the infrastructure specifications that facilitate knowledge transfer and storage, and maintainer of the closed-loop learning system" (Rasmus, 2000, p. 3). CKO is also recognized for setting "strategic policy for an organization's acquisition and distribution of knowledge and learning, based on the premise that increasing people's capacity to take action will enable them to respond more effectively and efficiently to their customers" (Barclay, 1997, p. 8).

Various job titles were retrieved from the KM literature including chief knowledge officer, chief learning officer, knowledge manager, knowledge facilitator, and so forth. To simplify these various definitions, this study uses the term "knowledge leader" (KL), reflecting the philosophy that CKOs have to show leadership when implementing KM initiatives. Therefore, a KL is an individual responsible for creating and/or maintaining a KM environment.

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