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Chapter V

We've Got a Job to Do – Eventually:

A Study of Knowledge Management Fatigue Syndrome

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Abstract

The implementation of knowledge management systems at universities can be tremendously costly in terms of both human and capital resources. One reason for this cost is the extended time period, generally measured in years, not months, over which they are implemented. This qualitative study presents data on the implementation of one such project at a Research I university in the southwestern United States. The analysis focuses on the concept of knowledge management fatigue syndrome and the increase of technological bloat and academic technocracy as a result of the project.

Introduction

Unforeseen costs and consequences of knowledge management projects at universities frequently are cited in the press. For example, the California State University system began a $400 million overhaul of its administrative information system in 1998. By 2003, there were many questions about the appropriateness and efficiency of the system, and it was clear that it has caused numerous unintended consequences to numerous administrative functions from accounting to student advising (Olsen, 2003). Similarly, an unforeseen problem with a management software upgrade at the University of Florida led to a delay in the processing of paychecks of more than 400 hundred graduate teaching assistants for nearly a month (Carnevale, 2004). These are just two examples of the problems universities face when implementing knowledge management systems. Given such problems, one wonders why a university would choose to implement these large-scale "enterprise" systems and what that process entails. This study illuminates one such implementation demonstrating knowledge management fatigue syndrome (Hakken, 2003). Further, the case study shows how knowledge management implementation can lead to technological bloat and academic technocracy (see Chapter IV).

This chapter is concerned with how such a long term project has affected the units of the university that have been directly involved in the first rounds of implementation, how users have responded to the system, and how the overall structure of units have changed. I will explore these questions by presenting data from e-mails, informal interviews and participant observation in one of the units that have been directly involved with the first round of the system's implementation. Before presenting data, I will discuss the conceptual framework that guided my inquiry.

Conceptual Framework

Many organizations, including universities, in the 1990s chose to use knowledge management systems to improve the efficiency and service quality of their operations. As indicated in Chapter IV, these intended gains in efficiency and quality have remained elusive at best. Why, then, have organizations continued to pursue such goals? The concept of an academic technocracy presented is