

Chapter 5.6

Knowledge Management in Action: The Experience of Infosys Technologies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the detailed architecture that Infosys has deployed for implementing KM internally, and the company's experiences in using that architecture for managing its knowledge. A brief historical perspective of the evolution of the Infosys KM effort is discussed and a description of the Infosys Knowledge Shop (KShop), Infosys's integrated knowledge portal that we have built, is given. The real test of the maturity of any orga-

nizational initiative is when it becomes invisible, a part of the normal way people work. The aim of the KM initiative is thus to move towards a culture where knowledge sharing is built into the organizational fabric. The chapter elaborates on one key mechanism that has been devised to help create such a sharing culture — the Knowledge Currency Units (KCU) scheme. Some of the key challenges and success factors the company has faced are discussed, and the approaches used to manage those are described.

INTRODUCTION

Today's organizations face a strategic landscape that is characterized by changing technology, rising stakeholder expectations, shifting competitor profiles and the emergence of new markets. The need to stay competitive in such an environment throws up immense challenges, and leveraging well on knowledge — internal as well as external to the organization — is a key imperative. Knowledge Management (KM) has thus, in recent years, acquired increasing management focus.

A central tenet of KM is to raise the speed and quality of learning, decision-making and customer service at the level of the organization as well as the individual. By institutionalizing best practices existing in pockets, facilitating greater reuse and helping better virtual teamwork, KM also raises the organization's ability to deliver higher quality and achieve faster time-to-market. Overall, KM also reduces risk and makes the organization more robust to thrive in a changing environment.

Given that most KM programs must start out with modest resources, a KM strategy must be optimized to extract the greatest effectiveness from these resources. A key success factor is getting the optimal emphasis on each of the four focal areas — people, process, technology and content — right from the early stages (see, for example, Davenport and Prusak, 1998). The specific emphasis laid on each of these is a function of the organizational culture and business context.

Infosys Technologies Limited (NASDAQ: INFY) is an IT consulting and software services organization headquartered in Bangalore, India. Founded in 1981, the company's revenues in 2001 were \$413 million, having grown at a compounded rate of 70% over the preceding decade. The company primarily services Fortune 1000 clients located in North America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific. Infosys has consistently been rated among India's leading wealth-creators, and recorded a net profit of \$131 million in 2001,

representing 32% of revenues. It was the top-ranked Indian company in the Review 200 listing compiled by the Far Eastern Economic Review, and has been rated the most respected company in India by, among others, Business World and the Economic Times. The company operates globally, with eight development centers in India, five in North America and one in the UK, and has 10,500 employees on its rolls.

The mission of Infosys' KM effort is to ensure that all organizational learning is leveraged in delivering business advantage to the customer. The objectives are to minimize effort dissipated in redoing learning that has already happened elsewhere, and ensuring that Infosys (as employees are called) in contact with the customer have the collective knowledge of the organization behind them. The company thus aims to move towards a "Learn Once, Use Anywhere" paradigm. Infosys uses the proprietary KMM, or Knowledge Management Maturity model (Kochikar, 2000a), a staged maturity framework, to underpin its KM strategy.

Infosys has devised and implemented a KM deployment architecture that has been found to work well. This chapter presents the detailed architecture that Infosys has deployed for implementing KM internally, and the company's experiences in using that architecture for managing its knowledge. While each company's KM journey is unique, we believe that sharing information about our architecture and experiences will prove useful to other organizations venturing along the KM path. Equally important, we believe that sharing the process by which we arrived at the architecture that is most optimal in our context holds meaningful lessons for other organizations seeking to define their own KM implementations. Thus, we also present here a brief historical perspective of the evolution of the Infosys KM effort.

A description of the Infosys Knowledge Shop (KShop), Infosys's integrated knowledge portal that we have built, is given. The real test of the

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