



Chapter 12

Information Manager/Librarian to Knowledge Manager: Change of Role

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Many organizations world over are embracing knowledge management systems for survival and to retain profitability. This trend is visible in the technology intensive businesses like biotechnology, computers and telecommunications and also in professions like legal, accountancy and management consultancy. A new breed of managers called "Knowledge Manager" has emerged to put the new system in place in the organizations. Information Managers and Librarians are increasingly drafted to fill the post of Knowledge Managers as their work is nearest to the job. This article covers the broad classification of knowledge and the mechanisms of its transmission and transformation. Finally the importance of human element in the Knowledge Management System is highlighted for the benefit of Information Managers and Librarians.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades of the twentieth century a shift in economy from capital to information base is perceptible. The intellectual capital in an organization has come to be realized as its main asset. This has resulted in more emphasis being laid in the business organizations on generation and maintenance of intellectual capital. The system that deals with this aspect is termed "Knowledge Management (KM)."

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The urgency felt in many organizations to have a KM system in place is understandable. The well-established best practices, which were supposed to retain their effectiveness over time, are increasingly seen unable to retain their efficacy indefinitely. The knowledge, which is a key factor in competitive advantage, has become so dynamic and short-lived that its effective management has become an imperative necessity for the survival. KM is seen under the circumstances as the system, which helps the organization to retain its competitive edge or advantage in the fast changing economic environment. The rapid inroads made by Knowledge Management in the organizations dealing with biotechnology, computer software and telecommunications and in firms of lawyers, accountants and management consultants illustrate the point.

The work of Information Managers and Librarians in the organizations though far from identical with that of the newly created Knowledge Managers, is nearest to the work of the later. The Information Managers and Librarians have therefore become the choice of the management to fill the new post of Knowledge Manager. It is important for the Information Managers and Librarians who are traditionally associated with the activities of gathering, enhancing, structuring and distributing information to fully understand what is KM and how to develop a KM system and put it in place in the organization. It is in their interest to understand the developments in KM and apply its principles where appropriate or risk being marginalized as others, more efficient and flexible organizations are likely to step in to offer a knowledge service with clout (Keeling and Hornby, 1999). It is intended in this article to introduce salient features of KM to the Information Managers and Librarians.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT (KM) DEFINITIONS

According to Chambers 20th Century Dictionary Knowledge is “assured belief, that which is known, information, instruction, enlightenment, learning, practical skill, acquaintance, cognizance, etc.” Management is the “manner of directing or use of anything.” The definition of KM according to one of the experts is “Knowledge Management caters to the critical issues of organizational adoption, survival and competence in face of increasingly discontinuous environmental change. Essentially it embodies organizational processes that seek synergistic combination of data and information processing capacity of information technologies and the creative and innovative capacity of human beings” (Malhotra, 1999). Another definition is “In practice, Knowledge Management often encompasses identifying and mapping intellectual assets within the organization, generating new knowledge for competitive advantage within the organization, making vast amounts of corporate information accessible, sharing of best practices, and technology that enables all

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