



Chapter 16

Implementing Knowledge Management: Issues for Managers

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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Knowledge Management (KM) has become a pervasive topic in management practice. The proliferation of KM is the result of concentrated and deliberate efforts on the part of many organizations. Scores of books, articles, and conferences tout KM. There is widespread belief that KM can lead to competitive advantage. Some authors have attempted to show that competitive advantage based on knowledge is highly valued by stock markets (see, e.g., Sveiby, 1997).

The purpose of this chapter is to present some definitions of KM and to raise issues that managers should consider. There is a discussion of categories of knowledge and their relevance for managers. We provide the elements that every organization should consider in assessing their readiness for KM. The components of knowledge harvesting are presented and organizational considerations are introduced. Reasons that KM efforts fail are provided as well.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT DEFINED

KM, a relatively new concept, has many definitions. Many authors define it through tenets or characteristics; however, some attempt to derive a basic understanding by defining its base words. According to Webster's Dictionary (1994),

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Table 1: Some Definitions of Knowledge Management
(Source: *The Knowledge Management Forum, 1997; Snyder & Templeton, 1997*)

KM Source	Definition of Knowledge Management
Thomas Bertels	The management of the organization towards the continuous renewal of the organization knowledge base – this means e.g. creation of supportive organizational structures, facilitation of organization members, putting IT – instruments with emphasis on teamwork and diffusion of knowledge (as e.g. groupware) into place.
Denham Grey	An audit of “intellectual assets” highlights unique sources, critical functions, and potential bottlenecks which hinder knowledge flows to the point of use. It protects intellectual assets from decay, seeks opportunities to enhance decisions, services and products through adding intelligence, increasing value and providing flexibility.
J. Hibbard	Knowledge Management is a process of locating, organizing, and using the collective information and expertise within an organization, whether it resides on paper, or in the minds of people, and distributing it wherever it benefits most.
Ray Hoving	The organization and use of a company’s intellectual assets to create value.
Brain Newman	Knowledge Management is the collection of processes that govern the creation, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge.
Karl-Eric Sveiby	The art of creating value from an organization’s intangible assets.
Karl Wiig	Focusing on determining, organizing, directing, facilitating, and monitoring knowledge-related practices and activities required to achieve the desired business strategies and objectives.

knowledge is all that is apprehended clearly and with certainty. The definition suggests that knowledge is a great deal more than facts or information. It suggests that the information must undergo a further process of experience or association to become knowledge. Additionally, Webster’s (1994) defines management as the act of directing, planning, controlling, handling, and implementing. By putting the definitions together, we can infer that KM is the directing, planning, controlling, handling, and implementing of processed information. This approach results in an oversimplification and has limited usefulness. Several definitions lead to confusion as to the meaning of the term.

The Virtual Library on Knowledge Management (1998) states:

Knowledge Management caters to the critical issues of organizational adaptation, survival and competence in face of increasingly discontinuous environmental changes.... 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.

Table 1 presents a few definitions of KM. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but merely to indicate the variety.

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