

Chapter XIV

Knowledge Management Implementation in a Consultancy Firm

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ABSTRACT

KM has become an important strategy for improving organisational competitiveness and performance. Organisations can certainly benefit from the lessons learnt and insights gained from those that have adopted it. This chapter presents the results of a case study conducted in a consultancy firm, and the major aim is to identify how KM has been developed and implemented. Specifically, the elements investigated in the case study include the following KM aspects: strategies and activities, leadership and coordination, systems and tools, training, culture and motivation, outcomes and measurement, and implementation approach. Hopefully, the information extracted from this study will be beneficial to other organisations that are embarking on the KM journey.

INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, the concept of knowledge has existed for ages. Likewise, researchers have widely studied and reported the backgrounds, principles, and frameworks of KM (Knowledge Manage-

ment). These theoretical studies have certainly provided very useful insights into its underlying concepts. Nevertheless, a number of empirical studies have also broadened and enriched our understanding of how to design and adopt KM. However, the development and implementation of

a KM initiative signifies a challenging endeavour for managers in the context of the current dynamic environment (Wong & Aspinwall, 2004a). In this respect, practical-oriented research is essential, if not more important than theoretical studies. Organisations attempting to embark on KM need information, input, examples and role models from existing adopters or practitioners to help them deal with it. To address this, this chapter is aimed to present the results of an empirical case study conducted in a consultancy company to investigate how it has implemented and is applying KM.

The initial part of this chapter will provide a brief description of the subject domain and methodology of this study. The results of the case study will then be presented. Following this, the overall key findings or lessons gathered from the study will be discussed. The chapter culminates with some future research directions and conclusions.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

In its broadest sense, KM can be understood as a formalised and active approach to managing knowledge resources in an organisation. It is also often viewed as comprising a series of processes such as creating, acquiring, capturing, organising, classifying, storing, transferring, sharing, and applying knowledge, to name but a few (Wong & Aspinwall, 2004b). Thus, organisations will need to manage not only their knowledge, but also the processes that act upon it. In addition, KM is concerned with the management of technological, cultural, operational, behavioural, and organisational factors that could affect its performance. Hence, as an integrative concept, it can be best defined as the optimisation and running of knowledge resources, processes, and factors (Wong, 2005).

In order to provide a better understanding of the KM domain, a number of researchers have specifically used the case study technique to examine and explore it in practice (e.g., Claver, Zaragoza & Quer, 2007; Davenport, 1997; Forcadell & Guadamillas, 2002; Liebowitz, 2003; Ng & Ang, 2007; Pan & Scarbrough, 1998; Rubenstein-Montano, Buchwalter & Liebowitz, 2001; Skok, 2003; Smith, 2004). Their efforts have certainly helped to broaden the understanding of this field. A case study offers an approach to research by exploring and explaining a phenomenon (Yin, 2003). It is viewed not merely as a data collection technique, but as a comprehensive empirical research strategy. Essentially, a case study represents a useful method when dealing with the ‘how’ question of research (Yin, 2003). In retrospect, the main research question addressed in this chapter is to examine how the company implements KM or how it deals with knowledge issues. Hence, the case study method is believed to fit this purpose.

METHODOLOGY

The company selected to participate in the case study is a consultancy firm. This is because it is a knowledge intensive organisation that develops and sells ‘know-how,’ and so KM is an integral part of its business function. In addition, it is an example of a thriving business, bringing demonstrable and tangible benefits to its customers through the adoption of KM. This also justifies why the company was chosen for the case study. For anonymity purposes, the company’s identity is not revealed in this chapter.

Interviews with the key person responsible for KM implementation were conducted in the company. In order to minimise biased responses, no sensitive or opinion-oriented questions were asked regarding its KM initiative. Where permitted, relevant documents such as implementation

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