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Chapter XVII

Infosys Technologies, Limited

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Knowledge has no equal.
– Ancient Indian Scriptures

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the emergence of knowledge management (KM) as a critical success factor, few organizations have successfully orchestrated the implementation of a KM initiative. This chapter highlights the implementation efforts of one such firm — Infosys Technologies, Limited. In this case, we discuss how KM emerged as a strategic requirement of the firm, and various capabilities the firm had to develop to fulfill this requirement. In other words, we discuss KM implementation as a confluence of multiple initiatives. We hope that by presenting this idea through the use of a case study we will assist readers to understand the intricate relationships between different facets of KM implementation.

BACKGROUND

Haris, account manager with Infosys's North American operations, pulled out of the multilevel parking lot in downtown Detroit. His meeting with the director of sales management systems of a large automotive manufacturer went fine. The company's sales

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and order management across the country operated in silos and the director wanted to integrate them. "This will improve our customer service and, at the same time, reduce cost. Can you help?" the director had asked. Haris was slightly anxious as he negotiated the evening traffic of downtown Detroit. He had to get back with the proposed solution by the next day, but the technical team was busy on a client site in Canada.

Late that night, he contacted Infosys's Domain Competency Group (DCG), the company's think tank in India that provides round-the-clock domain knowledge support to practice units around the world. It was morning in India and an automotive expert replied, "This sounds similar to a project we completed for a German automotive company a few months back. We can leverage that experience to propose a solution for the U.S. retail channels. I'll send you the material. And, let me ask the folks in Germany to update you on this."

As Haris presented the proposed solution the next day, the client admitted, "You seem to have clearly understood our problem. I like your approach to integrate our applications and create a unified customer interface layer. Let's get a formal proposal on this."

In the India head office of Infosys, Nandan Nilekani, the CEO, was gratified to notice how knowledge flows had improved across the organization as a result of their KM initiative. The initiative had slowly emerged as the organizational backbone, connecting Infosys's 30 offices around the globe into an intellectual monolith.

Based in Bangalore, the IT hub of India, Infosys was founded in 1981 as an offshore software service provider by a group of seven software professionals led by N.R. Narayana Murthy ("Murthy"). The journey over the past 23 years was a mixed bag. Early years were tough but the founders stuck together, at least for some time. "We had strong hopes of creating a bright future for ourselves, for Indian society, and perhaps even for the world," recalled Murthy, "Confidence, commitment, passion, hope, energy, and the capacity to work hard were available in plenty. However, capital was in short supply. We struggled to put together a princely sum of $250 as our initial seed capital." Revenues in the first decade were an unimpressive $3.89 million. In 1989, when one co-founder left, others became cynical of the future. It was Murthy's unflinching belief in success that finally kept them going.

Strong Leadership

A firm believer in being a role model for the rest of the employees, Murthy had a strong influence on virtually every area of Infosys's operations. His daily life was a blend of austerity and hard work. He reached office by the company bus and typically put in a 12-hour workday. For the past 20 years, he had never denied audience to anyone at Infosys at any time of the workday. People respected him for his tranquility, humility, and simplicity. His non-conventional management style was matched by his singular ideas of doing business. A firm believer in an intellectual, philosophical, ethical, and spiritual management, he once mentioned, "It is better to lose $100 million than a good night's sleep. The softest pillow is a clear conscience." He implemented his management philosophy by infusing Infosys with five core corporate values. Symbolized as C-LIFE, they include Customer Delight (surpassing customer expectations), Leadership by Example (commitment to set standards and be an exemplar for the industry), Integrity and Transparency (commitment to be ethical, sincere, and open in dealings), Fairness

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