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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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ABSTRACT

Today's emphases on Competitive Advantage, added value, and improved productivity, a firm's management needs to create, innovate, monitor, and protect its knowledge inventory. More specifically a Knowledge Management environment means a focus on generating new knowledge; transferring existing knowledge; embedding knowledge in products, services, and process developing an environment for facilitating knowledge growth; and accessing valuable knowledge from inside and outside the firm. When this happens, it is enhancing enterprise competitiveness. Some sources claim that 20 percent of an Organisation's knowledgeable personnel can operate 80 percent of the Organisation's day-to-day business. The business resources manage can play an important role in identifying the knowledge core of the Organisation, recommending ways to preserve this critical core, and building a robust, long range plan to ensure top-quality operations. Unless a company reviews its core knowledge and takes to manage it, it is subject to potential disaster resulting from resignations, turnovers, loss of its competitive edge and its like. This paper is an effort to highlighting an importance of top quality executives. In Most Corporations, the management of knowledge is still uncharted territory. Few executives understand how to make the most effective use of their company's knowledge. They may know about tangible assets like the physical plant or existing inventory but their returns are not properly evaluated with regarding their Expertise and Knowledge and More Executives turnover, resignations resulting thereof. Moreover this paper highlights other crucial problems of Knowledge Management.

KEYWORDS

Knowledge Management, Advantage, Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management is the most recent subject in today's highly competitive era. Firms have always been leaning toward accumulating and applying knowledge to create economic value and competitive advantage and the need to do it has never been more. Knowledge Management has often been perceived as a technology only for preserving and enhancing the knowledge base of a company. 21st century is called Knowledge Era and the organizations that can manage as well use its knowledge competitively is able to survive and grow.

KNOWLEDGE & INFORMATION

Most of the time, Knowledge is confused with Information. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate the knowledge and information. Only collection of data is not called information¹. In order to generate Information, a link or interconnectivity between data is required. Hence, we can say that the relationship between pieces of data or between pieces of data and other information is known as Information. Generally information has a tendency to be relatively static in time and linear in nature. Due to this feature of static nature information is not able to answer the questions, which starts from 'Why' or 'How' i.e. the information does not indicate how the data is likely to change over time. These kinds ('Why' or 'How') of questions can be solved out with the help of knowledge only.

Thus we can say that Knowledge is advance stage of Information and information is advance stage of Data. Information provides answers to all the questions starting from, who, where, when, what but it is unable to answer the question which asks why and how and to solve these problems Knowledge is required³

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

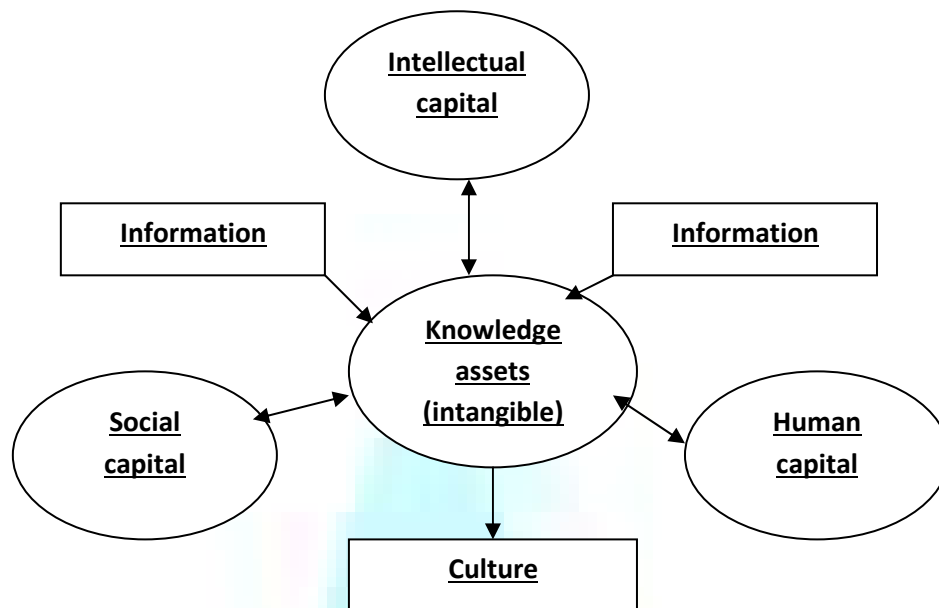
KM is a set of processes, tools and structures that aim to leverage collective abilities of the organisation's knowledge workers in a business situation. Doing it effectively means effective knowledge management.

Internal structure⁴ consists of patents, concepts, models, computer and administrative systems. These are created by the employees and are thus generally "owned" by the organization, and adhere to it. Sometimes they can be acquired from elsewhere. Also the culture or the "spirit" belongs to the internal structure. The internal structure and the people together constitute what we generally call the "organization".

External structure⁴ consists of relationships with customers and suppliers, brand names, trademarks and reputation, or "image". Some of these can be considered legal property, but the bond is not as strong as in the case of internal assets because investments in them cannot be made with the same degree of confidence.

From the above explanation it is clear that the core competence of any organization lies in the hands of intangible assets as the tangible things can be copied but the intangible ones cannot be. If the organization is well equipped with all these assets and if it manages it competitively and effectively then it will be able to defeat almost all its competitors. In today's cutthroat competition an organization cannot sustain itself if it is not able to satisfy its manpower, information and other intangible assets. Knowledge management aims to manage the ways in which we create, discover, exploit, disseminate and retain the expertise, understanding and practical know-how that individuals and organizations possess.

¹ Gene Bellinger, 2004



Knowledge management process is applicability differ as per the corporate of different countries. After so many debates and survey done by different authors, knowledge management process is identification, Knowledge goals, Generation, Storage, Distribution, and Application.

Identification – find the need where and what they want. That mean in business process where actually firms want to create KM, which part they want to make more weight.

Knowledge goals – define knowledge goals as per firm necessity. Simply after consideration of firm requirement, knowledge goal establishment should be done.

Generation – keep in mind that KM is not a technology. It is an activity enabled by technology and produced by people. After completion of goal establishment knowledge generation is next step, which include knowledge creation, capturing tacit knowledge.

Storage – as a part of process after knowledge generation, it is stored codified in a manner amenable for transfer and effective use. Knowledge codification knowledge codification is organizing and representing knowledge before authorized personnel access it.

Distribution –Merely making knowledge available is not considered to be knowledge distribution. It is transmission and sharing. The goal is to promote and facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration and networking.

Application – after completion most part of process, remain is application. Knowledge storage and distribution the knowledge utilization is most important. This step is resulting the whole process.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE

Improving the productivity of knowledge workers is one of the most important challenges for companies that face the transition from the industrial economy to an economy based on information and knowledge. Knowledge management is a part of corporate culture, which supports the active exchange of information, knowledge and experience between employee and departments.² Successful companies of the 21st century will be those who do the best job of capturing, storing and leveraging what their employees know³.

KM WITH HVK

From the below case study of HVK explanation it is clear that the core competence of any organization lies in the hands of intangible assets as the tangible things can be copied but the intangible ones cannot be. If the organization is well equipped with all these assets and if it manages it competitively and effectively then it will be able to defeat almost all its competitors. In today's cutthroat competition an organization cannot sustain it self if it is not able to satisfy its manpower, information and other intangible assets.

CASE OF HVK

"When HVK went on a shopping spree and acquired 10 telecommunications companies over a three-year period, it faced a serious challenge: How could the \$3 billion manufacturer of telecommunications equipment ensure that its technical support agents knew enough about newly acquired technology to provide quick and accurate answers to customers on the phone? And how could HVK bring new agents up to speed on all the company's products?

HVK's technical support agents—500 engineers scattered in 14 call centers around the globe—field approximately 10,000 questions every month about the company's products. Before the acquisitions, agents had relied on Tactics Online, an extranet where they and customers could search for frequently asked questions and text documents. As new agents and products joined the company's ranks, HVK wanted to supplement the website with a more comprehensive knowledge management system. As engineers from the newly acquired companies came on board, however, they were hesitant to share their knowledge about the products they had been supporting. "They felt that their knowledge was a security blanket that helped guarantee their jobs,"

BUILDING ON A KM FOUNDATION

When HVK began evaluating knowledge management technologies in the spring of 1998, the concept of sharing knowledge among agents was nothing new. Agents were already accustomed to working in teams of three or four people, gathering in war room fashion to solve customers' technical issues. And a year earlier, HVK had started basing a percentage of agents' quarterly bonuses on the amount of knowledge they submitted to Tactics Online as well as their involvement with mentoring and training other agents. "Each agent was expected to teach two training classes and write 10 FAQs to earn their full bonus. When Company brought new companies online, the new agents received the same bonus plan. This approach allowed company to build a very open knowledge-sharing environment.

To augment Tactics Online, HVK chose software from Service Ware Technologies, in part because its technology would integrate easily with the company's Remedy CRM system, which agents use to log incoming calls from customers and track other customer interactions. Companies division spent six months implementing the new system and training agents. The system—dubbed Knowledgebase—is linked to the company's CRM system and is powered by the Oracle

² Kai Martines 2003 edition

³ Nitin Noharia

database. The integrated view of HVK's customers and products provides agents with a comprehensive history of interactions. Technical support agents can, for example, put markers in the database and immediately pick up at the point where the customer last spoke with another agent.

CHANGING ROLES

Knowledge base has changed the agents' roles. Level 1 agent, for example, now do more in-depth troubleshooting because they have more information available at their fingertips. In fact, they solve twice as many calls themselves (50 percent instead of 25 percent) in a shorter time (10 minutes versus 30 minutes). Since Level 1 agents can handle more calls, this group has doubled in size during the last few years.

The transition wasn't quite as painless, however, for the Level 2 and Level 3 agents. Indeed, their roles changed significantly. "Rather than simply submitting HTML pages to Tactics Online, they were now asked to analyze the problems in a very procedural way and create diagnostic trees. That's a more analytical way to think through a problem. Most of these guys had thought in terms of 'what is the fastest way to solve a problem' rather than 'what is the most efficient way to solve a problem'.

With hundreds of people submitting solutions, HVK tended to get a lot of wheel reinvention. "There can be five or six ways to solve the same problem, but there's one way that's most efficient,". To unearth and disseminate the most efficient solutions, agents were required to flowchart each of their solutions for the first three months following Knowledgebase's launch. It's amazing how many agents were unconscious of their own methodologies," "It was somewhat painful, but they eventually felt they benefited because they understood how they solve problems."

As a result, agents now create technical solutions for customers in the most efficient—and logical way possible instead of simply offering a "quick and dirty" solution. Think of the difference between simply being told what keys to strike on your PC and being taught how your software works and the logic behind executing a certain sequence of keystrokes. Once you actually understand how the product works, you can use the software more effectively and resolve more problems yourself.

Agents also had to change the way they present the solutions to customers. Engineers wanted to provide a lot of detailed information yet we needed a degree of simplicity for customers. Most of the time, the immediate focus is on what a great collaboration tool this is and how it overcomes geographical distance among agents. Then I have to remind agents that this is a tool that we want customers to use and that they'll have to organize, write and present the content with customers in mind."

MAKING IT WORK

Manager spent a lot of time working with the Level 3 agents to make their solutions less complex and streamline the review process. "We had to go through two iterations of how to organize and present the content. Customers tend to think in terms of the product and then the problem. But engineers often think about the problem first and then the product."

RESULT: Customers often wouldn't fully understand the solution. At the same time, HVK had to work at easing Level 3 agents' concerns that making them responsible for reviewing solution content would suddenly turn them into technical writers.

HVK confronted cultural issues as well. Business needs are different in different parts of the world. What may be normal business practice for Americans may not be common elsewhere. In Europe, for example, the value of the KnowledgeBase system was not readily accepted. But once employees there saw that customers could use the system to solve some of their own problems, they got on board. Such an experience has been incorporated into how HVK approaches KM. "We sometimes have to introduce the idea of knowledge management over time, validate it, and then move forward.

To ensure that agents continue contributing new knowledge to Knowledge Base, HVK uses rewards. Besides bonuses, knowledge contributors receive recognition during meetings and in a newsletter. Rewards help feed this culture. Peer pressure also plays a role. Everyone wants to contribute because it's the right thing to do. You also have to make sure that the system works well and that employees use it long enough to see it work. It has to be embedded in training and fully integrated into daily operations so that it just becomes part of how you do business" (Source:- <http://www.cio.com>)

CONCLUSION

The benefits of knowledge management (KM) cannot be debated, but the creation of a knowledge portal is only the beginning of a stream of challenges. Making it a part of the organizational culture is perhaps the toughest of all. For many individuals, hoarding knowledge is power, and it is not so easy for them to imbibe the true spirit of knowledge sharing. There are others who take pride in being individualistic, and are not willing to learn from the experiences of others. Effective knowledge management is about leveraging the collective ability of knowledge workers for business gain. For most organizations, a successful KM initiative apparently means reducing the time to market; cross-departmental effectiveness and workforce motivation are other key factors.

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