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The Knowledge Management Systems Concept

in the case study of the commonwealth government agency's human resources

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Abstract

Organizations are realizing how important it is to know what they know and be able to make maximum use of the knowledge. This knowledge resides in many different places such as: databases, knowledge bases, filing cabinets and in peoples' heads that are distributed right across the enterprise. KM implementation at the work place should actually be the ability of the organization to provide or feed its employees by information on demand and when ever requested, for this information to be analyzed to improve decision making, resource allocation and effectively management systems.

1. Introduction

Once the world stepped into the new computerized era many organizations started to automate its way of doing work taking advantage of computer power. It was until the 80's when business organizations took advantage of telecommunications and networking, with the introduction of distributed data processing, office systems and personal computers (*Frenzel, 1999*). The main intention behind the automation of work was to improve how firms can conduct its tasks in a fast, efficient way and with the least possible cost while maintaining quality. Nevertheless, these organizations found themselves compelled to figure out a new methodology that will assist in managing the systems that posses the Giga bytes of data and information which is stored inside. This has led to the emergence of a field which became to be now known as Knowledge Management Systems (KMS).

This report will analyze the case study of *Human Resources of the commonwealth government agency*, by explaining how the concept of knowledge management can be applied to this agency in order to resolve the problems that occurred due to not dealing seriously with its knowledge assets. This will be done by addressing several key points, such as how knowledge management (KM) could be applied to the weak areas that emerged in this case and try to give some possible knowledgeable solutions. But before applying KM, the next section will give a brief definition on what is actually knowledge, management and systems.

2. Knowledge, Management and Systems

This section will decompose KMS and try to give a brief definition of what does Knowledge, Management and Systems mean individually before they can be introduces as a combined system.

Knowledge is defined as:
"A fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organizations, it often becomes

embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices, and norms KM and what benefits it could provide."(*Davenport & Prusak 1998*)

Management is defined as:
"The Influence of people to help accomplish the goals of an organization and business. It involves planning, organizing, and guiding employees and activities surrounding these events." (S*chwa, 2001*)

Systems are defined as:
"Sets of interacting components that operate together to accomplish a purpose." (*Alter p 585*)

3. Knowledge Management (KM)

Knowledge Management is the systematic process of finding, selecting, organising, distilling and presenting information in a way that improves an employee's comprehension in a specific area of interest (*Kannan, 2002*). It is based on the recognition that knowledge is a primary resource for successful operations and achievement of business goals and proceeding to capture valuable knowledge into an organised knowledge base.

The Standards Australia 'Knowledge Management Framework' defines KM as:

Knowledge management is a multi-disciplined approach to achieving organisational objectives by making the best use of knowledge it focuses on processes such as acquiring, creating and sharing knowledge and the cultural and technical foundations that support them. The aim of knowledge management is to align knowledge processes with organisational objectives (*Robertson, 2002*).

"Unfortunately, there's no universal definition of KM, just as there's no agreement as to what constitutes knowledge in the first place. For this reason, it's best to think of KM in the broadest context. Succinctly put, KM is the process through which organizations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets. Most often, generating value from such assets involves sharing them among employees, departments and even with other companies in an effort to devise best practices. It's important to note that the definition says nothing about technology; while KM is often facilitated by IT, technology by itself is not KM." (*Santosus & Surmacz, 2001*)

4. Knowing what you know

Every organisation when it intends to organise and manage its intangible assets such as its knowledge should ask its self a well known question which is do we know what we know? In order to answer this question, the organisation should first of all define what its knowledge assets are, then how it can manage these intangible assets.

Although it is difficult to represent these intangible assets in hard dollar means, yet this knowledge can still be represented in various means as to be captured in the form of text, tables, diagrams, product specifications, etc…. This form of display is known as explicit knowledge in respect to KMS. Nevertheless, knowledge could take other forms, in which it could have an ability to be articulated to be known as implicit knowledge or can not be articulated to be called tacit knowledge *(Nichols, 2000)*.

By comparing what was mentioned previously with the case study, the senior manager did not know what knowledge he actually owned in his agency, and as a result he missed the opportunity to exploit the knowledge and the amount of information that other manager in his agency would have provided him with in his approach to recruit the required new staff.

5. Lack of Effective Information Analysis

Information Analysis is a necessary step for the ability to manage information. In this particular case, the senior manager of the commonwealth agency contracted (outsourced to) an external company to conduct an exercise to recruit 130 new staff without conducting any kind of analysis of the commonwealth agency various departments to investigate its need to what kind of discipline and which type of performance and capacity is required. An effective information analysis could have been conducted through the use of a computer supported work system, which will be capable of providing useful information regarding the required skills and level of experience for each department. This information will then be fed to the outsourcing company in order to achieve efficiency through its work of recruiting the requested new staff.

For not conducting any information analysis, this resulted in giving incomplete information to the outsourcing company. So it did not include the company responsible to provide feedback to the unsuccessful applicants, informing the lot of the 360 unsuccessful applicants 6 – 8 weeks after their assessment, which indeed gave a bad reputation to the agency by damaging the agency's capacity to attract good staff in the future.

6. Weak Knowledge Management and Poor Communication Skills

This was another issue related to this case that played a key role in the bad approach followed by the agency's senior manager. His approach of contacting the outsourcing company without consulting his colleagues helped in increasing the chaos in the recruitment process. So many managers had to work on their own in order to finish their part of recruiting. This happened because the senior manager relied only on his experience and forgot that in order to achieve knowledge you need two add other components which are information and understanding. As we have seen in respect of information he did not provide sufficient information by not running any type of

knowledge analysis, while there was a vague understanding by the senior manager to the new recruitment situation.

Communication is an important entity in KM since it can be considered as the link between various knowledge components, in which it provides the path for data, information and experience to flow and interact with each other, and we can imagine knowledge with out communication as a city with out roads. In our case study, there were very poor communication skills especially between the agency's senior manager and his colleagues in not benefiting from the enormous amount of information and data that the agency's employees could have possessed. This began when the senior manager decided to outsource the recruitment process without consulting or even trying to listen to the opinions of his peers, so when attempting to analyze this act in a KM perspective we notice that this act has limited the amount of knowledge he could have provided the outsourcer with, since as the amount of data and information collected decrease, the amount of knowledge decrease to some extent. Besides the impacts that lack of communication in the agency had on knowledge, it impacted as well the confidence in between the agency's manager by becoming antagonistic towards each other, which will affect negatively the amount of knowledge that could be transferred from one brain to another in the agency.

7. Insufficient Knowledge Planning

When an organization has a grip on its knowledge (i.e. has performed Knowledge Analysis), it will be able to plan for the future which is known as Knowledge Planning. An organization will be able to develop a multi-year knowledge plan that defines how the organization will develop its knowledge resources, either by training its human agents, or by developing knowledge-based systems to support the human agents, or by other means that allow the organization to stay competitive *(Macintosh, 1999)*.

In regard of our study case the problem as we discussed previously was that in the beginning the senior manager did not perform any knowledge analysis, which will make implementing any planning analysis very difficult with the limited amount of knowledge available. Actually there was no any planning analysis in this case study giving that the senior manager responsible of the recruitment process did not even discuss the issue with his peers.

A typical approach for any manager to follow to achieve an effective knowledge planning is to divide the intended plan into short, intermediate and long rang plans. For example a short range knowledge plan could be to outsource the new staff recruitment procedure to an outside outsourcer company if the commonwealth agency sees that its human resource management department is not capable of managing such a procedure in the mean time, while an intermediate and long rage plan could be to in-source the recruitment procedures to the agency's human resource management department through using an effective collective decision making process that accommodated a range of views and by training

its human agents, or by developing knowledge-based systems to support the human agents.

8. The Role of the HRM Department in KM

The human resource management (HRM) department could play a vital role in knowledge management (KM) if it to be supplied by well trained employees and effective knowledge management systems (KMS). This could help in the process of finding, selecting, organizing, distilling and presenting information in a way that improves the manager's comprehension of a specific problem.

In the case study we have seen that the human resource management department had to intervene in the end of the new staff recruitment process in order to assist to fill in some gaps that the outsourcing company left, such as providing feedback to the unsuccessful applicants where it had to phone all the unsuccessful applicants to provide feedback on their performance. This was due to all of the past reasons that this report mentioned in the previous points, yet we can add another reason for the bad performance which is that the senior manager in charge did not exploit the agency's HRM department appropriately and involve it effectively in the recruitment process since this department has the strongest relation to this process because it is basically responsible of staff and employees and has a considerable amount of information which can be used in this trend to improve knowledge in which will improve the final outcome of this recruitment.

9. Conclusion

Knowledge management (KM) activities help focus the organization on acquiring, storing and utilizing knowledge for such things as problem solving, dynamic learning, strategic planning and decision making. It also protects intellectual assets from decay, adds to firm intelligence and provides increased flexibility *(Bellinger, 1997)*.

The analysis of the Human Resources of the commonwealth government agency case study in this report represents how important knowledge management can be to any organization. By knowing what intangible "soft" assets an organization would possess is the first step towards an effective KM. The senior manager in the commonwealth agency lacked the experience in KM by bypassing the important role of the HRM department, and by not perform any knowledge analysis in the beginning of the new staff recruit process and then ignoring any plan analysis in conjunction with his peers and colleagues resulting in poor knowledge management and communication skills.

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