

*Workshop on
Information Resource Management
13th-15th March,, 2002
DRTC, Bangalore*

Paper: DB

Is Knowledge Management Same as Information Resource Management?

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Abstract

Organizational knowledge has become a strategic corporate asset that needs to be retained, updated, disseminated and applied to future organizational problems. Knowledge repositories have to be created. The stored knowledge has to be continuously updated. This has given birth to a new activity known as Knowledge Management (KM). This paper tries to briefly understand what Knowledge management is and whether it is same as Information Resource Management.

1 Introduction

Organisations are made up of people, processes, policies and systems etc. Each of these are now considered as a source of some kind of knowledge. This organisational knowledge has to be put to use in order to stay one up above the competitors. Organizational knowledge has become a strategic corporate asset that needs to be retained, updated, disseminated and applied to future organizational problems. Knowledge repositories have to be created. The knowledge stored has to be continuously updated. This has given birth to a new activity known as Knowledge Management. Knowledge management is the *explicit* and *systematic* management of *vital knowledge* and its associated *processes* of creating, gathering, organizing, diffusion, use and exploitation. It requires turning personal knowledge into corporate knowledge that can be widely shared throughout an organization and appropriately applied. [6] This paper tries to briefly understand what Knowledge management is and whether it is same as Information Resource Management. It briefly describes what are the knowledge resources with respect to KM, what is KM in brief and lastly tries to relate IM (IRM) to KM.

2 Knowledge Resources

Any organisation has numerous kinds of knowledge resources. The intellectual and knowledge-based assets fall into one of two categories: explicit or tacit. What do these knowledge assets include? The explicit assets account for only a fraction of the real value of an organisation's knowledge assets. Explicit knowledge consists of anything that can be documented, archived and codified, often with the help of IT. The transaction data on all the processes, projects, customers and vendors, various benchmarks, the research logs, patents, trademarks, marketing strategies and business plans, competitive insights accumulated by every employee daily, are some of them. Intelligence available through the Internet and other information sources contribute to this accumulation of knowledge. The knowledge contained in every e-mail, every Word document, every spreadsheet and every fax that travels through the electronic infrastructure of an organisation and last but

not the least “best practices” adopted are also included in this list. The tacit kind of knowledge is even harder to capture, evaluate, share and leverage. Most of intellectual capital lies in the heads of the knowledge workers: their skills, experience, hard-won insight and intuition, and the trust they have invested and earned in relationships inside and outside of the organization. Some of this could be found in the explicit kind of resources.

3 Knowledge Management

As of today no exact definition of knowledge management has been coined. Various people have defined it in various ways. It is an amalgamation of strategy, technology, and people.

Different people have described KM as follows:

“Knowledge Management caters to the critical issues of organizational adaption, survival and competence in face of increasingly discontinuous environmental change.... 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.”

-- Yogesh Malhotra in Knowledge Management for the New World of Business, *Journal for Quality & Participation* special issue on Knowledge Management. [4]

"The focus of knowledge management is on 'doing the right thing' instead of 'doing things right.' It provides a framework within which the organization views all its processes as knowledge processes and all business processes involve creation, dissemination, renewal, and application of knowledge toward organizational sustenance and survival."

-- Yogesh Malhotra in Knowledge Management, Knowledge Organizations & Knowledge Workers: A View from the Front Lines, Interview with *Maeil Business Newspaper* the leading business newspaper of South Korea. [4]

Knowledge management encompasses management strategies, methods, and technology for leveraging intellectual capital and know-how to achieve gains in human performance and competitiveness.

CAP VENTURES, <http://www.capv.com/dss/knowledg.htm> [5]

Knowledge management is a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, managing and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets. These information assets may include databases, documents, policies and procedures as well as previously unarticulated expertise and experience resident in individual workers. Knowledge management issues include developing, implementing and maintaining the appropriate technical and organizational infrastructures to enable knowledge sharing, and selecting specific contributing technologies and vendors.

GARTNERGROUP, 29 AUGUST 1996, <http://www.gartner.com> [5]

Knowledge management can be defined as "the harnessing of a company's collective expertise wherever it resides and the distribution of that expertise to the right people at the right time. It's not a product but a process—the process of gathering, managing, and sharing your employees' knowledge capital."

GROUP COMPUTING ONLINE, <http://www.groupcomputing.com> [5]

Rudy Ruggles, a leading KM thinker/practitioner, has identified the following items as integral components of KM:

- Generating new knowledge
- Accessing valuable knowledge from outside sources
- Using accessible knowledge in decision making

- Embedding knowledge in processes, products, and/or services
- Representing knowledge in documents, databases, and software
- Facilitating knowledge growth through culture and incentives
- Transferring existing knowledge into other parts of the organization
- Measuring the value of knowledge assets and/or impact of knowledge management

Thus knowledge management includes various processes such as acquisition, creation, renewal, archival, dissemination and application (conversion of new knowledge into action or behavior modification) of knowledge. The processes of collecting, organizing, classifying and disseminating information are achieved effectively by the searching, indexing, collating, archival and transmission capabilities of new technologies. But these technologies are not able to create new knowledge or update it with time as they are not based on the meaning making capabilities of human beings.

4 Knowledge Management or Information Resource Management

Knowledge then exists in minds of people, not technology. Technology can help to capture information, but it can not create knowledge. Useful technologies include search engines, scanning technology, optical character and voice recognition software, intelligent agents, database management systems, document management systems, and repositories.

The knowledge is documented in the form of the various resources mentioned above. Once the information is identified, collected, and managed, it must be transformed into knowledge. This requires classification, analysis, and synthesis. This step, requires human intervention. Knowledge can not be created by technology. Only a human being can convert information into knowledge when read and assimilated after retrieval. Useful technologies for this phase of the knowledge management process include statistical analysis software, data mining tools, OLAP and decision support systems, AI, and data visualization tools.

Most important activity is effectively communicating the captured "knowledge." "Knowledge" here actually means information that is more easily transformed into knowledge by the recipient. Technologies that help to facilitate communication include collaboration technology, groupware, workflow management systems, e-mail, the web, networking technology, and mobile computing. The captured "knowledge" should be easily convertible into any format preferred by the recipient (for example, word processing documents, Adobe files, text files, etc.) Thus knowledge cannot be transferred unless it is converted back into information.

Information Resources Management also involves creation, acquisition, organisation and dissemination of information or its resources. Hence, knowledge management can be thought of as nothing else but information management (or information resource management). Knowledge is what is documented by the authors. It then becomes information for the reader. This information when put into use for achieving some goal creates knowledge. Knowledge *per se* cannot be transferred or managed. Though certain kind of knowledge (e.g – procedural knowledge like know-how) can be transferred as it is. Thus knowledge management is domain specific IRM. The resources are of different nature from the common information resources i.e-published books, CDs, periodicals etc. It is limited to the organization where it is practiced.

5 Conclusion

Knowledge management is gaining importance in business organizations to stay one-up over the competitors. New software tools have been developed for the same. But it looks like a specialized kind of management of various kinds of sources of information. The information sources are meant to be created and used only within the organization. They are not for anyone other than the employees of the organisation. KM is aimed to serve a limited clientele which are the employees of an organization. We as library science professionals can definitely play a role in implementing knowledge management systems and processes in organizations. Our expertise in classification, organization, indexing and

searching information can be useful in making a knowledge management system successful. The only difficult part being converting the tacit kind of knowledge into useful resources of information.

6 References

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