Editorial Preface

The Impact of Knowledge Management on Information Management Practice

Steve Clarke
University of Hull Business School, UK

In this short preface, I want to look at some ways of linking information management (IM) and knowledge management (KM), and, in doing so, hope to signpost some future directions for information management as a means of integrating IM into the wider knowledge base of organisations.

Drawing on a recent working definition of KM (Lehaney, Clarke et al., 2004), and looking at the basic elements of this definition, we arrive at:

To facilitate the creation, retention, sharing, identification, acquisition, utilisation, and measurement of information and new ideas, in order to achieve strategic aims.

Information is clearly a core element in this definition, and to explore this further I want first to look at one view of the processes, activities, and components of a KM system, then to relate these to a perspective on IM, before finally looking through this to the future of IM.

Knowledge management might be perceived to be about the processes of knowledge creation, knowledge retention, and knowledge identification. Knowledge creation relates to the creation of new ideas, new ways to market existing products, new products, and new versions of old products. Organisations can foster the conditions under which staff may want to create knowledge, may feel empowered to create knowledge, and feel rewarded for doing so.

But investments in knowledge creation cost money, and that is one of the reasons why knowledge retention rests on sharing and recording knowledge and is a key area for information management.

These two elements are also intertwined when it comes to knowledge identification. Staff may be willing to share knowledge, but: How do other staff know that knowledge is there? How do they identify it as being relevant to their needs? And what systems will help them to achieve this?

The “glue” that holds together these three processes consists of activities which need to be undertaken in order to facilitate and enhance them. These can be summarised as knowledge: acquisition, sharing, utilisation, and measurement. Knowledge acquisition is about how employees gain knowledge from inside or outside the organisation; knowledge sharing is important as a way in which organisations may help enhance the creation/identification/retention process. It is this sharing that is so often considered as a technical exercise, fundamentally depending on more technology or greater networking capabilities, but it is more often dependent on open communications—technology may help facilitate this communication, but it is people who decide whether to communicate and what they will or will not communicate; knowledge utilisation has to do with how knowledge is used, why is it used, and in what ways; measurement is concerned with knowledge targets and feedback loops, so that we know if we are succeeding and if we can do better.

All of this is supported by different “types” of knowledge. The “know-how”, “know-who”,...
“know-when”, “know-where”, “know-why”, and “know-that” (the basic accepted “facts”, experience and access to learning) of knowledge management.

Figure 1 shows the interrelationships of these processes and activities, and their linkages to staff, structures, and technology.

So, what are the implications of this for information management? Information management is often targeted at the structure and technology part of the organisation, but we must start to see it more in terms of its integration into all of the activities of knowledge management. The way forward rests on viewing the organisation holistically, and looking less at where the management of information can be positioned in terms of business functions, and more at how it can be used to enhance the interactions between those functions. Interactions between all of the processes, activities, and elements of Figure 1 make a solid starting point for this, and such an approach has the potential at last to frame IM as not merely a “supporting function” across an organisation, but more as an integral and integrated part of all the organisation’s activities.

REFERENCE AND FURTHER READING