Chapter XI

Managing Knowledge in a Collaborative Context: How May Intellectual Resources Be Harnessed Towards Joint Effect?

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ABSTRACT

The value of electronic collaboration has arisen as successful organisations recognize that they need to convert their intellectual resources into customized...
services. The shift from personal computing to interpersonal or collaborative computing has given rise to ways of working that may bring about better and more effective use of intellectual resources. Current efforts in managing knowledge have concentrated on producing, sharing and storing knowledge while business problems require the combined use of these intellectual resources to enable organisations to provide innovative and customized services. In this chapter the collaborative context is developed using a model for electronic collaboration through the use of which organisations may mobilise collaborative technologies and intellectual resources towards achieving joint effect.

INTRODUCTION

For modern organisations, knowledge is increasingly being seen as a strategic resource that needs to be created and harnessed effectively in order for the organisation to survive and achieve competitive advantage. It is believed that managing this strategic resource can enable an organisation to achieve particular benefits such as minimisation of costs, innovation of products, product development procedures, improved quality, flexibility in a dynamic market and improved customer service. For organisations to be successful, they must be capable of continuously acquiring, assimilating, disseminating, sharing and using knowledge (Senge et al., 1994; Huber, 1991). Alavi and Leidner (1999) identify an emerging line of information systems referred to as knowledge management systems (KMSs) that target professional and managerial activities by focussing on creating, gathering, organising and disseminating an organisation’s “knowledge” as opposed to “information” or “data.” Hibbard and Carrillo (1998) believe information technology, which supports knowledge management, such as data mining, groupware, document management, and search and retrieval applications, are widely available and already exist in many companies.

Efforts in organisations attempting to manage knowledge have concentrated on codifying or explicating knowledge and propose infrastructures for storing knowledge as well as refining, managing and distributing it (such as described in Zack, 1999, Hansen et al., 1999). While these efforts are valuable in themselves, practical considerations such as motivating employees to add to such databases and use them in their “knowledge work” have thwarted the success of such codification strategies. It has been suggested that problems which stem from traditional business environments that hoard knowledge is an obstacle which is preventing knowledge management efforts from being a complete success (Hibbard and Carrillo, 1998). In addition, Vance (1997) suggests that the reason information and knowledge may
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