Chapter XIX

Specialist Training:
Cultivating Knowledge Management Professionals

Abstract

The growing importance of knowledge and innovation in the marketplace brings with it a need for the better management of professional knowledge for knowledge workers in the New Economy. This chapter illustrates some major steps undertaken at the University of New South Wales, Australia, towards building an educational system for KM professionals that can meet the requirements of the knowledge economy. The chapter describes new multidisciplinary curriculum initiatives and instructional learning developments considered or implemented at the school of information systems, technology and management.
Responsibility for knowledge can be shared among all employees within an organisation in order to build a structure conducive to learning. Alternatively, having supportive organisational structure for KM may involve establishing a set of special KM roles and positions within the organisation. An organisation may seek to appoint a particular individual to be responsible for KM at the senior executive level, or as managers and facilitators at team levels. These individuals may assist in smoothing knowledge flows and enhancing the quality of knowledge objects.

A recent report presented by Essex (2003) reveals that one in four large global firms appoint executives with titles of “chief knowledge officer” (CKO), “chief learning officer” (CLO), or “director of intellectual capital” (DIC). According to Handzic and Zhou (2005), a CKO is typically charged with gathering knowledge from a firm’s geographically, functionally, and intellectually dispersed divisions and orchestrating its use wherever it is needed. Usually, the person works at capturing and leveraging structured knowledge, using information technology to drive the process. A CLO, on the other hand, is more overtly concerned with training and education, and human resources, as opposed to information systems, as a key enabler. The job is usually described as “creating and supporting an environment in which learning and applying what we learn is a daily priority.” A DIC tends to focus more on converting and/or extracting knowledge into revenues and profits.

Handzic (2003) identifies four categories of KM-related titles and roles found in the literature. These include: (1) knowledge scientists, who show others what would be possible if they were willing to try; (2) knowledge managers, whose prime concern is with knowledge needs of the organisation; (3) knowledge engineers with various specialisations, who act as advisors to knowledge managers on what can be done given the current “state of the art”; and (4) knowledge workers who produce and reproduce knowledge in every element of the economy.

The snapshot of knowledge managers’ major characteristics and activities reported by McKeen and Staples (2000) suggests that they are well-educated and experienced individuals whose primary goal is to guide their organisations towards managing knowledge for maximum benefit, and who see changing people’s behaviour as the key challenge. The profile of a typical knowledge manager includes the following individual characteristics: highly educated; already a seasoned organizational performer and chosen for the KM position based on proven performance; a “researcher” who seeks new knowledge and likes to learn; attracted to “being at the forefront of something new and exciting”; motivated more by a challenge than a formal power; receives intrinsic rewards from helping others, some altruism and evangelism; a risk-taker, sometimes a maverick; and sees knowledge management as a way to “make a mark within the organization.”
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