Chapter 13

The Relevance of Integration for Knowledge Management Success: Towards Conceptual and Empirical Evidence

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ABSTRACT

Many organizations pursue knowledge management (KM) initiatives with different degrees of success. One key aspect of KM often neglected in practice is following an integrated and holistic approach. Complementary, KM researchers have increasingly focused on factors that determine KM success and examined whether the metrics used to measure KM initiatives are reasonable. In this article, the importance of integration issues for successful KM is analyzed by means of a case study of a KM initiative at an international consulting company. The investigations demonstrate the importance of an integrated KM approach – an integrated view of KM strategy, KM processes, KM technology, and company culture – to ensure KM success.

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Subject and Purpose of the Chapter

Knowledge management (KM) has progressed from an emergent concept to an increasingly common function in business organizations over the past 20 years. Intense competition, fickle consumers, shorter product life cycles, and globalization are some of the driving forces that have led to increased inspection of the usage, application, and leveraging of knowledge in organizations. Successful KM is expected to have a positive influence on a company’s performance and effectiveness. It consists of critical enablers, such as employee training, teamwork, and performance measurement. This leads to the first observation:

KM is crucial for a company to succeed. Successful KM depends on the achievement of critical success factors that based on supporting conditions.

Although KM systems (KMS) are shown to provide benefits to organizations, they have a high chance of failure due to both technical and IT-related factors, as well as KM-related cultural, behavioral, and strategic factors—similar to many other types of information systems (IS).

Problems experienced in KM initiatives are assumed to be the result of one or more of the following three factors:

1. A focus on the technological dimension of KM (i.e. KMS), together with a lack of attention to the social dimension (e.g., organizational culture).
2. The absence of a clearly defined purpose and value for the business. In this context, a key requirement for realizing the business value of KM is the institutionalization of KM practices and systems into people’s natural work flow.
3. KM frameworks’, concepts’ and systems’ lacking adoption to the specific requirements of corporate contexts. Given its focus on people and their interactions, KM is intrinsically highly context specific. Each organizational setting poses its own challenges for successful KM.

These aspects lead to the second observation:

An integrated and holistic KM initiative, as well as the complete embedding of KM in organizations will be essential for KM success.

Based on both observations, the overall goal of this article is to analyze and investigate coherences, connections, and interdependencies between KM success and an integrated and holistic view of the subject area. The corresponding research question can be formulated as follows: To what extent do KM success factors that are accepted in literature support an integrative perspective and does such a perspective account for KM success?

Research Approach and Structure

Qualitative case study research was employed for this study. Section 2 introduces Riempp’s architecture for integrated KMS and its performance measurement system. Section 3 is an overview of KM and KMS success. It also discusses the success assessment framework of Jennex and Olfman. Section 4 compares the key performance indicators of Riempp’s architecture for integrated KMS and the critical success factors of Jennex and Olfman’s success assessment framework, using the case study findings. Section 5 concludes the article by outlining the findings, limitations, and further research areas.
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