Chapter 20

Affective Factors for Successful Knowledge Management

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ABSTRACT

The author proposes that any effort to successfully manage knowledge must be concerned not only with relevant technology, but also with the plethora of affective factors present in the workforce. The author’s objective is to heighten awareness of the impact of these affective factors on knowledge management (KM) implementation, and to offer practical approaches that it is contended will assist in “getting the affective factors right”.

INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade Knowledge Management (KM) has been vigorously proposed as a means to optimize enterprise performance and sustainable competitive advantage in the face of the rapidly increasing complexity and ambiguity of our modern global business environments (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Choo & Bontis, 2002; Marqués et al, 2006; Karaszewski, 2008). During the early ‘90s KM essentially referred only to information systems (I/S) technologies related to informational databases, artificial intelligence, and Internet/intranet applications where information is shared across I/S networks. An understanding emerged during this period that to derive actionable meaning from information it was essential that the explicit and tacit dimensions of organizational knowledge be developed in a complimentary and dynamically reciprocal manner (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).
By the late-90s there was emphasis on treating KM in a more systemic organizational sense to include the social as well as the I/S technological aspects of any attempt to manage organizational knowledge. The work of Davenport and Prusak (1998) led the way in emphasizing that any effort to manage knowledge must be concerned not only with the I/S technology, but also the associated social issues. Wiig (2000 pp. 14) cited a number of authors to support his contention that “Overall KM will become more people-centric because it is the networking of competent and collaborating people that makes successful organizations”. Since that time a broad-based acceptance of the inclusive nature of KM has developed, together with a more practical appreciation of the perils of KM (Chua & Lam, 2005; Dufour & Steane, 2007).

In parallel there has been increasing acknowledgement of the impact of organizational culture on the success or failure of KM initiatives (Guzman & Wilson, 2005; Pyöriä, 2007) including the constructive or detrimental influences of the more personal affective factors that are often unconscious, such as beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and instincts (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2002; Scherer & Tran, 2003; Smith & McLaughlin, 2003; Malhotra, 2004; Lucas, 2005; Figler & Hanlon, 2008; Maimone & Sinclair, 2010).

With the increasing understanding of how to leverage web-based social media such as Twitter and Yammer to encourage social commerce, and the emergence of social software platforms such as wikis and blogs, a further new and burgeoning culture-dependent element, typically termed Enterprise 2.0, has been added to how knowledge may be created, shared and stored (Levy, 2009; McAfee, 2009; Garcia, 2010; Kane et al, 2010; Martin-Niemi & Greatbanks, 2010; Ribiere & Tuggle, 2010). These web-based KM enablers may be implemented inside, outside, or across an organization’s fire-wall, and have the potential to influence affective attitudes for better or worse; never the less their usage by organizations will grow increasingly common.

The aim in this chapter is to heighten awareness of the impact of affective factors on KM implementation, and to offer practical approaches that it is contended will assist in “getting the affective factors right”. First a tried-and-true model for optimizing KM performance is reviewed that has been utilised successfully with a broad range of organizations for almost two decades (Smith & Sharma, 2002a pp. 767). Next this model is used to frame descriptions of initiatives that shape various affective factors for successful KM implementation. In exploring and defining the drivers for successfully implementing KM, the concept of a Personal Knowledge Management System (PKMS) is described.

BACKGROUND

Most managers will agree that their organization’s capability to act is heavily dependent on its knowledge assets and how they are managed. In this regard, information technology (I/T) may be used to create, capture, organize, access and use the intellectual assets of the organization; however as Davenport and Prusak assert (1998 pp. 123) “Knowledge management is much more than technology, but ‘Techknowledgy’ is clearly part of knowledge management”. In other words I/T is an enabler (Allee, 1997). Coakes (2006 pp. 581-582) tabulates the several roles and ways that I/T may support KM, but counsels “Successful knowledge management continues to need a socio-technical approach where the social aspects of knowledge creation, storage, and sharing need to be considered alongside the technical” (Coakes, 2006 pp. 591); this is particularly relevant with the emergence of Enterprise 2.0 capability (McAfee, 2009).

As understanding of KM has become more sophisticated, the traditional notion of knowledge as the assets of strictly defined “professional” groups has become untenable when compared to an organization’s wide-ranging knowledge requirements (Heiskanen, 2004), and the aware-