Chapter VI

The Organizational Characteristics of Knowledge-Centricity

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge focused organizations are knowledge-centric, a term that embodies the creation and management of knowledge but embedded as an integral element of an organization’s strategy and performance. By devising an organizational characteristics matrix, this chapter identifies a number of essential and desirable features that comprise a knowledge-centric business. The matrix is then applied to a case study company, Black and Decker, and more specifically its European Design Center, to examine the extent to which the organization can be viewed as knowledge-centric. While the use of such this first-iteration matrix is a useful mechanism for gauging knowledge-centricity, the chapter concludes with a critique of its potential limitations, with suggestions as to how it might be refined further to give a more illuminating assessment of an organization’s knowledge capabilities.
Introduction

The issue of knowledge management is now firmly embedded within modern management thinking, as organizations re-assess their business objectives and review the operational and strategic management of their resources (Von Krogh et al., 2001; Zack, 1999). In part, a more aggressive competitive environment, coupled with a move towards creativity and innovation, has ensured that organizations are increasingly keen to exploit knowledge as a productive resource and a potential means of developing competitive advantage (Hall & Andriani, 2002). Equally, a growing awareness of the benefits that can accrue from developing collective knowledge by creating an environment that facilitates knowledge sharing has been a driver of developments in this arena for many companies in the last few years.

Interestingly, the concept of knowledge management is by no means without ambiguity and this has led to different interpretations and emphasis in the academic literature (McAdam & McCreedy, 1999). While the reasons and context for this are discussed shortly and center largely on historical evolution, knowledge “management” is insufficient to fully describe how knowledge is created and exploited. Management is essentially a “top-down” activity and relates, typically, to managing tangible resources. Knowledge, on the other hand, arises from a number of sources, with the individual, at all levels, a key ingredient throughout. Thus, knowledge creation, often tacit in nature, is a multi-faceted human activity embracing every area of an organization, with knowledge transfer occurring across organizational hierarchies, within business units, across departments, between individuals and customers, and so forth. Knowledge is micro-managed in most everyday situations amongst individuals, but knowledge management, when used in an organizational context is, arguably, not the final stage of the knowledge journey (KPMG, 1997). Knowledge-centricity is a more apt term for examining the extent to which an organization is truly knowledge-focused, and while encompassing knowledge management, it encapsulates a broader view of the socio-technical and strategic issues surrounding knowledge creation, dissemination, exploitation and management.

Although this term is defined in more detail in the subsequent section, its use permits the identification of a number of characteristics that knowledge-centric organizations appear to exhibit, the latter typical of those organizations facilitating and stimulating creativity and innovation, the theme of this book. More
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