Chapter XIV

Promoting Organizational Knowledge Sharing

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines knowledge sharing and management within an organization. More importantly, it addresses what organizations can do to promote knowledge sharing in order to gain a competitive edge. Included are the results of a survey that explores employees’ willingness to share knowledge. Today, more than ever, organizations must efficiently manage their knowledge assets in order to remain competitive. Some knowledge management (KM) initiatives have failed, while others have succeeded. A key factor associated with successfully managing knowledge is creating an environment that encourages individuals to share their knowledge.
Introduction

Knowledge management (KM) is critical to organizations today. Completely and effectively documenting knowledge lessens the chance that an organization will fail. Successful KM turns real-life work experiences, hidden practices, facts and know-how into an organizational resource. Peter Drucker first pointed out that the “U.S. had shifted from an economy of manufactured goods to a ‘knowledge economy’” (Stewart et al., 2001, p. 41). He stated that, “knowledge is the most important resource—more important than labor, capital and land—and, indeed, the only meaningful resource today” (Gore & Gore, 1999, p. S555). James Quinn explains that “knowledge is the new power base of the modern corporation and that the value of most products and services depends primarily on how ‘knowledge-based intangibles’—such as technological know-how, product design, marketing presentation, understanding of the customer, personal creativity and innovation—can be developed” (Gore & Gore, 1999, p. S555). If knowledge-based intangibles represent the greatest share of the value of most products and services, what are companies doing to promote sharing of knowledge? Realizing the growing importance of managing knowledge, progressive corporations proactively learn how to better capture knowledge. By identifying what knowledge is vital to securing and sustaining a competitive advantage, organizations can make the first step towards KM success.

This chapter explores how to take an organizational approach to knowledge sharing. Strategies to gain a competitive advantage through effective KM are given. A survey was administered to gauge employees’ willingness to share knowledge and those results are discussed. In addition, strategies that promote knowledge sharing are given.

Solutions through Behavior versus Technology

Technology no longer provides a competitive advantage, since everyone has it and uses it. However, knowledge can continually bring an advantage if the knowledge base and knowledge activities are continuously maintained and enhanced (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004). Most knowledge management initiatives fall short of their goals (Desouza, 2003), largely due to taking a technologist perspective rather than a humanistic or balanced perspective (Desouza, 2003). Understanding how people are innately motivated to apply their personal