Knowledge Management Processes: Storing, Searching and Sharing Knowledge in Practice

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge management includes several processes, e.g., knowledge creation, knowledge storing, sharing, and using knowledge. When these processes run smoothly, an organization can confirm that information is available for users whenever needed. This is essential for organizations that sell knowledge-based services. However, often these processes are not as effective as they could be. In this article the authors concentrate on the following knowledge management processes: storing, searching, and sharing knowledge. The purpose of the research was to find out the different kind of practices companies use for these processes and how information technology can help companies produce these processes more effective. This paper includes the theoretical background of knowledge management and its processes as well as the results of an empirical benchmarking research done among medium sized and large organizations in knowledge intensive businesses.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Knowledge Management Processes, Knowledge Searching, Knowledge Storing, Sharing Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Many organizations have recognized that knowledge is one of their key assets. This recognition raises the question of how it can be ensured that the right knowledge is available whenever employees need it. Therefore there must be effective ways for storing and searching knowledge.

A large international engineering company providing multidiscipline engineering consultancy wanted to find answers to this question and started a project to improve its knowledge management processes. The company was particularly interested in knowledge sharing between employees and with clients, too. As one part of the project they conducted a benchmarking with other medium sized and large organizations. The results of this benchmarking are presented in this paper. This research is based on the notion that even though there is a lot of research done in knowledge management and in knowledge management processes, it is difficult to find practical ideas for development.

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The paper starts with an introduction of the theoretical background about knowledge and knowledge management processes. The theoretical background was used when planning the empirical research. This is followed by the research method and results of the empirical research. Benchmarking the situation of the case company with the results of the empirical research will be introduced next. Finally, the managerial implications of the research will be discussed.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

There are several different definitions for 'knowledge' and 'knowledge management.' Also 'knowledge management processes' can be defined in various ways. Some of these definitions are introduced in this chapter to provide background for the empirical study. The definitions used in this research are presented.

Knowledge

“Knowledge is justified true belief” is one of the most quoted definitions of knowledge by Nonaka (1994). Nonaka’s definition is based on the approach of the Western philosophy. Berger and Luckmann (1972) on the other hand see knowledge as a set of shared beliefs that are constructed through social interactions and embedded within the social contexts in which knowledge is created. This definition emphasizes the social dimension of knowledge: knowledge is created by people interaction and it always has a context.

The terms data, information, and knowledge are often clearly distinguished. Davenport and Prusak (1998) see knowledge as something individual: “it originates and is applied in the minds of knowers” but also say that “it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices and norms”. Along their lines “data is a set of discrete, objective facts about events”; Information is a message with a sender and a receiver and it is meant to have an impact on the judgment and behavior of the receiver. Finally, they define knowledge as “a fluid mix of frame experiences, values, con-textual information and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information.”

Also Liebowitz (2005) makes a separation between data, information, and knowledge in his knowledge framework. He says that data are discerned elements and they are turned into information when they are processed and patterned in some way. When information turns actionable, it is transformed into knowledge. Bhatt (2001) defines knowledge to be meaningful information. Knowledge derives from information. What makes the difference between data and information is their organization and what makes the difference between information and knowledge is the interpretation. Also Russ, Fineman, and Jones (2010, pp. 2-5) have a similar definitions.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) state that the difference between knowledge and information lies in three things: “First of all, knowledge, unlike information, is about beliefs and commitment. Secondly, knowledge, unlike information, is about action. And thirdly, knowledge, unlike information, is about meaning.”

Kogut and Zander (1992), however, connect knowledge and information in a different way. They define knowledge both as information and know-how. According to Kogut and Zander (1992) “know-how is the accumulated practical skill or expertise that allows one to do something smoothly and efficiently”. Information on the other hand, “implies knowing what something means.”

Tacit and Explicit Knowledge

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) made the concepts of explicit and tacit knowledge famous in their book “The Knowledge-Creating Company.” They argue that explicit knowledge is objective whereas tacit knowledge is subjective. Explicit knowledge is knowledge of rationality and mind and it is sequential. Tacit knowledge is knowledge of experience, it is simultaneous. It is hard to take away from the time and the place.
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