Chapter 11

Summation: The Holistic Approach

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author summarizes the book’s chapters into a concise statement of the value and benefits of KM.

The knowledge economy has pushed information professionals into a land of opportunity with an evolving definition for knowledge management that extends responsibility beyond document and records management. As technology changes and user behavior evolves, information professionals face a challenging set of tasks related to maintaining information and knowledge management processes. Rapid adoption of smart devices and - in that context - the interesting observation that people are seeking to simplify their information environments illustrate the ever changing means of seeking knowledge within our world. In order to make the most of knowledge as an asset, organizations and their information professionals and knowledge managers need reliable and valuable guidance.

That guidance must begin with an understanding of what knowledge management is. The definitions vary. The direction comes down to applying the basic tenets of library science to the current knowledge age. In essence corporate librarians, information professionals, and knowledge managers are responsible for collecting, organizing, and making information findable. Applying those responsibilities to the volume and velocity of information in today’s world requires a holistic approach to the process.

Strategy, communication, and daily tasks define the central elements of the creation, use, and retrieval of the right information at the right time. Defining the process, selecting the
right tools, and implementing the knowledge management system that best meets the needs of an organization begins with understanding the history, values, and corporate culture as they are related to knowledge assets. Taking that understanding forward to shift corporate attitudes, to demonstrate the potential value to be gained, and to show the efficiencies that could be created with the right approach is not an easy task.

Beginning with a true understanding of what knowledge management is and why it is important may be the best starting place. Communicating that technology alone will not solve the problem of finding and using the knowledge assets of an organization is an important message. All knowledge workers are not knowledge managers, and thus a methodical approach is required to truly gain a return on investment - whether the investment be in personnel or enterprise software solutions. In truth, the best knowledge management solution requires personnel and technology used with a highly informed strategy in mind.

Businesses need knowledge insights that reflect the multi-dimensional nature of their organizations. Human beings tend towards activities with similar groups and are uncomfortable getting outside those groups. However, organizations need those groups to share because they likely are working on similar projects and have the opportunity for achieving cost savings, better solutions, improved processes, and other organizational benefits. Finding a way to break down silos often means finding the right “manager” to work across the groups. Information professionals are well placed to take on such a role because they do work across groups; they understand the organizational structure and can see the larger picture of where information sharing may benefit disparate groups.

A good knowledge management system staffed with professionals and enhanced by useful technology can improve the efficiency, relevance, and expertise of knowledge workers. The system allows for improved sharing of critical information and places value on the mere process of staying informed and current, thus allowing knowledge organizations to maximize the positive impact of their knowledge assets. Creating the system that allows for such high value activity begins with a culture that understands the benefits to be gained through the proper management and use of knowledge assets.

Ulla de Stricker emphasizes in the Knowledge Culture chapter the importance of having the organizational culture place value in knowledge. A productive and positive workplace benefits by retaining talent and thus having engaged employees who make improvements and contribute to enhanced products and services. As de Stricker explains, “creativity should be enhanced by a review of past efforts.” Building capture and sharing of knowledge into work processes and structures is a critical part of fostering meaningful creativity.

Naturally, before processes and structure can be altered or improved to reflect a strong knowledge culture, a starting point should be defined. The practical steps and guidance offered in Cynthia Shamel’s chapter Planning for Knowledge Management are useful in determining that starting point. Knowledge management is an organizational activity with multiple layers of responsibility, application, and adoption. Workarounds for using software solutions are common, ownership of tasks is often debated (or indeed debatable), and adherence to the process for sharing data is frequently inconsistent. The assessment is a critical process in assigning responsibility, defining needs, and creating a comprehensive
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