

KnowldgWORKS News
Volume 1 Number 11

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KnowBits

Another definition for Knowledge Management

In my ongoing search to understand knowledge management and to seek out good definitions for it, I encountered one in the oddest place. A publication by Ziff-Davis had an article in its Computer Shopper (July 1999) magazine entitled, "Knowledge is Power" by Dan Costa. As articles go about the subject, it is well written and well balanced. The definition actually comes from Lotus. It is:

Knowledge Management is "the systematic leveraging of information and expertise to improve organizational innovation, responsiveness, productivity, and competency."

I like this definition because it is short, does not obfuscate the subject with a lot of other terms that are difficult to define, and does capture the essence of what knowledge management is about. To me, the word expertise is an excellent term to use as it captures not only the notion of knowledge, but also the idea of the kind of knowledge needed to accomplish improved innovation, responsiveness, etc. As this week's newsletter is about definitions, I thought this was particularly relevant.

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Volume 1 Number 11
Topic: General (Definitions)
Back to Basics

The first two newsletters focused on setting a context - defining knowledge management (my own flavor) and going on from there. As I mentioned in these newsletters, there is much variation in definitions and on what knowledge management is about. As with any field of discourse, we need to have a common language, one where if I say knowledge work, you have some idea of what that is and

what I am talking about. Likewise it is important to have the same kind of understanding of other terminology in the domain of knowledge work.

A good example of this comes to mind. In linguistics, a grammar has a specific definition. If I use the term in discussion with another linguist then that linguist will understand what I am talking about. The definition is a standard one accepted throughout the linguistics community. This level of definitional acceptance is worthy to achieve in any domain because it allows community members to focus on the work as opposed to debate about basic concepts and definitions.

Basic Vocabulary

What is the basic vocabulary of knowledge work? If we had to identify 10 significant terms, what would they be? Here is one possible set of terms and the definitions of these terms. Of course, you may have others, and are welcome to share them and extend this list.

1. knowledge
2. knowledge work
3. knowledge management
4. knowledge capture
5. knowledge worker
6. learning
7. knowledge repository
8. knowledge value chain
9. knowledge value
10. knowledge process

Definitions

1. Knowledge - That which is learned or acquired and integrated in some way in the mind of an individual, group of individuals, or organization of individuals that enables the knowledge holder (individual, group, or organization) to do something. For example, an individual may have knowledge about how to be a successful salesperson. A relevant question is whether or not knowledge has to be in a mind or can it be outside a mind. I think the answer to this question lies partly in a philosophical debate about the nature of knowledge and partly a matter of practicality.
2. Knowledge work - Any manipulation of knowledge including acquiring, integrating, retrieving, and transforming knowledge. An example of knowledge work is the process of deciding which

stock to buy to achieve a maximum return on investment.

Knowledge work subsumes knowledge management.

3. Knowledge management - The control, planning, and arranging of one or more knowledge resources to achieve a desired goal. An example of a desired goal may be to reuse knowledge to improve productivity of a business function.
4. Knowledge capture - The acquisition of knowledge from individual, group, or organization. Once knowledge is captured it can be codified and stored to promote reuse.
5. Knowledge worker - An individual who performs tasks that of knowledge work.
6. Learning - The acquisition and integration of knowledge so that it may be used and applied. For example, seeing that $1+1=2$, $1+2=3$, $1+3=4$ is not learning if one cannot also answer the question, what does $1+4=?$ The transformation of the series of formula into knowledge exemplifies acquisition and integration of knowledge. Value can be added to knowledge by extending the possibility for new integration. For example if we learn that $1+2=2+1 = 3$ and then learn that in general $1+x=x+1$, we have added value to the original knowledge.
7. Knowledge repository - A place to store knowledge. An individual, group, or organization can all have knowledge repositories. Basic requirements for a repository are the ability to store various types of knowledge and the ability to retrieve that knowledge. A low-tech knowledge repository could be a set of file folders. A high-tech knowledge repository might be based on a database platform.
8. Knowledge value chain - Assuming that knowledge is a commodity of value, how it is created, how it is prepared for market, how it is marketed, how it is priced, and how it is purchased are all elements of the knowledge value chain. In the value chain there are knowledge providers, knowledge marketers, and knowledge users. Each of these roles play a part in a process and within the process knowledge value is created.
9. Knowledge value - An assignment of price to a defined entity of knowledge. The price can be in terms of quantitative or qualitative measurement. For example, having a particular knowledge entity may yield a certain return on investment for that entity. Therefore the price for the knowledge is at least the return on investment in the knowledge.
10. Knowledge process - A process in which knowledge is used to achieve a desired goal. Knowledge processes explicitly define the points at which knowledge is added to the process and the points at which knowledge is produced by the process. In defining a knowledge process it is possible to identify valuable knowledge that needs to be part of the process, i.e., if a

certain piece of knowledge is not available the process will be seriously inhibited.

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Next week's issue: Knowledge Work and Artificial Intelligence

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