

11. Does it make sense to change the format of the newsletter into a multi-column format as in the case of more traditional newsletters?
12. How do I continue to make the production of the newsletter an enjoyable process?
13. How do I best balance the time between working on up and coming newsletters and important knowledge work projects (for example, the taxonomy)? What would be more important to the community?
14. Should the format of knowldgWORKS News be changed to a discussion forum? Should a discussion forum be added?

The newsletter has now reached its seventh month of existence. It seems fitting that these questions arise and I assess the next phase of the newsletter's life. For the time being, as I consider these questions and issues, the newsletter may be published on an irregular basis. When I can come to some conclusions about these issues, I will have a better idea of where the newsletter will be headed. As always, I would like to hear any opinions or questions you might have in relation to these considerations.

Best regards,

Randy Kaplan

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Leveraging Organizational Knowledge

There are many ways an organization can make use of its knowledge. For instance, it can use its knowledge to create new products, to increase its market share, to add to the growth of the organization, and ultimately (in the case of a public company) to make its stockholders extremely happy. This seems to be obvious--something that doesn't require much additional discussion, but is it?

Let's consider an organization whose primary product is knowledge. That is, an organization that sells knowledge. What types of organizations sell knowledge? Most frequently they are consulting organizations and these organizations should be very interested in knowledge work. After all, knowledge is their product. For example, I know of one organization that has substantial person years invested in understanding a popular and complex enterprise software system. Their interest in selling this knowledge

is exemplified by the service and tools they have to make this knowledge available to clients.

Differentiation

Imagine you own a small consulting organization in its fifth year. Your organization has been growing, and you are approaching 100 employees and approximately \$10M in annual revenue. You have a goal to grow the business ten fold in the next five years. Unfortunately, market and internal conditions are inhibiting your ability to grow the business.

Your consulting organization operates in a super-saturated market. In the region in which you operate there are at least 50 other organizations vying for the same customers. To a customer all of these organizations look very similar. They all do the same thing, and the absence of differentiation makes competition extremely fierce. Price of services is a primary differentiator, although some organizations in this market are attempting to differentiate themselves in terms of their expertise.

What Do You Know? (What Does Your Organization Know?)

People have been paying your organization for its services for the past five years, so something you are doing must be valuable. You or your organization knows something that provides value to your customers. What are your clients paying for?

Your clients might value your services because they perceive your organization to be more efficient than the competition. You can produce a quality product in significantly less time than the competition. Your organization has a process that achieves this efficiency.

Another example: Only some of the hundred or so individuals in your organization are in constant demand. Some of your other employees get assignments only when demand for consultants is at a peak. It probably goes without saying, although I am going to say it, that these high demand individuals are differentiators for your organization. These individuals are one reason why people use your organization in the saturated market.

How Do You Leverage What You Know?

Anything that helps you understand your embedded process or what differentiates your higher demand consultants from your lower demand consultants will help your entire organization stay competitive.

Case in point. Suppose you notice that SAP consulting services are hot, so you decide to add an SAP practice to your organization. Currently no one in your organization knows anything about SAP so you hire a "senior" SAP guy and a couple of junior guys and are ready to market your SAP consulting services. Or are you?

What do your SAP guys know that no one else knows? What can you sell? What knowledge can you bring in-house to transfer and leverage throughout the organization? Clearly if knowledge is that which enables you to do things, then expert knowledge (supposedly a more valuable kind of knowledge) enables you to do expert things. These expert things might only be available from your company. Only after you ask and answer questions like these are you ready to open your SAP consulting doors.

In any consulting organization--small, medium, large, or behemoth--the value is in the knowledge the consultants have, not necessarily in what they produce.

In the case of this SAP example, there is knowledge about SAP but there is also special knowledge that may differentiate your SAP practice. If for instance your SAP team can install SAP for one-half of the cost of any other organization this knowledge would be a substantial differentiator. On the one hand this knowledge might include knowledge about SAP but it may also include substantial knowledge about how to effect rapid change of business processes in an organization. The latter is of significant value beyond the knowledge of SAP.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to know what you know. If you don't then you might be missing out on what is the true value and differentiation of your business, and ultimately growth and revenue for your business. Have you reviewed what you know lately?

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