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KnowBits

This fourth issue of the ACCSYS KM Newsletter marks a special event. Through the marvelous community of the web, a colleague in the knowledge management community generously offered to host an online copy of these newsletters as part of their discussions about knowledge and non-profits. You can check out this discussion at <http://wellengaged.com/engaged/smithweaversmith.cgi?> I will be hosting the discussion and responding to questions about the newsletters and general questions. Thanks to Denham Grey and Smith Weaver Smith for this opportunity.

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If you miss an issue of the ACCSYS KM Newsletter, they are all posted to the ACCSYS web site at <http://www.accsys-corp.com>. You can also download PDF versions of each of the newsletters.

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Planning a KM Project

If you are considering a knowledge management effort, where do you start? What are the fundamental steps? Here is a ten-step process that can be the framework for your project plan.

Step 1 - Define the Problem

What is the problem you will be solving with the knowledge management effort? Is the problem a local problem specific to a workgroup or one that is more organizationally widespread? Can the problem be easily stated? Do individuals in the organization regard this problem as a significant one for the organization, and one that could use knowledge management as a solution?

It is very important to understand the problem you wish to solve. A knowledge management effort is a complex

undertaking and will require the investment of time and resources. Although the effect you create may grow into a general knowledge management capability, initially it should be focussed to address a very specific problem that can be clearly defined and classified as a knowledge management problem.

Step 2 - Identify the Sponsors

Who is going to support the effort? What will be involved? For a grass roots internal effort make sure you have enough people to support the effort. For a management-supported project, understand the nature of the commitment. Is the management sponsor willing to commit resources to the project? Is the sponsor willing to participate in the project? Answers to these questions will help you understand the scope and dimensions of the support for your effort. What do the sponsor(s) understand about knowledge management? Do they think of knowledge as an asset? Are any of the sponsor(s) part of the knowledge market?

Step 3 - Choose the Team

Who's going to execute the effort? Are there a pool of individuals who are excited by knowledge management? Are these individuals committed to solving the problem with knowledge management? Are they available to work with your team? Or do you need to identify and select team members? Or did you inherit staff? Regardless of whether you have your team members or have yet to build your team, your team members need to believe in the value of knowledge management and understand what needs to be accomplished. I would also recommend that your team members agree with the general motivations and assumptions of the project. Since knowledge management is not an exact science, debate about what knowledge management is and how to execute the project can seriously delay any knowledge management effort. Make sure you know beforehand if any of the team members have issues with one another and try to resolve these before the project has started. Team members with issues will effect openness and the possibility for knowledge sharing.

Step 4 - Create a Plan for the Effort

With the team assembled, construct the plan for the knowledge management effort. Given the problem, it should be possible to define goals for the solution. What should

the solution look like? Are you looking for short-term results or long term results? What results will your sponsors want to see? What results will the management team want to see? Remember that knowledge management is highly speculative so the management team will be expecting tangible results. With the solution/results defined, decide what knowledge management tools and methods you can use to transform the problem into the desired results.

Step 5 - Make the Plan Known

This step could be called evangelize and get buy-in. Because of the hype surrounding knowledge management you are bound to encounter skepticism and resistance. It is good to share your plan as early as possible. Any knowledge management effort will involve many people in the organization, so the more inclusive you are when disseminating the plan, the more successful your effort will be. Accept feedback about your plan and incorporate it as best as you can. Include everyone who has expressed interest in your plan and in knowledge management - they are also supporters of your efforts.

Step 6 - Do Some Experiments

As part of your plan, you may want to identify some activities that would test your knowledge management solution. In the case of a large effort this is particularly important because it allows you to see whether the solution you have chosen will solve the problem.

Experiments will allow you to mitigate risk because you can try things "in the small" to determine if they might work "in the big." It will also give you an idea of the acceptance of a particular approach and allow you to fine-tune the approach in the actual knowledge management effort. Don't forget to update management and/or sponsors about these experiments and their results.

Step 7 - Educate the Participants

Some participants may have been involved in the planning process. Depending on the scope of the project, educating the participants about the project is a very important aspect of rolling out a knowledge management effort. By doing this the participants will understand what the effort is about and why they are participating in it.

You will get additional buy-in and allow and considerations to be aired.

Step 8 - Execute the Plan

Start the effort. At this point you are ready to start the planned knowledge management effort. Check with your participants to make sure they are ready to start and that they understand their roles in the process. If there is technology to be installed/deployed/used make sure it is working and that everyone understands how to use it before engaging the technology in the project.

Step 9 - Monitor the Knowledge Management Effort

The plan should have defined measurements for progress and success. How will you know you're moving in the right direction? How will you know when you achieve your goal? You need to be able to monitor progress as you go. You may also want to make some modifications to your process. Monitoring is necessary in order to be able to make mid-course modifications to your process. For example, suppose your solution calls for accumulating knowledge in a common place to be referenced by the project community. You might want to monitor this repository of knowledge and how it is used to make sure the process is working as you designed it.

Step 10 - Make Your Results Known - Have Feedback Sessions - Do It Again

After some time your plan should have some demonstrable results. For example, if your primary purpose for the knowledge management effort was to enhance collaboration then you should see signs of enhanced collaboration, knowledge sharing, and idea generation. Has your solution addressed the problem you set out to solve? If so, how and why. If not, why not? Give your sponsors and/or management information about how the effort worked or did not work. Ask them if you have provided them with the results they wanted? Solicit ideas for improvements. Once you have focussed the public eye on your results and received feedback, evaluate whether or not it would be beneficial to refine your approach? If so, do another iteration.

One more comment. As far as knowledge management goes, it is extremely important for the knowledge management team to "eat its own food." It is not okay that the knowledge management team defines what is to be done and then is not a participant in the process. Actually doing knowledge management in the knowledge management team sets an extremely important example for the rest of the organization.

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Have any specific questions about this process? Please send email to rkaplan@accsys-corp.com. Have any ideas for the framework? Please let me know if you do. Do you have a different framework? Please share it and I will publish it in a future newsletter.

If you are interested in learning more about knowledge management, subscribe to this newsletter by sending email to infoac@accsys-corp.com. Send the message: Subscribe ACCSYS-KM <your email address> or go to <http://www.accsys-corp.com/getintouch.htm>, fill out the form, and in the comments area, enter Subscribe ACCSYS-KM <your email address>. If you know of anyone interested in knowledge management, please pass this newsletter on to them.

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Next week's issue: "Knowledge Management Activities"

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