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KnowBits

Feedback

Thank you all for responding for my request for feedback. You are a kind readership and it is appreciated. I received some excellent suggestions for future topics and some of the readership shared some information about their background which I will be including in up and coming issues. Since it is most important to continue to provide value in this newsletter, your suggestions are important. Please feel free to contact me when you have some feedback or a suggestion. My email address is:
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Randy Kaplan

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Contributions

Some of the readers have shared their own viewpoints. As our subject is complex, multiple voices offer different perspectives. Different views give us different ways to consider knowledge work. I am pleased to share these contributions in this issue.

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The following is attributed to Jon Foley from the Knowledge + Non-profits Practical Knowledge Management discussion as another view of knowledge management activities.

... I think about the kinds of Centers I've worked in over the years. We didn't know we were doing knowledge Management; we thought we were doing knowledge work! ;.) The Centers were the hub of some of the more strategic projects of the host organizations. We're a loose confederation of knowledge workers who contracted to work on specific projects as part of a virtual organization, not in the sense of existing online, but in the sense of existing for a project, then dissolving, then coming together in a new form for the next project.

At one point I put together a list of practices of such a Center to help create a context for team members who couldn't quite figure out what they were supposed to do as staff of such a Center.

(edited) ...

The Knowledge Management Center Support Staff Role

A knowledge management center support staff continuously manages information with the express intention of making it more meaningful and useful. The goal is to get the right information in the right form to the right person at the right time. As people engage with this information and combine it with their experience, knowledge is born, the potential to take effective action increases, and solutions are generated and implemented in an accelerated fashion.

Within a Center, there is a continuous stream of collaborative design events, overlapping, intertwining, of various sizes and significance. Some events are for the purpose of creating shared vision and strategy, others for more tactical purposes, some even to build final product models.

During these collaborative design events, staff roles are intended to facilitate the work, i.e., make it easier and include the following: lead facilitation, process facilitation, facilitation from the middle of the room, scribing, videotaping, wall copying, writing, documenting, lap scribing, music facilitation, etc.

Outside of these design events, the facilitation includes such activities as: using various models to discover blocks and remove them, observing group process, identifying blocks and removing them, practicing discerning and working with group energy, developing resource materials on teamwork, synergy, high-performance, etc., developing information packets to guide others in the best use of the Center and its tools, managing information as a continuous cycling process, documenting an event or process, implementing or managing feedback systems, finding and studying books/articles about process facilitation, maintaining a library of sample documentations as a reference to show clients, maintaining a library of templates and instructions in their use, creating indexes to key ideas and concepts from past projects and design

events, developing toolkits for self-documentation, practicing graphic skills, setting up a file of examples of good graphic design, developing training for diagramming, flow charting, using graphics to communicate, etc.

When there are no events scheduled in the Center, the staff is heavily involved in generating knowledge in the form of a constant stream of products, including: work products, reports, newsletters, knowledge walls, "one page abouts," executive summaries, multi-media presentations, other kinds of presentations, models, readings, synopses and/or summaries, web pages, scenarios, white papers, weak signal research, files of collected readings, article and book synopses, databases, predictions, maps, knowledge maps, project maps, graphic illustrations, etc.

The intent is to generate useful knowledge and discover new patterns through discovering, chunking, linking and synthesizing information.

Topics for the above products vary depending on current Center projects and the personal interests of the various knowledge workers on the staff, but typically includes the following: specific topics related to current events and sub-projects, futurist predictions, technology, change management, group process, whole systems, competition, markets, trends, how people learn, organizational theory, customers, leading edge theory, etc.

Other activities include finding and adding new materials to the library, including books and CDs; tracking documentation and product distribution; mining historical documentation or ideas and follow through opportunities; managing the storage and distribution of documentation and various work products.

Educational activities are intended to increase the capacity of the organization to generate and apply knowledge, i.e., take effective action. Typical staff support in this area include activities such as collecting relevant articles or sections of books and synthesizing these works to make them useful, making learning part of all work, learning and practicing using the Experiential Education model, learning about cognitive styles and other educational models, developing personal short and long term educational goals, forming study/learning groups, exploring topics of interest, building collections of articles and

engaging with others to discuss and apply lessons learned, teaching specific skills to others, coaching others' performance, exploring higher level concepts with others, engaging in regular feedback activities, especially debriefing sessions, discovering and honing personal learning skills and strategies, developing weak signal reports on learning concepts such as organizational learning, accelerated learning, etc., creating a loose-leaf notebook to document learning, journaling, recruiting others to conduct short learning sessions, organizing and/or leading lunchtime seminars, developing and offering workshops.

Regarding environment, typical staff activities include visiting other project and knowledge management centers, exploring how new tools should/can be integrated with existing tools and systems, diagramming the types of interactions that occur and exploring how the space facilitates or hinders these interactions, maintaining tools and furniture, consistently and continually refreshing the space, studying the metaphysical basis of environment, studying books and articles on how space affects us, studying and applying architectural principles, feng shui, etc., setting and maintaining standards of care for the Center, setting up display walls, maintaining inventories, establishing conversation walls, developing and maintaining a scheduling system, developing information packets about using the space and tools effectively, maintaining a reference source to document successful environment configurations, learning about music and consciously applying music to facilitate work, documenting what works, establishing and implementing maintenance schedules, scanning for new tools that would help facilitate the work, etc.

Technological systems should support the work without intruding. This requires consistent investment in maintaining systems and skills. Typical staff activities in this area include learning new software programs, learning to create multi-media presentations, building databases, studying the application of expert systems, artificial intelligence, etc., becoming proficient with modeling and simulation software, developing procedures, developing networks of communication, promoting connected centers in other parts of the organization, continual maintenance, continual scanning for and learning about new technologies, etc.

This has not stopped many people from trying to treat these social factors as if they were clearly definable, and try to establish the relationships between them. One example was Brooks, who tried to define a basic formula of information science to represent the impact that information, has on knowledge.

His formula was $K[S] + dI = K[S+dS]$
where d = the Greek letter Delta

The basic insight that information created in change in a person's knowledge was very important, but his formula was useless, no-matter how many times it was explained and modified. Mathematical formulation is incapable of representing the uncertainty and complexity inherent in the basic terms.

Well - how do we deal with these issues? I suggest that we need a close interaction between the action people (practitioners) - who get things done and the contemplators (e.g. academics), who think how things link together. The action people come up with the experience, and the contemplators guide the development and extension of these lessons. It is only in close interaction between these that we can move forward. TQM was an example of a system that was dominated by practitioners with inadequate contemplation. Management science was the other way around - lots of contemplation, but it did not really work, except in a very limited sense.

The interesting thing is that knowledge management has come from many different practitioners - which gives me great confidence in its validity. However, it represents a rather confusing set of ideas and I hope that academics such as myself can play a role in refining the ideas and helping more people to make use of them effectively.

There are many other issues to be considered such as the relationship between the managers, practitioners and consultants, technology and the people etc. but perhaps later.

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Knowledge Codification

by Holger Nohr

In many companies there is a lack of transparency of company wide knowledge. Valuable knowledge is often not used because people don't know that it exist. Because of that an important element in most knowledge management programs is the identification of personal and organizational knowledge. Knowledge identification results in better transparency of what is known. Transparency is a prerequisite to share knowledge and so e.g. to save time and money in product development processes.

To identify knowledge it is necessary to create a codified and organized form of it. Knowledge codification is the representation of knowledge such that it can be accessed by each member of an organization. To access knowledge it must be organized in a structure which is meaningful to the searchers.

An excellent way to codify knowledge is to visualize it. Visualizing knowledge of an organization leads to knowledge maps (see knowldgWORKS News, Volume 1 Number 5). To define what knowledge maps are isn't an easy task, because different organizations build them using different names, in different ways and to fit different requirements. In easy words knowledge maps are straightforward directories pointing people who need access to knowledge to the locations where it can be found. Usually, such maps recognize both explicit and tacit knowledge - that is, knowledge that has been captured in documents and databases, and knowledge that resides only in the heads of experts. They contain internally knowledge and often externally as well. Let's assume that e.g. the expertise of your company exist in the people's head. Than you have to create a map that points out the experts to answer a given

question. If knowledge about the development of new products is of strategic relevance to your business create a map of this processes. The latter e.g. was the approach of the knowledge management program at pharmaceutical company Hoffmann-LaRoche. Knowledge might be embedded in documents, files, databases, directories, competencies, experiences, processes or relationships. It can be explicit or tacit, formal or informal, internal or external, it can be permanently or ephemeral. "What knowledge is important to do your companies work?" is the starting question of each knowledge mapping project.

The creation of knowledge maps isn't an information technology project mainly! First of all it is a project of analyzing and systematizing knowledge resources and knowledge driven processes. To identify important knowledge and knowledge-based processes in your company is the starting point of each knowledge codification project. The implementation step requires no invention of new software technology. Many useful knowledge management tools are on the market today. From Lotus Notes as a platform to specific knowledge management tools as KnowledgeX, DOCSFulcrum or POLYGON as integrated software systems for different tasks. POLYGON e.g. is a tool for the visual representation of knowledge items and the relationships between them. Its visualization approach gives users both the content and context information they need to make information relevant to their tasks. DOCSFulcrum offers gateways to file servers, databases, groupware, intra-/internet and document management systems. It enables users to group knowledge items on individual requirements in a knowledge map.

Knowledge cartographers should pay attention to how knowledge is categorized. In a data warehouse project at Lawson Mardon (Singen, Germany) e.g. the critical success factor was to define the internal terminology of the company. The understanding of what is meant by the term "order situation" can be different in the sales department and in the department of production. Moreover Carol Hildebrand (CIO, July 1995) points out that "if information is not where users expect it to be, they'll be loath to use the map." Knowledge codification and organization requires a common understanding of what is meant when using a specific term. Thesauri are knowledge management tools for define and control the terminology of a company. They

e.g. include terms to describe processes, products or qualifications.

In addition to the guiding function knowledge maps also support the identification of knowledge gaps in a company. If the maps stated the strategic knowledge your company must know they also pointing out knowledge not yet learned. Not collecting and storing but using knowledge is the aim. Knowledge maps have to be integrated in knowledge management tools such as intranets, workflow management systems or GroupWare to support working processes.

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Next week's issue: "Eating Our Own Dog Food."

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