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This Week's Topic - Tools for Personal Knowledge
Effectiveness - Part I

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Tools for Personal Knowledge Effectiveness
March 25, 2000

In issue 16 of knowldgWORKS News I described something called Personal Knowledge Effectiveness. If you remember anything about this issue (you can refer back to it by clicking on the link above) you will remember that my own notion of knowledge management centers around the idea that knowledge originates in an individual, and that in order to achieve larger, more complex forms of knowledge management, it is necessary to first achieve personal knowledge management. I place original knowledge squarely in the hands of the individual.

You may also remember the acronym CUEOD, which is one way to remember the significant steps in a knowledge management process, namely, CAPTURE, UNDERSTAND, EVALUATE, ORGANIZE, and DEPLOY. Since creating this acronym I have seen many flavors of it across various theories of knowledge management. To take the idea of personal knowledge effectiveness a step further I thought it would be interesting to describe my own "personal" tool set for achieving personal knowledge effectiveness. Hopefully, such a discussion will give you some idea of how I approach my knowledge management process. This presentation is given with the caveat that the tools I use are by no means comprehensive or "the set of tools," but rather a possible set that I offer for consideration.

Before I begin describing my tool set, I want to avoid any potential argument about the distinction between information and knowledge. Some may see my tool set as a means of managing information instead of knowledge. One theory that I attribute, for the most part, to Wegener is that knowledge is only created as a result of group accreditation. In other words, knowledge does not become

knowledge until it has been accepted by a group of people. According to this point of view, individual knowledge management could not exist. The individual effort would have to be information management. Arguments could be made for and against this point, but I believe both ideas-- individual knowledge and group knowledge--can exist. Therefore, I will take the liberty of saying that I am describing a set of tools for managing knowledge even though this might be opening a firestorm of debate . Actually, I prefer to call the information that individuals try to manage "potential knowledge" because at any time an individual does not know when or if a particular piece of information will become knowledge.

The Basic Elements of a Personal Knowledge Effectiveness Tool Set

When I first started considering the idea of how I personally manage my own knowledge I began to look at the various tools I use to accomplish this. Over time, the tools that I use to manage my personal knowledge have changed somewhat. New tools have been integrated into the process but these tools are not as mature as tools I have employed for a longer time. I will begin by describing some of the older tools and then move on to some of the newer ones.

One of the most significant knowledge management problems I face, as an individual is how to "remember" the significant amount of potential knowledge I am exposed to on an ongoing basis. I like to call this potential knowledge because it is my belief that at some point in the future I will need what I have read in order to do something. This fits nicely with my definition of knowledge - that which enables people to do things. So as I read articles, papers, web-based publications, and books, what tools can I use to help me remember what I think will become important? My oldest set of tools for dealing with this problem are a computer, a document scanner, and a program that allows me to maintain a library of scanned documents. The library, as you might imagine, could potentially grow quite large, so it is important that the program does not limit the amount or size of the document database that is accumulated.

Although the specific type of computer and scanner is not particularly important, I have found that a computer

with significant hard disk capacity is a must (documents require lots of storage even if they are compressed), and that a scanner that will automatically feed documents is also a plus in that some of the scanning that needs to be done can be done automatically as opposed to feeding pages one at a time. Only recently can such a scanner be obtained for a reasonable price. As I read and review I make decisions about elements that are potential knowledge or potential knowledge sources and I save these. I have been using a program called Paprport for the last several years. Visioneer was the company that markets (and created?) this program. Unfortunately the company was acquired by another and the acquiring company had a competing product resulting in the demise of Paprport. Paprport offers a compelling enough set of features that I continue to use it.

Paprport allows the user to create a set of folders. The folders represent a personal taxonomy, i.e., they represent how an individual wants information to be organized. As new documents are scanned they are placed in the appropriate folder. Folders may be nested in folders so there is a capability within the taxonomy of categories and subcategories.

Although I have not made extensive use of this feature, Paprport will, as a background process, perform character recognition on the scanned information and create an index of the documents stored. Ultimately this allows the document contents to be searched as far as the text recognition engine will allow. The text recognition/indexing operation can be quite time consuming.

As Paprport originated several years ago, it has some definite disadvantages. It is basically a "closed" system. Once you put a document into it, you cannot view the document unless inside of Paprport or by using a standalone Paprport viewer. The scanned image format is proprietary. It is also closed in the sense that the only way to extract all documents into a more standard format (like PDF) is one document at a time. Since the usefulness of a library system requires accessibility, deployment to a web would be a time consuming process. So after making a commitment to Paprport (or any program using a closed and proprietary format), one will find it somewhat difficult to extricate the potential knowledge from it. Having to do it again I would carefully consider features such as mass extraction and common document file format.

Although these are technical considerations one must be very careful about choosing tools because the decisions made early can have great implications down the line. Sometimes, technical limitations will make a piece of technology less than useful and therefore should be considered in any knowledge management application. An important aspect is to carefully consider the problem to be solved and how the technology will solve the problem.

I have made use of the Paprport/Scanner/Computer tool for the past several years and have accumulated about 1GB of potential knowledge. It has been significantly easier to retrieve from this store than the boxes and boxes of periodicals, articles, and books I have accumulated over the years. For the information contained in the document library, access has been greatly simplified.

Part II - Next Month - Some Other Tools

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The knowldgWORKS News is written in its entirety by Randy Kaplan and edited by Harriet Trenholm. Suggestions for the newsletter should be sent to rkaplan@accsys-corp.com. All suggestions will be considered and always appreciated.

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