Knowledge Management at Infosys – Implementation - Current & Future Benefits - Problems & Challenges

Essay

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Knowledge Management

Implementation | Current & Future Benefits | Problems & Challenges

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KNOWLEDGE & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

"If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas." (George Bernard Shaw)

Unlike many other resources that get depleted when shared, an idea or a knowledge nugget only gets enriched. From an era where labor and capital ruled, we now have evolved to a period where knowledge is seen as the key, if not the sole differentiator.

INTRODUCTION

"Knowledge is the currency of the millennium, and knowledge management, the key to corporate survival", (Dr.V.P.Kochikar, 2000). Knowledge is progressively being accepted as the new strategic imperative of organizations. "Knowledge is Power", so one has to hoard it to maintain an advantage. The understanding of knowledge has considerably changed over the years, particularly from the perspective of organizations. The new paradigm is that within the organization, in order for knowledge to grow, it must be shared. The sharing of knowledge between concerned management and staff has been seen to build an organization stronger and more competitive. This is the core of knowledge management – the effective sharing of knowledge.

Knowledge Management is a fairly new term that describes a range of activities intended to make sure an organization uses its information resources as effectively as possible. (Paul Bocij, 2008) There is no universally accepted definition of knowledge management, however there are numerous definitions proffered by experts. Bergeron (2003) defines knowledge management as:

Knowledge Management (KM) is a deliberate, systematic business optimization strategy that selects, distills, stores, organizes, packages and communicates information essential to the business of a company in a manner that improves employee performance and corporate competitiveness.

Knowledge Management is the process through which organizations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets.

In some way or the other, all the multifarious definitions of knowledge management hint at the same idea but each one focuses on a particular aspect of KM.

A primary component of knowledge management approach is the distinction between gradations of data, information and knowledge. Today, organizations have realized the need of KM and put in a lot of effort to research and understand how effective knowledge management can be used to support continuous learning within the organization. Knowledge Management draws specific attention to how data moves and evolves throughout an organization – from data, to information, to knowledge. As data flows within an organization, its evolution takes on various forms, shapes and functions.

Knowledge Management significantly contributes to an organization's activities. An organization that learns how to apply data to problems that are context specific, rather than using data to fulfill reporting or compliance-based functions, becomes more effective in using and sharing information for decision making. And this learning within an organization develops and further evolves by an apt application of knowledge management.

KM is expensive, but so is stupidity! Knowledge is an asset, but at the same time its effective management requires investment of other assets. Thomas H. Davenport (2006) rightly points out the problems associated with KM activities such as investment of money and labor, including the following:

- Knowledge capture, i.e., creation of documents and moving documents onto computer systems.
- Adding value to knowledge through editing, packaging, and pruning.
- Developing knowledge categorization approaches and categorizing new contributions to knowledge.
- Developing information technology infrastructures and applications for the distribution of knowledge.
- Educating employees on the creation, sharing, and use of knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AT INFOSYS

The essay would make a descent effort to focus on knowledge management practices at Infosys, a software services and IT consulting company, headquartered in Bangalore, India. It would also spot the current benefits and problems associated with knowledge management and lastly what benefits and problems might be seen in future with respect to knowledge management at Infosys.

Infosys Technologies Ltd. (NASDAQ: INFY) defines, designs and delivers technology-enabled business solutions that help Global 2000 companies win in a Flat World. Infosys also provides a complete range of services by leveraging their domain, business expertise and strategic alliances with leading technology providers. Infosys has a global footprint with 63 offices and development centers in India, China, Australia, the Czech Republic, Poland, UK, Canada and Japan. Infosys and its subsidiaries have 122,468 employees as on September 30, 2010. (Infosys, 2010)

Infosys Technologies won the prestigious Global MAKE (Most Admired Knowledge Enterprises) award, for the year 2005. Infosys won the award for the third time in a row, and remains the only Indian company to have ever been named a Global Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise. It's also the only Indian company to have won the Asian MAKE award for five consecutive years (2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, and 2002). (Infosys, 2010)

Infosys undertakes numerous and varied projects at any given point in time in diverse areas such as Banking and Capital Markets; Communication Services, Media and Entertainment; Energy Utilities and Services; Insurance Healthcare & Life Sciences; High Technology & Discrete Manufacturing; New Markets and Services; Transportation; Automotive, Aerospace & Defense; Retail, CPG, Logistics, and so forth. Needless to say, managing knowledge at Infosys is a huge challenge.

Implementation of KM at Infosys – Current and Future Benefits

Infosys began its Knowledge Management initiative in late 2000 with a steering committee that had representation from the Board of Directors and senior management. The attempt was to create a system that would be capable to facilitate the Infosys KM aim of establishing a *'learn once, use anywhere'* paradigm.

In Infosys, the organization-wide knowledge is majorly managed using three centrally operated knowledge repositories: the Knowledge Shop (K-Shop), Process Asset Database (PAD), and People Knowledge Map (PKM).

The K-Shop is primarily the most common amongst the Infoscions or the Infosys employees. It has been built on Microsoft site server technology, and all employees can access it through a web-interface linked through the Infosys intranet – "Sparsh". The employees are encouraged within the company to share and submit papers, project experiences, internal or external literature, innovative ideas, technical solutions, their knowledge on concerned subjects and so forth. In addition, the K-Shop has an excellent search facility that offers a single as well as a multiple parameter search. Thus on click of a button to entered search keywords and content type, a wealth of productive information is made available to all Infosys employees through K-Shop.

The Infosys Process Asset Database is another online system to capture the "as is" project deliverables. This contains project artifacts such as project plans, database design references, high and low level design documents, development and test plans etc. Employees can search the related documents based on project code, project type, unit, customer type, customer name, and so forth. This benefits and helps provide new projects with information on similar, previously executed projects and thus helps set quantitative goals.

The People Knowledge Map or the PKM is a knowledge directory of experts in varied fields. The employees are able to search and locate experts through this intranet based system. The usability of this map is enormously seen within the company as it provides multiple nodes and topics. There are various expert technology enabled teams that can be contacted through this portal which help employees working on some specific technology to resolve their issues and thus in a way helps in faster delivery.

Infosys's intranet "Sparsh" serves as the common window for all these systems and acts as the central tool. The Infosys' QSD or the Quality System Documentation is a repository of all process-related guidelines, checklists, templates etc. and serves to standardize all the Infosys project processes and hence the outputs. Infosys also has electronic bulletin boards (commonly known as BBs) for discussing development issues, technical and domain-related topics. In addition, there are news groups and newsletters across various units that discuss the latest technology and business issues.

Knowledge Management is of even more importance and significance at a project level than it is for an organization. The benefits of efficiently managing and sharing knowledge in a project team include the ability to easily react to customer requests, improve productivity through fewer defects and rework, improve teamwork through regular knowledge transfer (KT) sessions amongst the team members so

that everyone gets benefitted from every other team member's knowledge. At Infosys, every project explicitly maintains a project-specific knowledge repository and a detailed training plan with material to deal with project attritions. In addition, effort and cost is subsequently reduced by reusing knowledge in the form of holding weekly knowledge sharing (called as KT-sessions at Infosys) sessions where team members impart knowledge, discuss and document past learning. In a project, knowledge management is everybody's concern and responsibility. The project manager defines the KM activities in the project plan, which then serves as a guide for the team members to undertake. Generally, about 2 to 3 percent of a project's effort is dedicatedly spent in knowledge management activities.

Infosys Technologies' KM vision is to be an organization where every action is fully enabled by the power of knowledge; which truly believes in leveraging knowledge for innovation; where every employee is empowered by the knowledge of every other employee; which is a globally respected knowledge leader.

In future, like in the present as well as in the past, knowledge management would remain one of the key strategic imperative of organisations. Its productive use and management in future would unleash new ideas and creativity, help mitigate project risks and facilitate development and implementation of new and improved business models. Its future benefits would be in the speedy innovation, production and conservation of new values for the organisations such as the Intellectual Property Assets, Web-blogs etc. It would enable sustainable organic growth and development of new markets, hence benefiting the organisations in future with increased revenue and increased returns on their investments. The future benefits of knowledge management also stretch out in helping to create a more adaptive, flexible, responsive and dynamic organisation as well as aid in the smooth progress towards evolution of a more intelligent enterprise, facilitating the production of smart and engaging products.

Knowledge Management continues to improve and accelerate learning and the flow of information in an organisation. The enterprises have identified KM as the key for future development of collective wisdom, experience and brain-power of human capital assets. The advantages of KM have shifted employees from balance-sheet expense items to knowledge investors in the enterprise and helped them cope with increased information overload. Knowledge Management, in future would improve the organisation's ability to manage change, attract and retain motivated, loyal and committed talent. Effective Knowledge Management in present would lead to better knowledge transfer methods, tools and techniques in future and help to create more knowledge awareness, knowledge friendly culture and community, better suited to the emerging knowledge-based economy context. (KiKM, 2005)

Problems and Challenges of Knowledge Management

We have so far seen the implementation, advantages, current and future benefits associated with knowledge management from an organisational context. Maintaining and establishing such an effective knowledge management within an organisation is one of the key concerns of the institutional leads. Along with benefits lie the challenges and problems associated with handling and establishing efficient knowledge management within an organisation.

Knowledge Management, for present as well as for the future, is a challenging issue in companies. To create, capitalise, contribute and share its knowledge capital is a need of any innovative organisation. But managing the knowledge capital does not only involve processing of information through novel technologies. Instead, it is a long term programme, starting from a strategic commitment, involving a correct analysis of knowledge and know-how in the company, and integrating various and well adapted tools (Ermine, 2000).

Garud and Kumaraswamy (2001) provide a systems perspective on the problems and challenges faced by Infosys in harnessing knowledge with insights related to all of the major problems related to KM. The main challenges pertaining to KM were found to be effective coordination, distribution and reuse of knowledge. Through a longitudinal case study at Infosys Technologies, an organization that is globally acknowledged for its leadership as a knowledge enterprise, they propose that knowledge management at Infosys involves more than just the sponsorship of initiatives at and across different levels. It also involves an active process of steering around and out of vicious cycles that will inevitably emerge for any specific knowledge management initiative. (Sambamurthy & Subramani, 2003)

The key concerns about knowledge management mostly expressed by managers are primarily the cultural, managerial and information issues. In terms of culture, the challenge is the change management, the ability to convince people to share and contribute their knowledge. In addition to that, the ability to convince different industry business units within the organization to share their knowledge with other units, particularly when there is accountability over the profit generated by each unit and each of them is separately responsible for showing a profit towards the organization. The managerial concerns relate to the business value of knowledge management and the need for metrics upon which to demonstrate the value. Alavi & Leidner (1999) write that there is usually a concern within a project about determining who would be responsible for managing knowledge and within an organization as a whole in bringing together many players that would get involved in developing KMS, including technical staff, corporate librarians, documentation staff, archivists, database administrators, and the professionals with the knowledge. Lastly, the information and technological issues in knowledge management primarily relate to determine infrastructure requirements, keeping up with future technologies and security of data over the internet.

The organisations usually get into a fix with increasingly large and complex knowledge repositories. They can cleanse the system of old files but that in a way would mean to dilute their own knowledge management initiative. Alternatively, the organisations could place separate teams to check and cleanse only the redundant files and data, thus increasing its costs substantially. The real challenge for organisations apart from these could be to monitor their various departments and ensure that each unit takes responsibility for keeping their databases and repositories clean of redundant files. (Annely, 2006)

Knowledge preservation has become a key issue and a major challenge among organisations in this fast paced technology era. One of the reasons for this might be that the technology that is used currently for storing and managing knowledge may or may not remain compatible with future technologies. Hence, with time, the need is a constant up gradation of knowledge as well as its storage devices and technologies, which is seen to become a challenging task for organisations.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

In this knowledge explosion era, through continuous learning and knowledge management as some of the key essentials, Infosys has achieved excellence in its information systems management, technology and allied fields. In future, Infosys should and probably would use its present reserves and skills to strive and evolve on its KM aim, objective, mission, goal, strategy and vision, thus setting up a real challenge before its competitors. In fact, it must think beyond competition(s) and accept the multiple challenges in the world, strive for the best to keep delivering its best. With knowledge comes empowerment and by having a successful knowledge management practice going, a company would be able to empower every employee by the knowledge of every other employee. Putting into action the KM motto of Infosys 'learn once and use anywhere', the Infoscions thus could bring a complete paradigm shift in the world.

Knowledge Management is a new branch of management for achieving breakthrough business performance through the synergy of people, processes, and technology. Its focus is on the management of change, uncertainty, and complexity. (KM Network, 2008)

Knowledge is undoubtedly being considered as currency of the millennium, and knowledge management as a key survival imperative. As knowledge management requires determination, patience and perseverance, KM practitioners should not expect immediate returns on KM investment. It takes several iterations of real input and measurable output and subsequent updates to make KM productive. The prime objective of Knowledge Management within an organization is to support the achievement of business objectives. Therefore, knowledge sharing as well as reuse need to be encouraged and recognized at both individual employee and the company level. This is best done by measuring and rewarding knowledge performance. Sustained strategic commitment and a corporate culture which is conducive to knowledge performance are vital for achieving success in knowledge management.

At a project level, Knowledge Management plays a major role in developing expertise within a team which not only helps in an individual's personal growth but also in increasing the efficiency of an individual, decreasing the defects and rework and ultimately increasing the quality of the project. The concept of KM is to bring competitiveness in the team besides gaining domain and business knowledge.

There are many problems and challenges associated with knowledge management but at the same time knowledge management has numerous benefits which are increasingly becoming the key factors towards booming evolution of organizations. The advanced enterprises today have realized the potential of knowledge management and are ready to adopt it and take up any challenge involved in its successful implementation. Others will gradually follow the suit, and still others will lag behind and would be reluctant to adopt KM approaches due to various challenges associated with it until competitive pressures force them to do so. Given the importance of effective knowledge management in today's competitive environment, we can expect to find that emphasis on knowledge creation, development, organization, and leveraging will continue to be of prime focus for generations to come.

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