

Knowledge Management In Educational Institutions

An industry that can possibly gain the most out of practicing knowledge management is that of education, the primary function of which is to impart knowledge. It is ironic that the importance of managing knowledge was to be realized at the centers of learning; the educational institutes much later than businesses.

The educational system can be aligned to produce results that will immensely benefit the knowledge economy. Introducing Knowledge Management in education is as much a misnomer as it is in the context of business. Knowledge has been traditionally managed in educational institutes & businesses much before KM (methodologies) gained prominence, albeit informally. In educational institutes, librarians were traditionally entrusted with the function of knowledge management (or information management to be precise). Shielding against information overload has been one of their primary functions & will remain so even after the educational institutes' transformation into knowledge centers. In fact a large chunk of consultants in the field of KM have been librarians in the past. These librarians now need to move on from a support role to the center stage & collaborate with the entire knowledge community at a strategic level to make KM successful.

Technology

Again as in business, technology can be an enabler in knowledge management. Softwares can aid in managing existing databases/ resources & identify additional information needs, link up data sources, help meet information demand of parents & the community, thus instilling greater accountability of both students & teachers.

Apple's PowerSchool is “a web-based student information system, provides administrators, teachers, parents, and students with immediate and easily accessible

information to support each child in reaching his or her potential” according to Bob Longo, President, PowerSchool.

NCS Pearson, Inc. offers a comprehensive range of student information systems. The integrated school administration applications manage student information, including grades, assignments, announcements, curriculum, instructional resources, assessments and student performance measurements.

These systems have provided a good start. As the stakeholders get used to these modules, greater interaction & collaboration can be built in. Currently most system allow parents to only view their child's information online, which is largely due to the security concern for schools' databases. Students hacking into school systems is a real threat today & commercial use of the database by some schools could become a threat in the future.

Future developments could include ways for parents to ask questions and share ideas, input, and reactions to improve school programs and children's experiences. This will allow for smoother & better communication than the present phone hunts between parents & teachers. These initiatives can then be further extended to web based interactions which could help working & single parents, who are often unable to attend parent-teacher meetings (PTAs/ PTOs).

Even with all these features, these softwares stop at information processing only. While collaboration seems the next logical step, knowledge management may not be a direct succession. Explicit understandings & meanings from the information in the system will lead to knowledge creation.

The Knowledge Center

An educational institute practicing knowledge management has to set goals for itself that will drive the institute towards becoming a knowledge center:

- ✦ Plan classroom instructions in a way that increases individual attention in critical areas

- ✦ Identifying training needs for teachers

- ✦ Aim to develop competence (opposed to awarding certificates, which cannot be an end in itself)

- ✦ Enable students to learn in a way that promotes interest in learning & continue learning in environments other than the institute which imparts formal education.

- ✦ Incentives to promote a learning organization

For example, school examinations, grading, individualized extra curricular competitions, etc promote knowledge hoarding which seems to be necessary to succeed in such an environment. A greater amount of collaboration can be brought in into the education system by rewarding sharing of knowledge & increasing group based activities.

Challenges

A successful knowledge management implementation in an educational institute is a bigger challenge when compared with commercial outfits. A learning community for a school involves the principal, teachers, staff, counselors, students & their parents. These groups/ individuals in themselves are highly autonomous. Students may not be at a school by choice & parents would need greater motivation to direct their efforts beyond the improvement of their ward to contribute to the betterment of the institute. The goals of the institute are not as clear, nor do they form part of a finite set as in the case of businesses. The day to day functioning is guided by legal frameworks. There is no set methodologies for measuring quality of education imparted. Change can be a much more slower process when compared to businesses.

Knowledge management in educational institutions is still a relatively new area. The benefits of KM to these institutes will undoubtedly garner greater visibility in the recent future. As institutes find innovative ways to overcome these unique challenges, the success stories of these knowledge centers will redefine the way knowledge is managed in businesses.

Webizus Consulting

#43 – 16A, Brindavan Society,

Thane (West), Mumbai,

Maharashtra, INDIA

Tel: +91 – 98216 – 34476

+91 – 98212 – 72254

Website: <http://www.webizus.net/>

E-mail: info@webizus.net

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