

Knowledge Management

There is unlikely to be any other term of such importance that brings out so many varying definitions of what it stands for and creates confusion in many minds. When faced with making a business proposal for a KM initiative within their own organization, CIOs (Chief information officers) are unable to take decisions because of the difficulty of explaining KM concepts beyond initial definitions. Let's have a brief insight of KM, a survival ticket for dynamic organisations of tomorrow.

What KM actually means:

The global consulting firm Gartner group defines KM as a discipline, which promotes a collaborative approach to creation, capture, organisation, access & use of an enterprise's information assets. Lotus Development Corp. a vendor which recently reshaped its products -Lotus Notes & Domino R5 in context of KM, defines KM as the systematic leveraging of information and expertise to improve organisational innovation, responsiveness, productivity and competency.

But no two consultants are agreed on same definition of KM. Bill Landefeld, Director Global Mkt. Microsoft Corp. explains "Talk to five different consultants and you have five different definitions of KM."

Importance of KM:

Today, with increasing globalisation, competition, mergers, acquisitions, and downsizing, the traditional structure of an organisation is undergoing a metamorphosis. The survival formula now pivots around the ability to innovate and time-to-market products and

services. Enterprises have a high percentage of their value vested in knowledge assets. Analyzing the unique role of knowledge within an enterprise can clarify whether a knowledge-focused or knowledge-enabled strategy is more appropriate. Enterprises should assign a value to their knowledge assets, adjust the value based on business trends and direction, and choose a knowledge strategy that uniquely supports their business mission and goals.

In systems other than KM employee of organisations complains " We don't know what we know ". While KM involves creation, capture and access of explicit knowledge in the form of reports, manuals, and emails, the real challenge lies in capturing the tacit knowledge of employees. K.K. Diwakar, GM, Engineering, Themax Babcock & Wilcox explains " ERP helps an organisation to familiar situations, KM, on other hand, equips an organisation to make innovative responses to unfamiliar stimuli"

KM process framework:

The KM process framework is mainly composed of five activities:

Create: The activities that result in new knowledge.

Capture: The activities that enable capture and representation of tacit knowledge in explicit form, thereby moving knowledge from individual and making it available across the enterprise.

Organise: The activities that classify and categorise knowledge for storage and retrieval purposes. This includes maintenance of knowledge data as well as indices, maps and processes that manage it.

Access: The activities through which knowledge is disseminated or requested by users.

Use: The application of knowledge to work activities, decisions and opportunities. 'Use' is recursive i.e. it generates feedback that may be injected into the KM process through any of the other four activities.

Bottom line:

KM permits the highly flexible application of knowledge managing technology and techniques. Therefore, business targets for KM programs can be selected for their high

probability of success. Enterprises should thus seize this unique opportunity by clearly defining a KM strategy and selecting appropriate business targets as prerequisites for implementing KM.

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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