

Knowledge Exchange

Other Peoples Taurus

The basic organizational unit of knowledge management is the community of practice, which is a group of people who share a common area of expertise and/or who search for solutions to common problems. Nurturing vital communities is hard enough when the members are in a single location with good connectivity. When the members are spread around the world, in remote areas as well as population centers, the challenges are enormous. Therefore, significant attention must be paid to issues of process and people.

The latter is the key to the all important factor of motivation. This will also extend to the customer.

The way forward with learning, is not to look ahead, but look around. In looking to share information and knowledge we must not separate it from context – from the details and subtleties of how people communicate; how they learn; how they use and understand both what they know and the information they have; how they use the tools they have; how knowledge moves across regions; and how relationship between people and organisations work and don't work..

Disregard for the realities of how people interact individually and together with information and knowledge explains why most organisational learning initiatives have fallen flat.

KE (Knowledge Exchange) initiatives will extend to feature not only employee but customer education too. Companies can use KE to introduce new products, educate customers/employees in self-service techniques, etc.

Customers/employees will look for these value-added services, and by 2005, KE will be an accepted practice on 70 percent of customer Web sites and company intranets.

Most new web propositions offer complimentary opportunities for enriching relationships between retailers and customers. We are all striving for this. But we have to bring in a new equation – KE will *enrich the relationship between customers and customers*.

Building relationships that might *not* involve the company.

These powerful supportive networks allow people to share experiences and knowledge, as well as powerful personal development tools.

If a question comes up at work, and it is time-sensitive, put it on the system and try it out.

It's all about what's important to each user at any given time.

What KE allows is for people to take small components of information as and when they are needed. This is the secret behind 'learning organizations'...people taking a little of what they need and reinforce what they have already learned or need to know. Take music, for example, where every person has their own unique 'Tingle factor'; Needs driven knowledge-on-demand is no different.

According to a 1997 Ernst & Young Center for Business Innovation survey entitled "Executive Perspectives on Knowledge in the Organization," the biggest impediment to knowledge transfer is corporate culture (54 percent), and the biggest difficulty in managing knowledge is changing people's behavior (56 percent). Organizations must find ways to motivate individual community members to share what they know and to apply the knowledge of others.

In a knowledge intensive world, clever people deliver better results by making better decisions. Concentration needs to be not on the limits of decision makers, but on the human strengths and capabilities that have typically been played down or ignored.

High pressure naturalistic decision-making settings are the norm where information is inadequate, time is of the essence and change constant.

Skilled problem solvers and decision makers are themselves scientists and experimenters. They are actively searching for and using stories and analogues, personal as well as borrowed from others, to learn about important casual factors.

The reasoning behind creating this 'needs-driven' knowledge on demand is motivational, in as much that imagination does not issue forth from the top of the company. Most companies have a hierarchy of experience, not imagination. Thus the bottleneck for new ideas is at the top. We can motivate by appealing to geographically and culturally diverse groups of people through passionate beliefs they hold about their work.

Organisational knowledge creation occurs in a spiral, moving between tacit and explicit knowledge. Starting at the individual level and moving up through expanding communities of interaction that cross sectional, departmental, divisional, and organisational boundaries.

Knowledge is not neatly packaged. It is difficult to extract, it is ephemeral and may only be approximately correct. One of the chief barriers to the construction of expert systems is the difficulty of knowledge acquisition--and this barrier must also be overcome to achieve success in knowledge management. However, there is some good news. The problem may be more tractable in the new context.

Systems that support knowledge management typically do not try to solve a problem alone. Rather, they try to find the knowledge (best practices, lessons learned, tips, solutions to related problems, and so on) that assist people in developing their *own* solutions. Stated another way, the goal today is to help people solve problems. The goal of giving powerful assistance to individuals as they solve problems is of greater interest and benefit to the knowledge management community.

When we look at how the structure of KE is built, we need to look towards the real world, and what people are saying, doing and looking for. In 'Triad Power' (1985) Kenichi Ohmae argued that countries are mere government creations. In the emerging "Inter-linked Economy" envisaged by Ohmae, consumers are not driven to purchase things through nationalistic sentiments – "At the cash register, you don't care about the country of origin, you don't think about employment figures or trade deficits."

Tomorrow's innovators and high achievers don't care where they study or work, or where the people they collaborate with to achieve the results they want are located, it could be Sweden, Italy, Germany, Hong Kong, Iceland. Their decision is made on the basis of what would be the best program for them, at that moment in time and who shares the same passionate beliefs; age, climate, gender, lifestyle, sexual-preference, these will be all-important factors in the motivational war on developing KE.

Information knows no boundaries.

Most firms have a life expectancy of 12.5 years – Multi-nationals have a 40-50 year life cycle.

The life expectancy can be attributed to the manager's focus on profits and the bottom line rather than the human community which makes up these companies.

Fix this, and you have discovered the fountain of youth.

This is not to say that we should want our brand to live forever, but have smaller units of collaboration continually re-inventing our brand identity that burst into life, create temporary monopolies, then fade back into the liquid ether of

collaboration, just as the next unit is bursting through, innovating on the previous success.

We need to take great care in implementing KE that the technology delivering this collaboration does not cloud the message we are trying to convey.

We need to make sure the message at the start is clear. It is the customers and employees that are allowing this greater freedom, not the technology.

The ability to allow collaboration, capture the knowledge and deliver the powerful message throughout the organization is more valuable than a whole lorry-load of hi-tech equipment. It is personality, not PC's that will leave the lasting impression.

For the majority of companies, training creates only a limited or transient success. The reasons are quite simple; people forget or are too busy to actualize the new knowledge or methods that they have been shown. Even the message within the best workshops is soon forgotten or put on the back burner in the face of today's demanding work environment. This 'blind-spot' at the core of most training is what has prompted the development of the AskHow2 System.

In creating a strategy for change towards a more collaborative and open learning organization, supported by the AskHow2 system our research shows some interesting results.

For the individuals and companies that have recognised this innovative strategy, we have seen increased sales by an average of 40%, improved staff retention by an average of 150% and reduced customer churn rates by an average of 50%, improving key account contracts average order value by 40% and establishing consultancy or higher customer relationship management revenues at an average increase of 150%.

20% of the managers trained have moved up into higher management roles within three months of undertaking the training, and a total of 80% have improved their team's performance and achieved their commercial goals.

Conclusion:

People are the agents of change, and their collective intelligence is the corporate asset on which effective use of the other assets depends. Management therefore needs to focus on how an organization can develop its ability to motivate, educate, and align its workforce.

Organizational learning relates to the process whereby people acquire, assimilate, adapt, develop and apply knowledge; but it is not just knowledge management. It has come to mean much more, encompassing the appetite and enthusiasm with which people learn to work together to create the future they desire most.

For more information on this strategy and how to achieve the results given,
please contact:

Douglas King – doug@hrexcellence.co.uk

Arthur D. Little – *Collective Intelligence, Management Skills + Development*
[1997]

Arie de Geus - *The Living Company*

Ridderstrale & Nordstrom - *Funky Business* [2000]

Brown and Gray [1995]

Ernst & Young Center for Business Innovation survey - *Executive Perspectives
on Knowledge in the Organization* [1997] (See also Bock [1998].)

Kenichi Ohmae - '*Triad Power*' (1985)

Sources of personal inspiration and information;

Louis Searchwell, Centre for Learning Development, The University of Wales.

Tony Jackson – The Learning Partnership, UK - *Personal Comments* [2002]

Kim Coe, How2 Knowledge Group, UK - *Catalyst for Change* [2002]

Corinne Wilhelm, Clever2gether, Germany.