

Chapter 3

Sustainable Knowledge Management Strategies: Aligning Business Capabilities and Knowledge Management Goals

Denise A. D. Bedford
Georgetown University, USA

ABSTRACT

Knowledge organizations have been challenged to develop sustainable, actionable and business oriented knowledge management strategies. Many strategies published in the peer reviewed and gray literature include tactics, principle, platitudes and checklists. Organizations often borrow templates from associations or other organizations as starting points for formulating their strategies. These strategies often fall short of expectations. This chapter proposes a framework for an organization to walk through the process of developing a knowledge management strategy that aligns with business-critical capabilities, identifies the intellectual capital and knowledge assets required to support those capabilities, aligns assets and capabilities, and creates a foundation for selecting and monitoring tactics to invest in and manage liabilities associated with those assets. The chapter recommends a strategic infrastructure that is comparable to those developed for financial and physical assets.

INTRODUCTION

Effective strategies are tied to business goals and aligned with what an organization does and how it works. Strategies are translated into tactics, and tactics are deployed to achieve goals. Strategies are a critical business tool when they are well formulated and well executed. While knowledge management and knowledge sciences are disciplines in their own right, they enhance the effectiveness of organizational business strategies. This is particularly true in the 21st century where organizations are concerned with the strategic use of all of their capital assets – whether financial, physical or intellectual. To ensure we leverage knowledge management and sciences to greatest effect, we need to understand the goal of the

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field. According to Bollinger and Smith (2001) knowledge is a resource that is valuable to an organization's ability to innovate and compete. Knowledge is an asset of an organization's individual staff, within its capabilities and also in a composite sense within the organization. According to the resource-based view of the firm (RBVF), strategic assets such as knowledge and intellectual capital are the critical determinants of an organization's ability to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage.

While there is a consensus around the goal of knowledge management, there are many perspectives on how to leverage the methods and tactics to achieve this goal. This results in knowledge management programs, projects and initiatives that do not produce business related outcomes of value to an organization. In this chapter, we describe an approach that may assist organizations in designing knowledge management strategies that support business goals and enable business strategies, and which may be effectively translated into tactics. The approach targets business critical aspects of an organization to ensure that knowledge management strategies and tactics have the greatest and most visible impact on the organization. The approach we offer focuses on knowledge and intellectual capital assets wherever they exist throughout the organization – and suggests how to construct a knowledge management strategy at three critical layers of the organization – individuals, groups and communities, and the organization as a whole.

BACKGROUND

The peer-reviewed and the gray literature are rich with theory and with case study references to knowledge management strategies. We provide a high level overview of these literatures to illustrate the challenges that organizations face in developing and deploying knowledge management strategies. Gray literature – wide range of types of strategies – from 175 page narratives designed around tactics, aggregated from multiple versions – to 1 page principles based papers (Alavi and Leidner, 1999; Beckett Wainwright and Bance, 2000; Bell DeTiene and Jackson, 2001; Blumentritt & Johnston, 1999; Carrillo Anumba and Kamara, 2000; Choi & Lee, 2003; Choi Poon and David, 2008; Dawson, 2000; Drew, 1999; Earl, 2001; Fahey & Prusak, 1998 ; Forcadell & Guadamillas, 2002; Garavelli Gorgoglione & Scozzi, 2004; Greiner & Bohmann, 2007; Haggie & Kingston, 2003; Hansen Nohria & Tierney, 1999 ; Jasimuddin, 2008; Kamara Anumba & Carrillo, 2000; Liebowitz, 2004; Liu Chen & Tsai, 2005; Lyles & Schwenk, 1992; Qitas Lafere & Jones, 1992; Rosenberg, 2001 Sanchez & Mahoney, 1996; Wiig, 1997; Yang, 2010; Yew Wong, 2005; Zack, 1999; Zheng Yang & MLean, 2010)

Challenge 1: Knowledge Management Strategies as Checklists

Some organizations promote the use of checklists as strategies. These checklists include a list of tactics which may be used throughout the organization. Typically, checklists are used to determine whether a tactic is or is not being used anywhere in the organization. These checklists do not align with business goals and do not lead to actions. While checklists are easy and quick to complete – they are simply a single task that may provide insights into areas that may be worth further consideration. They do not, though, help a knowledge management team or office to see a strategy that will support the business. Such an approach should be characterized as a “tool” rather than a strategy. A strategy should include statements of expectations, mission and goals, a vision for the future, and a roadmap to achieve that vision. Simply completing a “current” and “future state” checklist does not constitute a strategy.

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