Chapter 10

Does Knowledge Management Really Work?
A Case Study in the Breast Cancer Screening Domain

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary organizations, including those involved with healthcare, are constantly under pressure to produce and implement new strategies for delivering better products and/or services. Knowledge Management (KM) has been one of the paradigms successfully applied in such business environs. However, a lack of proper application of KM principles and its components have reduced the confidence of new adopters of this paradigm. KM-based healthcare projects are moving forward, and innovation is the driving force behind such initiatives. This chapter sets the scene by outlining the KM's core elements, facets and how they can be appropriately applied within an innovative, real-time healthcare project. It further enumerates a case study which targets the screening attendance issue for the NHS' breast screening program. The case study not only discusses the need of a balanced approach to address both the technological and humanistic aspects of KM, but also answers the question "Does knowledge management really work?" A questionnaire-based study was conducted with the General Physicians (GPs) on the KM's aspects and its relationship to the interventions proposed in the study. The study

provided ample proof that a balanced approach will definitely increase the efficacy of such initiatives. Such studies can increase the confidence of future KM adopters in healthcare domain. This chapter provides credibility for such balanced KM-based initiatives and highlights the importance of a focused approach on the various facets of KM to maximize benefits.

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Knowledge Management (KM) has been acknowledged to be an integral part of management culture which provides methodologies through models, frameworks and approaches with appropriate objectivity via rigorous studies (Wickramasinghe *et al*., 2007). The following section provides a brief introduction to KM and its focus areas. The core of KM is knowledge; KM identifies how knowledge is created and shared among different stakeholders in a business paradigm. KM is a multidisciplinary management science and every organization has come to appreciate the importance of knowledge and its management. Modern understanding of knowledge has its basis on the teachings of Plato and Aristotle (Pemberton, 1998). Organizations adopting KM have come a long way in their quest for managing knowledge. Taylor started to view knowledge in a scientific perspective and the Hawthorne's experiments highlighted the humanistic nature of KM in modern management (Kwon, 2004). Drucker coined the term "Knowledge worker" (Ellingsen, 2003) and experts who followed (such as Porter, Cohen, Senge and Nonaka) defined and redefined on this idea of knowledge and how to best manage it (Kwon, 2004). A reasonable understanding of the core elements and the different facets of KM will not only assist in better application of this paradigm but also would provide sufficient expertise to adapt KM proactively while tackling the current business challenges.

Core Elements of KM

In spite of exhaustive research interest shown in KM, we are yet to evolve a universal approach towards the KM paradigm; it has at least been established that KM is desirable and cannot be disregarded and we are clear about the tacit and explicit nature of knowledge (Hildreth and Kimble, 2002). Knowledge is dichotomized based on its existence; it is termed tacit (when coupled with cognition) and explicit otherwise. In simplistic terms, KM paradigm focuses on three core elements namely people, process and technology (Gillingham and Roberts 2006). Even though other facets of KM have been identified and justified (to mention a few, culture, IT, content, infrastructure, politics, etc). Each of these facets can be mapped to these core elements (Lehaney *et al.* 2003, Milton 2008).

Technologies as simple as email, web blogs, e-notice boards, fora etc. to much more sophisticated tools such as AI, knowledge discovery and data mining tools are part of the technology element in KM. Technology plays the least significant role in KM but technology-based KM solutions are easy to procure and implement. They fail to contribute to their potential unless the other two core components are properly aligned with the rest of the KM components. Process is related to internal mechanisms that the organization has established collectively over years of existence. Process represents a summary of best practices which really work in that specific organizational environment. It is common that the contexts for creating such processes are lost over time. Yet they preserve what is good and is practicable for the betterment of the organization. Communities of Practices (COPs), social structure, cultural aspects, social capital and so forth play a vital role in the process element. People are perhaps the most fundamental element in KM and is the most significant factor in a knowledge-based

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