Chapter II

Knowledge Management in More Detail

2.1 Some Starting Points

The previous chapter provided a broad introduction to knowledge management. As you might imagine, this is a complex area. This chapter begins to peel away the layers bit by bit to examine knowledge management in greater depth.

Knowledge management has various approaches and definitions according to the perspective and discipline of the individual or organisation that engages with the concept. These include management, individual and organisational learning, communications, information systems and technology, artificial intelligence, intellectual assets, and so on. Each discipline approaches KM with a different perception, for example, computer science focuses heavily on technology, human resources takes an individual and organisational approach emphasising learning and reward factors, and intellectual assets focus on the explicit capture and registration of knowledge.

There is no single unifying definition or approach, but there are principles and content that may encompass the whole. Knowledge management involves people, processes, activities, technology, and the broader environment that enable the identification, creation, communication or sharing, and use of organisational and individual knowledge. It is about the processes that govern the creation, dissemination, and utilisation of knowledge to attain organisational objectives. It requires a mix of business awareness, creative attitudes and practices, systems, tools, policies, and procedures, designed to release the power of information and ideas.

"Knowledge management is about:

- supporting innovation, the generation of new ideas. and the exploitation of the organisation's thinking power;

- capturing insight and experience to make them available and usable when, where, and by whom required;

- making it easy to find and re-use sources of know-how and expertise, whether they are recorded in physical form or held in someone's mind;

- fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, continual learning and improvement;

- improving the quality of decision-making and other intelligent tasks;

- understanding the value and contribution of intellectual assets and increasing their worth, effectiveness, and exploitation" (KPMG, 1999, p. 2).

KM must focus an organisation on improving its actions to exploit the power of knowledge. Knowledge management is concerned with the creation, generation, codification, and transfer of information and ideas. The power of knowledge management is in allowing organisations to enable and support explicitly these activities to leverage their value for the group and organisation as well as for the individual.

Given all of the above, why is it that KM has only recently emerged as a major organisational challenge? The next section discusses this.

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