Chapter 2.1
Towards a Consensus Knowledge Management Success Definition

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores knowledge management (KM), and knowledge management system (KMS), success. The inspiration for this chapter is the KM Success and Measurement minitracks held at the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences in January of 2007 and 2008. KM and KMS success are issues needing to be explored. The Knowledge Management Foundations workshop held at the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-39) in January 2006 discussed this issue and reached agreement that it is important for the credibility of the KM discipline that we be able to define KM success. Additionally, from the perspective of KM academics and practitioners, identifying the factors, constructs, and variables that define KM success is crucial to understanding how these initiatives and systems should be designed and implemented. This chapter presents the results of a survey looking at how KM practitioners, researchers, KM students, and others interested in KM view what constitutes KM success. This chapter presents some background on KM success and then a series of perspectives on KM/KMS success. These perspectives were derived by looking at responses to questions asking academics and practitioners how they defined KM/KMS success. The chapter concludes by presenting the results of an exploratory survey on KM/KMS success beliefs and attitudes.

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BACKGROUND ON KM SUCCESS

Jennex summarized various definitions of KM to propose that KM success be defined as reusing knowledge to improve organizational effectiveness by providing the appropriate knowledge to those that need it when it is needed (Jennex, 2005). KM is expected to have a positive impact on the organization that improves organizational effectiveness. DeLone and McLean use the terms success and effectiveness interchangeably and one of the perspectives proposed in this chapter does the same for KM (DeLone and McLean, 1992 and 2003).

Jennex and Olfman (2005) summarized and synthesized the literature on KM/KMS critical success factors, CSFs, into an ordered set of 12 KM CSFs. CSFs were ordered based on the number of studies identifying the CSF. The following CSFs were identified from 17 studies looking at 78 KM projects:

- A knowledge strategy that identifies users, sources, processes, storage strategy, knowledge, and links to knowledge for the KMS;
- Motivation and commitment of users including incentives and training;
- Integrated technical infrastructure including networks, databases/repositories, computers, software, KMS experts;
- An organizational culture and structure that supports learning and the sharing and use of knowledge;
- A common enterprise wide knowledge structure that is clearly articulated and easily understood;
- Senior management support including allocation of resources, leadership, and providing training;
- Learning organization;
- There is a clear goal and purpose for the KMS;
- Measures are established to assess the impacts of the KMS and the use of knowledge as well as verifying that the right knowledge is being captured;
- The search, retrieval, and visualization functions of the KMS support easy knowledge use;
- Work processes are designed that incorporate knowledge capture and use;
- Security/protection of knowledge.

However, these CSFs do not define KM/KMS success; they just say what is needed to be successful. Without a definition of KM/KMS success it is difficult to measure actual success.

Measuring KM/KMS success is important

- To provide a basis for company valuation,
- To stimulate management to focus on what is important, and
- To justify investments in KM activities (Jennex and Olfman, 2005) (Turban and Aronson, 2001).

Besides these reasons from an organizational perspective, the measurement of KM and KMS success is important for building and implementing efficient KM initiatives and systems from the perspective of KM academics and practitioners (Jennex and Olfman, 2005).

PERSPECTIVES ON KM/ KMS SUCCESS

The KM workshop at the 2006 HICSS-39 found that there were several perspectives on KM success. This section briefly summarizes these perspectives.

KM Success and Effectiveness

One perspective on KM success is that KM success and KM effectiveness are interchangeable