Chapter 2.6
Permitting the True Potential of Knowledge Assets to be Utilized with KMI[1]

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ABSTRACT

In order to support a systematic and sustainable approach to knowledge management (KM), innovating organizations must develop an appropriate knowledge management infrastructure (KMI). Such a KMI must support the people, process, and technology aspects of KM, as well as being sufficiently flexible to grow with the changing demands of the organization. This chapter details both the benefits of establishing an appropriate KMI and how to go about this process.

INTRODUCTION

As has already been asserted in several chapters of this book, prudent application of KM is vital to the on going success of any innovating organization. A key question will then be: how can KM become integral to the organization? The key to this question lies in the establishment of an appropriate knowledge management infrastructure.

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ESTABLISHING A KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE (KMI)

The business world is growing increasingly more competitive, and the demand for innovative products and services has grown greater than ever before. In this period of creativity and ideas, the most valuable resources available to any organization are human skills, expertise, and relationships (Drucker, 1999; 1993; 1988). Knowledge Management (KM) is about capitalizing on these precious assets (Duffy, 2001). Currently, most companies

do not capitalize on the wealth of expertise in the form of knowledge scattered across their levels (Gold et al., 2001; Halliday, 2001). However, information centers, market intelligence, and learning are now converging to form knowledge management functions. A KM infrastructure, in terms of tools and technologies (hardware as well as software), needs to be established so that knowledge can be created from any new event or activity on a continual and systematic basis (Duffy, 2000; Wickramasinghe, 2003).

The KM infrastructure forms the foundation for enabling and fostering knowledge management, continuous learning and sustaining an organizational memory (Drucker, 1999; Ellinger et al., 1999; Hammond, 2001; Holt et al., 2000; Lee and Hong, 2002). An organization's entire "know-how", including new knowledge, can only be created for optimization if an effective KM infrastructure is established (Wickramasinghe and Davison, 2004). Specifically, the KM infrastructure consists of social and technical tools and techniques, including hardware and software that should be established so that knowledge can be created from any new events or activities on a continual basis (Duffy, 2001; 2000; Wickramasinghe and Davison, 2004). In addition, the KM infrastructure will have a repository of knowledge, a system to distribute the knowledge to the members of the organization and a facilitator system for the creation of new knowledge (Wickramasinghe and Davison, 2004). Thus, a knowledge-based infrastructure will foster the creation of knowledge, and provide an integrated system to share and diffuse the knowledge within the organization (Srikantaiah, 2000) as well as offer support for continual creation and generation of new knowledge (Wickramasinghe, 2003). A knowledge management infrastructure then contains, at least, the elements displayed in Figure 1.

ELEMENTS OF THE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

The key elements of the KMI depicted in figure 1 will now be discussed in turn:

- Infrastructure for Collaboration: The key to strategic competitiveness and improving customer satisfaction lies in the ability of organizations to form learning alliances; these being strategic partnerships based on a business environment that encourages mutual (and reflective) learning between partners (Holt et al., 2000). Organizations can utilize their strategy framework to

Figure 1. 5 key elements of the knowledge management infrasture (adapted from Wickramasinghe & von Lubitz, 2007)