Chapter 1
Knowledge Manageability:
A New Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

Although the knowledge society is evolving rapidly, uptake of knowledge management principles and practice in the public sector have lagged well behind that in the private sector. To help overcome this difficulty, the knowledge management mantra that industrial-era cultures must change in order for KM to succeed is reformulated into a new paradigm: Within an existing culture, how can knowledge management increase the value of organizational knowledge and the productivity of knowledge work? The paradigm uses the Cynefin sense-making framework as a foundation for knowledge manageability. Four knowledge manageability regimes are described: authoritative hierarchy (use of explicit knowledge is authorized through organizational decisions), organizational structure (explicit knowledge is codified and interpreted in the context of organizational processes), negotiated agreements (tacit knowledge is exchanged among individuals and within communities to validate new knowledge), and responsible autonomy (innate knowledge is voluntarily used by individuals to create new knowledge). Most organizations use all four regimes, each of which requires a different approach to management. The chapter also describes methods for transferring knowledge across the regions, from creation to application. The knowledge manageability framework encompasses a spectrum from dynamic, unstructured organizational environments to relatively inflexible, highly structured environments. It provides a robust, multi-dimensional framework for managing knowledge and knowledge work across diverse organizational contexts. By avoiding the need to change inherently structured culture and work processes, it greatly reduces the challenges associated with implementing knowledge management in public-sector organizations.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century knowledge society, organizations must manage their knowledge as a core resource and knowledge work as the critical production factor or risk irrelevance (public sector) or eventual failure (private sector) as others outperform them, key employees leave without sharing what they know, or even worse, sharing it with competitors. A number of authors have commented on the magnitude of the changes that lie ahead. One of the earliest was Drucker (1993) who stated: "The new challenge facing the post-capitalist society is the productivity of knowledge workers and service workers. To improve the productivity of knowledge workers will in fact require drastic changes in the structure of the organizations of post-capitalist society, and in the structure of society itself" (p. 83).

Rubenson and Schuetze (2000) describe a sweeping socioeconomic vision: "The knowledge-based economy and society challenges the foundations of the social contract that provided the glue for industrial societies after the Second World War. The foundations of the new social contract are not yet clear, but many see the likelihood of a new consensus, based on current realities, that enhances economic prosperity and social cohesion" (p. xiii). Similarly, Allee (2003) observes: "We are currently engaged in a global learning journey that is so massive it is altering the perspectives, goals, and behaviors of entire societies. We are forging new relationships, new strategies, identities, purposes, language, and new organizational forms" (p. 16).

Florida (2002) explains that the transformation will challenge existing organizational structures: "Perhaps the biggest issue at stake in this emerging age is the ongoing tension between creativity and organization. The creative process is social, not just individual, and thus forms of organization are necessary. But elements of organization can and frequently do stifle creativity" (p. 22). This provides a perfect segue to the underlying purpose of this chapter – how can highly structured departments and agencies in the public sector manage inherently unstructured knowledge and knowledge work.

Although the knowledge society is evolving rapidly, uptake of knowledge management principles and practices in the public sector has lagged well behind the private sector. Many reasons could be cited for this discrepancy. We begin by setting aside a number of arguments that cannot fully account for the observed differences. A substantial KM literature, available to all organizations, implies that lack of understanding of knowledge management in the public sector only accounts for part of this gap. Resistance to change, a hallmark of all bureaucratic institutions, also only accounts for a part of the gap as evidenced by many short-term or partial successes that have occurred.[1] Given that most government agencies have technological capacity equal to that in the private sector excludes capacity as a primary barrier. Finally, there is a rapid turnover of senior managers in the public sector, although this should not adversely affect an organization that is culturally ready for change. Although all these considerations affect the implementation of KM programs in the public sector, there are methods of minimizing their negative impacts. We must look elsewhere to find the root causes of the difficulty of implementing knowledge management in the public sector. We begin with the evolution of KM, itself.

Knowledge management has evolved through three generations (Dixon, 2010). The first generation emphasized explicit knowledge contained in documents. The focus was on knowledge structures and technology that was difficult to distinguish from information management. The second generation involved sharing tacit knowledge among individuals. The emphasis shifted to interactions and relationships among individuals and communities – a significant departure from managing knowledge objects. The third generation involved collaboration, peer production, and synergy

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