



Knowledge Management: Process before product

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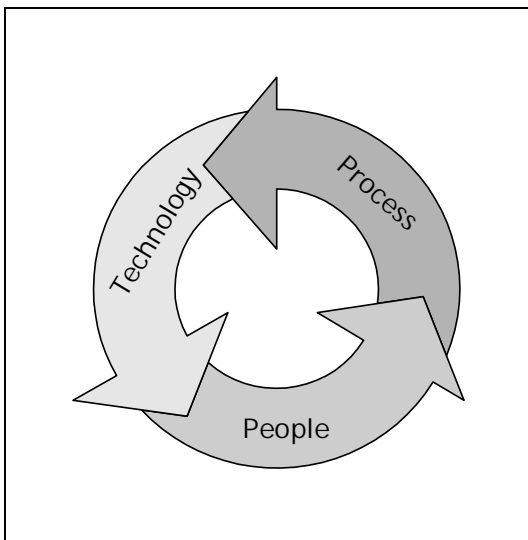
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Before the product selection begins, it is crucial to have a solid understanding of what knowledge management will look like in the enterprise.

This includes the resources from a technology and personnel standpoint, the knowledge domains, and the workflow proposed for managing that content. One of the most overused clichés about knowledge management remains one of the truest; Knowledge Management is the interaction of people, process, and technology or PPT.



Process

In theory, the act of managing intellectual assets can be reduced to four steps: Identification, Collection, Organization, and Maintenance. However, theory and practice are often quite different

from one another and without a solid process even the most sophisticated knowledgebase application or search technology will fail to deliver as promised. Additionally, reliance on a technology vendor to complete process design ensures that the outcome will align strongly with product capabilities and not necessarily account for the organization's capabilities.

When knowledge management projects suffer a lack of customer input in the process-area the vast majority of outcomes are adoption related, resulting in longer payback times, unnecessary product customizations, and user resistance. The truth is that vendor "best-practices" often translates into "the best way to do it on a given platform".

Technology

This is perhaps the least important factor when compared to the people/process dyad. In knowledge management the technology acts as a medium by which to search and provides the means to intelligently organize the content.

For years, the Dewey Decimal System and card catalogs were the preferred method for organizing books and their associated meta-data. While this approach has clearly been surpassed by today's technology it does not in any way diminish the still useful and in use Dewey Decimal System. It also



provides some insight into the transactional nature of knowledge management.

In the same way that the managing of knowledge can be broken down into four relatively simple steps, so too can the use of a knowledge management system: Need, Search, Find, and Use. Obviously, this is a highly distilled interpretation of the major actions within the transaction, but the major components are captured nonetheless. Furthermore, this high-level depiction generally affords the opportunity for some enlightening discussion.

1. How will the knowledgebase be advertised?
2. Who will have access?
3. What types of search will be used: NLP, Boolean, etc?
4. What taxonomy will be used?
5. How many taxonomies will be used?
6. Does the system support multiple taxonomies?
7. How will the results be displayed?
8. What is the mechanism for ranking said results?
9. Can the results be imported into other applications?
10. Can existing file formats be searched natively or will they require conversion?

Not every product in the knowledge management space can do everything. Ultimately, the right product will accommodate the

knowledge development process that provides the most amount of efficiency for a particular organization, and in an ideal situation, this process will be known in advance of any product evaluation.

People

Perhaps the hardest obstacle to overcome in knowledge management is in the area of Human Resources. Who will create the content, manage it, organize it, measure it, and own it. The fact is a successful KM program initially requires full-time resources, typically internal, in conjunction with vendor supplied personnel. The benefit to staffing in this fashion is the newly appointed knowledge workers will have the benefit of learning their new roles from individuals who practice knowledge management on a near daily basis and they will be undistracted by the demands of their former positions.

Why? The vendor is an expert at their product and executing a KM program on their platform not necessarily expert in the market to which they are introducing the product. It is still up to the organization to provide the subject matter experts that ultimately serve to enrich a knowledgebase. Their responsibility, their contribution to the team, will be their expertise and making that expertise available on as broad a platform as possible.



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Yes, the vendor can provide strategies for potentially completing this task in a more platform friendly way, but the creation of content is a human-centric activity and it comes at a price.

The content is what will ultimately make the knowledgebase a trusted and valued tool. Beware, too little content, content that is out of date, and disorganized content will all steer potential customers away. In the end, it points to staffing levels remaining approximately the same in order to support the new system.

Understandably, this strategy will be a cause for some misunderstanding. The value proposition utilized by many firms in the KM software space is a possible reduction in force due to the efficiencies gained by using a particular platform--reducing the sticker shock associated with a major software purchase. In the end, people are the single most critical component to the operation of a successful KM program and they come with a cost.

Closing

Fortunately, enterprise knowledge management does not start with the enterprise. It is an undertaking that requires small diligent steps that generate a series of appreciable victories. These victories i.e. results, are the means by which the project can be sustained until such time knowledge management is integrated into the organization's

culture. In other words, a Change Management strategy can make the difference between a major success and a catastrophic failure.

Of course, there are other pieces of a KM implementation not mentioned and that does not diminish their importance. However, the three aforementioned topics seem to raise the most amount of discussion. Knowledge management is a practice and practice requires discipline. By making the primary focus people and process, instead of the surrounding technology, the vendor selection process will be eased significantly. Additionally, it will increase the likelihood for success dramatically.



About the author

Jon Doctor

In his current role as President and Owner of inquire incorporated Jon is committed to helping great companies solve hard problems. By focusing exclusively in the areas of Organizational Change and Knowledge Management Jon is able to leverage 8 years of enterprise consulting experience and knowledge of best practices to create value in every phase of a project. Understanding the highly sensitive nature of change and knowledge management, he strives to facilitate open communication and high levels of trust. Finally, Jon is committed to developing customer specific solutions, refusing the “cookie cutter” approach, and instead focusing on the creation of realistic sustainable organizational change and knowledge management solutions.

About inquire

inquire specializes exclusively in the area of Knowledge Management Consulting. Our experience in this field makes us uniquely qualified to assist with your initiative. Whether your needs include vendor selection, project design, auditing the progress of an existing project, or the sanitization of content you are guaranteed unparalleled levels of service. Contact us today at 877.819.9940 or via the web at <http://www.inquireincorporated.com>. Don't ask, inquire!

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