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Information Management Solutions

Knowledge Management

White Paper
By Galaxy Consulting

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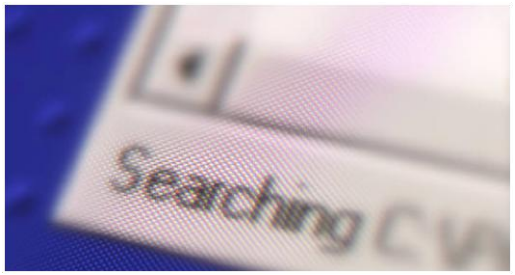

Abstract

Knowledge management (KM) includes a range of strategies and practices used to identify, create, distribute, and enable adoption of insights and experiences. Such insights and experiences comprise knowledge, either embodied in individuals or embedded in organizations as processes or practices.

KM efforts typically focus on organizational objectives such as improved performance, competitive advantage, innovation, the sharing of lessons learned, integration, and continuous improvement of the organization.

This white paper identifies knowledge types, describes successful KM strategy and how to convert knowledge into content, presents unified knowledge management, and gives steps on how to implement KM right the first time.

Knowledge Types

Understanding the different forms that knowledge can exist in, and thereby being able to distinguish between various types of knowledge, is an essential step for knowledge management (KM). For example, the knowledge captured in a document would need to be managed (i.e. stored, retrieved, shared, changed, etc.) in a totally different way than that gathered over the years by an expert craftsman.

Within business and KM, two types of knowledge are usually defined, namely explicit and tacit knowledge. The former refers to codified knowledge, such as that found in documents, while the latter refers to non-codified and often personal/experience-based knowledge. In practice, all knowledge is a mixture of tacit and explicit elements rather than being one or the other.

There is also embedded knowledge. This way, one differentiates between knowledge embodied in people and that embedded in processes, organizational culture, routines, etc.

Explicit Knowledge

This type of knowledge is formalized and codified, and is sometimes referred to as know-what. It is therefore fairly easy to identify, store, and retrieve. This is the type of knowledge most easily handled by knowledge

management systems (KMS), which are very effective at facilitating the storage, retrieval, and modification of documents and texts.

From a managerial perspective, the greatest challenge with explicit knowledge is similar to information. It involves ensuring that people have access to what they need; that important knowledge is stored; and that the knowledge is reviewed, updated, or discarded.

Tacit Knowledge

It is sometimes referred to as know-how and refers to intuitive, hard to define knowledge that is largely experience based. Because of this, tacit knowledge is often context dependent and personal in nature. It is hard to communicate and deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement. Tacit knowledge is also regarded as being the most valuable source of knowledge, and the most likely to lead to breakthrough in the organization. One can link the lack of focus on tacit knowledge directly to the reduced capability for innovation and sustained competitiveness.

This type of knowledge cannot be handled by knowledge management systems (KMS). Imagine trying to write an article that would accurately convey how one reads facial expressions. It should be quite apparent that it would be near impossible to convey our intuitive understanding gathered from years of experience and practice. Virtually all practitioners rely on this type of knowledge. An IT specialist for example will troubleshoot a problem based on his experience and intuition. It would be very difficult for him to codify his knowledge into a document that could convey his know-how to a beginner. This is one reason why experience in a particular field is so highly regarded in the job market.

Embedded Knowledge

Embedded knowledge is found in rules, processes, products, manuals, codes of conduct, ethics, culture, routines, artifacts, or structures. Knowledge is embedded either formally, such as through a management initiative to formalize a certain beneficial routine, or informally as the organization uses and applies the other two knowledge types. It is important to note, that while embedded knowledge can exist in explicit sources (i.e. a rule can be written in a manual), the knowledge itself is not explicit, i.e. it is not immediately apparent why doing something this way is beneficial to the organization.

The challenges in managing embedded knowledge vary considerably and will often differ from embodied tacit knowledge. Culture and routines can be both difficult to understand and hard to change. Formalized routines on the other hand may be easier to implement and management can actively try to embed the fruits of lessons learned directly into procedures, routines, and products.

Due to the difficulty in effectively managing embedded knowledge, organizations that succeed may enjoy a significant competitive advantage.

Develop a Knowledge Management Strategy

Successful knowledge management initiatives place a very strong emphasis on converting tacit and embedded knowledge into explicit knowledge. Documenting the knowledge that resides in employees' know-how and storing it in the central location where everybody can find it would greatly increase efficiency and productivity. It also would eliminate dependency on selected individuals who may not be available when needed.

Knowledge management strategies and instruments for companies include:

- rewards (as a means of motivating for knowledge sharing);
- storytelling (as a means of transferring tacit knowledge);
- cross-project learning;
- after action reviews;

- knowledge mapping (a map of knowledge repositories within a company accessible by all);
- communities of practice;
- expert directories (to enable knowledge seeker to reach to the experts);
- best practice transfer;
- knowledge fairs;
- competence management (systematic evaluation and planning of competences of individual organization members);
- proximity & architecture (the physical situation of employees can be either conducive or obstructive to knowledge sharing;)
- master-apprentice relationship;
- collaborative technologies;
- knowledge repositories (databases, bookmarking engines, etc.);
- measuring and reporting intellectual capital;
- knowledge brokers (some organizational members take on responsibility for a specific "field" and act as first reference on whom to talk about a specific subject);
- social software (wikis, social bookmarking, blogs, etc.);
- inter-project knowledge transfer.

Motivations

Typical motivations leading organizations to undertake a KM effort include:

- making available increased knowledge content in the development and provision of products and services;
- achieving shorter new product development cycles;
- facilitating and managing innovation and organizational learning;
- leveraging the expertise of people across the organization;
- increasing network connectivity between internal and external individuals;
- managing business environments and allowing employees to obtain relevant insights and ideas appropriate to their work;
- solving intractable or wicked problems;
- managing intellectual capital and intellectual assets in the workforce (such as the expertise and know-how possessed by key individuals).

Converting Knowledge into Content

Many of us have grown accustomed to referring to our work email accounts to find that bit of information that we received from one colleague or another. Now you discover you need that information quickly to finish a project.

Where is it? If you have faced this similar situation, it means that the amount of data and its applications have grown more complex. It also likely means that you and your organization are too loosely exchanging important information and have lazy knowledge management practices in place. This is not meant to be insulting, of course. It is simply a way to understand how to improve the process.

Big data has come to encapsulate the work we do now. Wouldn't it be great if we had a place to cleanly and robustly organize all of the information that we come across? Well, content and knowledge management policies and programs will help you to achieve this.

Where is Knowledge?

Knowledge is everywhere. In your business or organization, it is likely fostered through learning and growing and experiencing the flow of the market and the culture. Each member, employee, manager, stakeholder and so forth has a different level of that experience, giving each of them unique knowledge. That knowledge is usually transferred through the relationships among staff via verbal and electronic exchange (email, memos, research notes, etc.) and hard (paper documents) means.

This is where our knowledge lives. But as it lives in the minds of the personnel and in fragmented pieces in various formats, how easily are organizations able to attain that knowledge and deploy it efficiently to achieve goals? It must be converted, therefore, into unified content and implemented with policies, procedures and strategies. So how do we do this?

Identify Knowledge and Outline a Plan for Documentation

Now that we know where our knowledge lives, we must formulate some type of plan to extract this information. At each layer, the process may be different. It might depend on your industry, your culture and things of this nature. In any case, the main point is to identify the information, record it, and put it somewhere, preferably into a centralized system that makes use of taxonomy.

At some stage, this may require you to hire a technical writer or some other documentation specialist that can interview subject matter experts in your organization to get the detailed information that will serve as your organization's knowledge base. This person can identify with processes, components, procedures, policies, records, archived data, intellectual property, financial data, secure data and a broad range of other information that must live in an environment where the appropriate members or users can access it later.

In terms of legal matters or legal information, many regulations have information handling requirements that are rigid and may require that you have certain pieces of critical information readily available to audit. Knowledge management and content management are more important in this scenario than ever. Information audits can be done to sift through organization's data including email, memos and other documents to make sense and make use of them.

This process of making an audit of information and knowledge is an important first step, but the next step is just as important. You must now organize the information that you have so that it can be easily found by the right people.

Centralizing Your Converted Knowledge and Content

Documents stored as files in a simple network drive will no longer suffice as the volume and complexity increases. It is also a security problem. In the cloud environment, there are backups and options to monitor and distribute storage and speed. This makes converting knowledge into content easier when a content management system is deployed to quickly and efficiently handle all of that incoming information.

The type of content management system your organization will or should deploy depends very much on how the information will be used. It might turn out that you don't use just one CMS. You might end up using multiple CMS options or configurations for different types of content or information. Of course, sensitive information and information meant for the public should be handled differently and therefore should be managed differently.

Popular newsfeed or blog platforms include Drupal and Joomla. Oracle handles various IT and other types of content systems. There are systems like SharePoint that help users collaborate on word processing, spreadsheets, charts, presentations and other kinds of documents. There are hubs where users can go to find or share information with other colleagues within the company or organization.

Of course it is always important to take some time to think about security and access privileges and develop information handling policies and procedures within the company.

Make Content Searchable and Organized

After the information has been properly disseminated and you found the right vendor to store and manage that content, you can begin the critical process of organizing it. Usually, within a content management system, we talk about taxonomy. Taxonomy is the process of categorizing or "tagging" content to make it searchable and displayed properly in results or views for the user. Tagging content within a content management system is an integral part of enabling the user, whoever that might be, to quickly locate bits and pieces or entire batches or wholes of information quickly and efficiently.

You must ultimately decide how to organize content in terms of how it will be used. Web content for the public, for example, may need to be audited for its SEO quality (how easily can it be found by search engines like Google, Bing, Yahoo, AOL, etc.). Your internal search systems, glossaries, thesauruses, style guides, policies, manuals and so forth will only be as good as their databases and program functionality as defined by the organization. Try to audit these systems for usability and continually try to improve the way information, both simple and complex, should be handled by internal systems.

Unified Knowledge Management

This scenario might be familiar to many organizations.

Inside an organization, valuable information is not being used. It is scattered in pieces across multiple repositories and siloed organization where no one even bothers to look for it. Valuable content also resides outside your organization: in social media, communities, etc., created by your customers and industry experts, which is used and shared by other customers when they need answers.

In many organizations, employees spend a significant amount of time trying to find and process information, often at a high cost. Recent report found that knowledge workers spend anywhere from 15% to 35% of their time searching for, assembling, and then recreating information that already exists. And studies show that much of this time is spent not only looking for content, but also looking for experts. Most companies are unable to reuse the majority of work that is created every day.

This is the growing challenge of knowledge management today: how to leverage meaningful knowledge through constant reuse by each and every employee and each and every customer when they need it, no matter where it resides.

Return on Knowledge

These are few points to consider:

- Data on its own is meaningless. It must be organized into information before it can be used.
- Data is factual information: measurements, statistics or facts. In and of itself, data provides limited value.
- Information is data in context: organized, categorized or condensed.
- Knowledge is a human capability to process information to make decisions and take action.

Knowledge keeps organizations competitive and innovative, and is the most valuable intangible asset. Yet, knowledge is one of the most difficult assets to generate a return on (with repeated access, use and re-use), simply because information is so widespread, fractured, and changing at an accelerated pace.

Connecting the dots between relevant content and associated experts on that content is critical to leveraging the collective knowledge of an organization's ecosystem for the greatest return.

How to Get a Higher Return on Knowledge

The key to a higher return on knowledge is accessibility to information from anywhere, presented within any system, and personalized for the user's context.

The following tips would allow your organization to bring the return on investment in managing the knowledge throughout your organization.

1. Consolidate the knowledge ecosystem. Bring together information from enterprise systems and data sources, employees and customer social networks, social media such as Twitter, Chatter and more. Connect overwhelming amounts of enterprise and social information to get a complete picture of your customers, their interaction histories, products, levels of satisfaction, etc.

2. Connect people to knowledge in context. Connect users to the information they need (no matter where it resides) within their context.

3. Connect people to experts in context. Connect the people (the experts) associated with the contextually relevant content to assist in solving a case, answer a key challenge or provide additional insight to a particular situation.

4. Empower contribution. Allow users to create, rate content, and share knowledge about customers, cases, products, etc.

5. Personalize information access. Present employees and customers with information and people: connections that are relevant, no matter where they are, and no matter what they are working on. Just like the suggestive items on the e-commerce websites you visit, the experience is personalized, because it knows what you are working on.

Bringing this content to the fingertips of your employees and customers will increase organizational productivity, result in more innovative and customer-pleasing products, create happy employees, and drive customer satisfaction as well as profitability.

Unified Indexing

Unified indexing and insight technology is the way that forward-thinking companies will access knowledge in the 21st century. The technology brings content into context: assembling fragments of structured and unstructured information on demand and presenting them, in context, to users.

Designed for the enterprise, unified indexing and insight technology works in a similar way to Google on the Internet, but on the heterogeneous systems (e.g. email, databases, CRM, ERP, social media, etc.), locations (cloud and on-premise), and varied data formats of business today. The technology securely crawls those sources, unifies the information in a central index, normalizes the information and performs mash-ups on demand, within the user's context. The user creates the context based on his or her needs and interests.

Advantages of unified indexing:

- Customers will see a personalized and relevant view of information from the entire knowledge ecosystem (from inside or outside your company) intuitively presented so they can solve their own challenges.
- Service and support agents can solve cases faster. No longer support agents need to search across multiple systems or waste time trying to find the right answer or someone who knows the answer. They will have relevant information about the customer or case at hand, right at their fingertips: suggested solutions, recommended knowledge base articles, similar cases, experts who can help, virtual communication timelines and more.

- Employees can stop reinventing the wheel. When every employee can access relevant information, locate experts across the enterprise, and know what does and does not exist, they can finally stop reinventing the wheel.

The new age of knowledge is here and it is powered by instantly accessible, collective, crowd-sourced and contextually relevant information that comes from everywhere and is presented as knowledge workers go about their work and customers look for information they need.

Five Steps to Do IT Right the First Time

A strategically implemented knowledge management solution is the answer to the growing need to do more with less. It can reduce costs and increase efficiency and productivity.

But while a carefully implemented knowledge management initiative can transform employees' experiences and organizational efficiency, a poor implemented initiative can have a negative impact.

Here are five steps for optimizing customer service and support with an effective, best practice led knowledge management initiative.

1. Define and phase your knowledge management initiative.

Start with clear goals and objectives, and roll out your implementation in stages. Implementing knowledge management in only few departments at a time, offers a chance to fine-tune knowledge management in few departments before expanding to the rest of your organization.

2. Target and tailor your employees interactions.

Be sure you understand the context and intent of your employees queries for information. Choose knowledge management tools that enable you to avoid overloading your employees with information and would deliver tailored, interactive, accurate answers to their queries.

3. Foster collaborative knowledge creation.

Encourage collaboration during knowledge creation making sure that your knowledge capitalizes on the collective knowledge of your organization employees. This collective knowledge might be included in social networks of your organization.

4. Analyze the Performance.

Powerful analytics are vital to optimizing your knowledge management initiative. They should be used on an ongoing basis to identify opportunities for improvement, emerging questions trends, and common employees information seeking behavior. You should monitor the performance of your knowledge management initiative and adjust practices accordingly.

5. Think enterprise-wide.

But where do you begin? Start with one group or department but think enterprise-wide. During early stages, be sure to involve all those who would benefit from future roll-outs. Knowledge management can ultimately deliver benefits across enterprise - from expanding the scope of marketing campaigns and supporting the development of departmental intranets and portals, to enhancing relationship with partners and vendors.

Comprehensive knowledge management solution helps organizations strategically transform the customer service and support experience - and drive customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, increased sales and reduced costs.

Conclusion

Some of the advantages for knowledge management are:

- sharing of valuable organizational information throughout organizational hierarchy;

- avoid re-inventing the wheel, reducing redundant work;
- reduce training time for new employees;
- retention of intellectual property after the employee leaves;
- time management.

Knowledge sharing remains a challenging issue. Barriers may include time issues for employees, the level of trust, lack of effective support, technologies, and culture.

About Galaxy Consulting

Galaxy Consulting provides services in business analysis and usability, content and knowledge management, records management, information architecture, enterprise search, taxonomy development and management, document control, and information governance.

Galaxy Consulting was founded with the mission and vision of helping organizations to manage their valuable information assets. Many of our clients, both large and small, have dramatically improved efficiency and reduced unnecessary labor hours through efficient methods, processes, and solutions we created.

Galaxy Consulting believes in partnerships with our clients. We are committed to working with you and to helping you transform your business. We will increase efficiency and productivity, maintain regulatory and legal compliance, improve collaboration, enhance innovation, and reduce costs through effective information management!

Call us TODAY to schedule a free, no obligation consultation!

Contact Us

Office: 650-474-0955
Mobile: 650-716-3609
Info@galaxyconsulting.net
www.galaxyconsulting.net