Role of technology

Technology

Knowledge has recently been regarded as one of the most important assets of organisations. Managing an organisation's knowledge effectively and exploiting it in the marketplace is fundamental in achieving a competitive advantage. (Skyrme et al, 1997) Whilst technology may help the growth and sustainment of organisational knowledge, knowledge management brings a new dimension, the emphasis on managing tacit knowledge, something that technology cannot readily identify.

This highlights the need to shift from developing intelligent systems that use explicit knowledge, to developing tools for intelligent people that enhance their capability by improving their communication, information transfer and collaboration. (Nonaka, I. & Takeuchi, H. , 1995) This is a concept that many businesses today find difficult to grasp, the need to balance explicit knowledge with tacit knowledge.

Over the course of this essay I will firstly consider the evidence behind technology as a knowledge management solution and then secondly, will go on to develop an analytical framework which captures, and helps us to understand the differing key technologies and the benefits and limitations that technology may play, as a knowledge management solution. This will allow a valid conclusion to be made in which I will assess its effectiveness. In a year long study of international best practice (Skyrme et al, 1997), two definitive factors were identified.

The first was to utilise knowledge that already existed within the firm, for example, by sharing best practices. Too frequently the knowledge needed to complete certain tasks, was found in other parts of the organisation. This

information may have not been known or difficult to access. Hence, the first initiative many knowledge management programs implemented was to install Information Communication Technology (ICT) systems such as the Intranet, as they could upload best practice databases.

The second factor was the creation of knowledge innovation (Debra. M, 1997) This requires an environment where creativity and learning thrives and knowledge can be embedded into products. For example, software can be described as packaged knowledge. (Skyrme et al, 1997) The importance of knowledge as a strategic advantage can be reflected in past writers such as Drucker (1993), who came up with the term 'knowledge worker'. It can also be seen in the recent works of Quinn (1992), who says that knowledge is the foundation to corporate success.

As knowledge processes become more systematised, geographically dispersed and cross-, companies are turning to ICT. Surveys have demonstrated the effectiveness of the internet, intranet and email as a knowledge management tool. (Murray and Myers 1997, Chase 1997) While technology may be seen as a solution to the problem of sharing knowledge whether it be in a global or organisational context, the evidence is somewhat amalgamated. This is because the simple storage of information and data on systems does not necessarily get transferred or used appropriately by workers.

Businesses are often hit by the glitches of new technology; " Hundreds of appointments for patients have gone astray because of system failures at two hospitals. " There is also no strong link between ICT investment and

performance as demonstrated in an article by Frederick M. Hess (2004); at the zenith of the technology boom in 2000, it was proposed that computers and internet connections should be 'sprinkled' around classrooms. However, no rationale was implemented in relation to school performance i. e. helping with the learning process, increasing efficiency or allowing for future cost savings.

Are teachers just expected to implement this new technology to increase productivity and change their teaching methods that had been built on foundations of previous decades if not centuries? Although successful implementation can contribute to knowledge management solutions for example, in terms of learning different languages; technology can provide support and enhance the structures already in place through audiovisual databases to 'facilitate understandings of language at work' or 'electronically-filtered sounds which facilitate awareness-raising in learners of language. ' (A-P. Lian, 2002)