

Introduction to Knowledge Management Systems

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The aim of every organisation is to achieve its set goals and objectives as well as secure competitive advantage over its competitors. However, these cannot be achieved or actualised if staff or workers act independently and do not share ideas. Today, prominent businesses are becoming more aware that the knowledge of their employees is one of their primary assets. Sometimes organisational decisions cannot be effectively made with information alone; there is need for knowledge application. An effective knowledge management system can give a company the competitive edge it needs to be successful, and, for that reason, knowledge management projects should be high priority.

This means that for any organisation to be competitive in today's global world there is need for combination or pooling together of ideas by employees in order to achieve teamwork; this is in support of the saying that 'two good heads are better than one'. Since organisational knowledge is one of the important assets of the organisation, it needs to be managed like other assets, hence the need for Knowledge Management Systems (KMS).

Knowledge management systems 'collect all relevant knowledge and experience in the firm and make it available whenever and wherever it is needed to support business processes and management decisions'. Knowledge here could be referred to as the understanding that a person has gained through education, experience, discovery, intuition and insight or a combination of instincts, ideas, rules, and procedures that guide actions and decisions. It is an intangible asset that is unique and can be used to achieve long-term strategic benefits or advantage. This is because knowledge has more competitive significance than physical assets in a consulting organisation like ours that relies on unique competencies and methods. Also, unlike other physical assets of an organisation, knowledge is not subject to the law of diminishing returns as are physical assets, but increases in value as people share it.

Knowledge can be in a form that can be stated, codified or written and understandable by everyone (explicit) or in a form that cannot be expressed easily and unconsciously applied but understood by individuals (implicit or tacit). Therefore, what knowledge management systems do is to provide collaborative capabilities, using groupware to facilitate sharing of explicit and implicit knowledge among employees. It is also meant to change people's behaviour to make their experience and expertise available to others. These systems involve a process that helps organisations identify, select, organise, disseminate and transfer important information and expertise that are part of the organisational memory that typically resides within the organisation in an unstructured manner.

The main objective of knowledge management system is to identify knowledge and explicate it in a way that it can be shared in a formal manner, and thus reusing it. It helps in transferring the intellectual assets of the firm to value processes such as innovation and knowledge acquisition. It is meant to improve the organisation's ability to execute its core processes more efficiently by capturing intellectual assets for the tangible benefit of the organisation. Knowledge Management Systems also aim at codifying knowledge (such as best practices), organising it in repositories for later access, finding knowledge (using search engines and other schemes), and providing organised ways to find people who possess the required knowledge.

It is poised towards determining what knowledge the organisation has, as well as acquiring the knowledge that is lacking for the purpose of providing collaborative capabilities and facilitates sharing of explicit and implicit knowledge among employees. Knowledge management systems enhance knowledge creation through learning, knowledge sharing and communication through collaboration as well as knowledge capture and explication, use and reuse, access and archiving. It is meant to transform information and intellectual assets into enduring value for the organisation and transform knowledge to add value to the process and operations of the business. It also aims at leveraging knowledge strategic to business to accelerate growth and innovation as well as using knowledge to provide a competitive advantage for the business.

These systems also capture knowledge about how problems can be solved in order to promote organisational learning, leading to further knowledge creation. In doing this, intellects that are in the form of tacit knowledge in individuals, groups within the organisation and other areas are transferred to value processes that lead to innovation, knowledge creation and replenishment of the organisation's core values. Knowledge management systems also capture knowledge in an external repository, identify needed knowledge and help in matching and exchanging knowledge. Some technologies that support this system are: e-mail, document management, search engines, enterprise information portal, data warehouse, groupware, workflow management and web-based training. Knowledge management systems are also meant to provide collaborative capabilities, using groupware to facilitate sharing of explicit knowledge among employees; its activities or processes are supported by software such as Wincite, grapeVine, and Knowledge X.

In summary, the four broad objectives of knowledge management systems are as follows:

1. Create knowledge repositories.
2. Improve knowledge access.

3. Enhance the knowledge environment.
4. Manage knowledge as an asset.

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