Knowledge Management - a Primer

By Christopher J. Roberts, P.E.
Keynote Software Incorporated - keynote@jersey.net

Where is the Life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

The Rock by T.S. Eliot *(e-mail keynote@jersey.net for other references)*

A disabled airplane sits, full of passengers, at an airport gate. A mechanic goes on board. The longer he spends thumbing his way through instruction manuals, the more dissatisfied the airline's customers grow and the more profit the company loses. We can all think of analogous (if perhaps less dramatic) situations in our own businesses when we need the right information fast. We also worry about "infosmog" and the paralysis induced by too much data. Welcome to the relatively new and somewhat fuzzy discipline called knowledge management (KM) where information is recognized as a tangible asset to which we seek better and easier access.

Knowledge Management - Some Preliminary Definitions

- providing the right content to the right people at the right time and in the right manner
- turning information and data into effective action
- delivering the information and data people need to do their jobs effectively
- identifying, capturing, distributing, and using knowledge in a continuous process
- **data** comes in the form of measurements - observations of states of the world, raw facts, quantifiable entities.

- **information** is a statement of fact about these measurements i.e. data endowed with relevance and purpose.
- **knowledge** is information endowed with the context and meaning which allow us to take effective action.

Knowledge may be tacit (in people's heads) or explicit (exploitable by the organization) - please read this illustrative anecdote from Japan <http://www.jersey.net/~keynote/KM_1.HTM>. Now, perhaps we are ready for another definition of KM - "finding and translating the experience, instinct and values already in an organization into documentable knowledge that can be delivered throughout the supply chain". For example: a knowledge management system would provide a "place" (most likely a computer network configured as an intranet) for an employee to record a new problem and its resolution. It would offer a sophisticated indexing and search system

(probably similar in appearance to those used on the World Wide Web) so that a second employee could locate the history of the first incident quickly; then add additional information to it. In other words, document your business so that you minimize reinventing wheels.

To enable KM you need to know which bits of information count. You don't need to reduce the amount of data and information assembled. You need instead to translate that information and data into knowledge. Consider applying a KM "project" to a definable part of your business. Some related considerations may include:

- **business objectives** - long range plans; also strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to your organization
- **business cycles** and those events where people need to act
- **information leverage points** - when information is produced or consumed in your business cycles and by which groups
- **where your information resides** - generally a computer network
- **employee profiles** - found by mapping "days in their lives"
- **content and format** - see our XML tutorial <http://www.jersey.net/~keynote/XML.HTM>.

A major challenge is overlaying the knowledge structure onto the departmental structure. A *common vocabulary* is the *glue* holding related content produced by different groups. You also need to define content types in terms of ownership, level of detail and appropriate audience:

- **Product Development** typically owns the "*what*" and "*when*" i.e. specifications, schedules etc.
- **Marketing** owns the *"why"* - public relations, brochures, customer profiles etc.
- **Customer Service / Training** own the *"how"* - alerts, tips, workarounds, case studies etc.

Technology is an enabler, not the solution. Knowledge enabled computer applications include authoring, document management, databases etc. Technology also enables delivery. (Intranets use HTTP and HTML - same as the World Wide Web <www.jersey.net/~keynote/WWW1.HTM> but applied to your local area network or LAN.) Registering users is a prerequisite to the automatic presentation of information tailored to their particular needs.

An Ernst and Young survey of companies that had implemented KM indicated that the biggest obstacles were:

- changing peoples' behavior (54%)
- measuring the value and performance of knowledge (43%)
- determining what knowledge should be managed (40%)
- justifying the use of scarce resources (34%)

The full, long term benefits of knowledge management are not yet totally known. However, billions of dollars are projected for related software usage during the next few years. Keynote Software is particularly interested in the application of KM to small business needs and we

believe there are suitable computer and other tools available. We start small and offer a framework to facilitate this. This methodology uses an analogy to a published construction management system to provide a staged KM solution appropriate to your needs.

Chris Roberts is a left brained engineer and a right brained musician. President of Keynote Software Incorporated, he has used the Internet since 1991. This is his fourth presentation at TCF.

Keynote Software serves the practical information needs of small business. Their services include Web site design (focusing on access and visibility), research and other information technologies and methods.   KSI's Web site (www.keynotesoftware.com) includes tutorials plus hotlinks to hundreds of other business related Web sites.

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