THE VALUE OF ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE – AND HOW TO MAXIMIZE IT

In a world of information, data and facts, knowledge and experience often stay stored in silos, in each individual. One of the challenges that organizations face is accessing, storing and making collective use of that knowledge.

After many years of working close to organizations, such as law enforcement agencies, that have a great need to gather, store and share vast amounts of information and experience, I’ve seen the challenges that they face. One of the key factors that stand out to me is the need to somehow accumulate knowledge.

WHAT IS ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Like all of us, you carry around a great deal of knowledge and experience in your head. Accumulated over a long time or even your entire life, you have enormous experiential intelligence, and you use much of this knowledge freely. In fact, almost effortlessly.

Take talking, for instance. You formulate an idea in your head, translate it into words, and speak them. But this is an automatic, subconscious activity. Or when you get in your car in the morning and all of a sudden you are at work: how did that happen? Or when you cook your favorite meal, without following any instructions even though it involves hundreds of individual actions and decisions.

Drawing on the experience of others

We routinely solve many of the problems we encounter by just using the knowledge we have accumulated throughout our lifetime. But if we take this idea and apply it to more than one person, it gets even more interesting. Collectively, a group of people will often accumulate far more than any one person can learn.

We use what others have already figured out, and then we add to it. And we reuse what others have done when faced with particular problems. Reflecting on the importance of accumulated knowledge, Isaac Newton said, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Explicit vs. tacit knowledge

Knowledge can be described as two different types; explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge can be expressed in words and numbers, and easily communicated and shared in hard form, spreadsheets, report cards, or official records. Tacit knowledge is more personal, context-specific, and hard to formalize. This is the kind of knowledge that is difficult to communicate or share with others, and is generally inside the heads of individuals and teams. Nevertheless, it is very important to capture, save and then share tacit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge often moves through communities of practice. Communities of people who spend a lot of time together, privately, through common interests, or who work closely under a period of time. This is informal information of significant value because it is information that you know is passed on with the best intentions which you don’t have to process and therefore makes it much more effective. This saves time meaning more work can be generated because you do not have to reinvent the wheel every time a new project is taken on.

Increasing our capacity

A lot of this accumulated knowledge is stored in people’s heads or in books, films, tapes, paintings, and other artifacts. Now, an ever-increasing percentage is stored in databases and computer solutions. Computers are both a storage unit and a processing device, which makes them an excellent solution for building on the previous work of other people.
BUILDING YOUR OWN KNOWLEDGE-SHARING ENVIRONMENT

You first need to define the kind of knowledge you want to store – as well as what that knowledge is for. It needs a very clear purpose that everyone in the organization understands so that everyone feels confident in using it as well as discovering and adding their own knowledge.

Along with this clear purpose, a knowledge management system will define processes to create, protect, and use knowledge, which in turn allows the skills and expertise within an organization to blossom. Freeing people to be the best that they can be, instead of seeing kept information as an assets just for themselves.

The right environment allows personal reflection about employees’ own sense of purpose and aspirations, cultivating individual and collective responsibility. If people are involved and see the whole picture, they become willing participants. When knowledge is the key asset in an organization that means employees willingly add to that value and it creates a positive spiral upwards. And it goes a long way towards creating an organization that has the creation and accumulation of knowledge as an ongoing goal.

Success factors for accumulating and managing knowledge
The following factors should be considered:

- To accumulate knowledge, the culture of the organization is critical. It is of the utmost importance that those in charge communicate the importance of gathering and sharing knowledge.
- Access to knowledge provides value. Ensure users get easy access to the right content at the right time and place.
- Information technology can link and support collaboration, and allow people in the organization to access information resources. Coming back to tacit information, information technology is most effective when it converts the tacit knowledge of an individual into explicit knowledge that is then accessible by all.

A culture of sharing
However, all the technology and tools in the world won’t make you a knowledge-based organization if you do not establish a culture that believes in sharing. But there are real advantages:

1. Increases in employee satisfaction due to greater personal development and empowerment.
2. Helps keep your employees longer and also reduces the loss of intellectual capital from people leaving the company.
3. Saves money by not reinventing the wheel for each new project.
4. Helps you learn faster and increase productivity by making knowledge available more quickly and easily.
5. Software that accumulates knowledge and technological infrastructures allows global access to an organization’s knowledge.

Technology and accumulated knowledge
Finally, with the understanding and will to share knowledge and a culture that promotes and facilitates knowledge sharing, a technical structure and infrastructure is needed to turn it from an idea to reality. Technology solutions and tools are needed to link and support collaboration and allow access to information.

Griffeye Analyze Collaboration Server Enterprise is one example of this kind of technology. It provides the central quality controlled repository and toolkit to effectively process, analyze, store and share high volumes of data and knowledge. The solutions help investigators and organizations work together, optimize results and tackle challenges.

The Griffeye Analyze platform collects, organizes, processes, correlates, analyzes, visualizes and reviews digital media. Going from information through analysis to create intelligence.

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