The use of storytelling in knowledge management

among knowledge management in Israel / Tally Kuchuk

Abstract:

In recent years knowledge management has become one of the leading

managerial methods in organizations. Numerous articles and books have

been written on this subject, and surveys revealed that many managers

regard knowledge management as an important tool in their managerial

toolkit. Many organizations appointed knowledge managers and information

systems have been set up for coping with organization owned information and

knowledge.

One tool knowledge managers can use in their daily work is storytelling. This

tool is the focus of this research.

Before human beings learned how to read and write, storytelling was the

primary medium of collective memory and knowledge transfer to future

generations (alongside apprentice and tutoring). Knowledge transfer in these

cultures was mostly situational and non-operational theoretic knowledge was

rare. Stories enable us to reconstruct past wisdom, they encourage memory

(by using rhymes, repetitions and rhythm), and assimilate values in a

community.

Knowledge management researchers agree that knowledge is distinguished

from information mainly by its strong connection to action and experience, as

opposed to a static repository of facts, which we usually regard as

information.

The fact that stories and knowledge are both situational and operational

makes stories a tool in the knowledge manager's work. Stories are less

threatening than managerial decisions and dictations and they enable the

knowledge manager to bring people closer to the knowledge management

process. Stories can be used as carriers of knowledge itself (as done in oral

cultures). Stories can be used as means of joining people around a vision,

increase people's creativity and aid people in dealing with complex situations

which are integral part of business environment.

The purpose of this research is to examine Israeli knowledge managers'

awareness of this method, their stance towards it, and to check the kind of

uses they find to stories in their daily work.

13 knowledge managers from 13 different organizations were interviewed to

this research. They were asked about the storytelling method, their attitude

towards it and how they use it (if they do) in their work. The interviewees were

also asked about their definition to the concept of "knowledge management",

and how they perceive their role as knowledge managers.

The findings show that most of the interviewees are aware of the storytelling

method and have a positive stance towards it. Only one manager claimed that

telling stories can be very useful but is has nothing to do with knowledge

management.

The following uses to stories were found in this research:

Facilitating and assimilating of knowledge management in the

organization, by telling failure stories or future success stories made

possible by knowledge management.

Transferring knowledge in the organization – generally or within special

groups.

Centering people around a vision, by telling a future story.

Dealing with complex situations – by identifying patterns in situations

through stories.

Delivering managerial massages.

Using examples and case studies.

A linkage was found between knowledge managers' definition of their jobs to

their inclination to using stories. Knowledge managers who had a local and

narrow or technical perception of their job, conceived stories as an

intermediate stage in managing knowledge, a stage needed to mediate

between people's knowledge to the databases and knowledge repositories,

which they considered as the heart of their work. Those knowledge managers

made little use in stories, mainly as examples and illustrations.

On the other hand, knowledge managers who saw their work as a part of an

integrated process, both cultural and technological, recognized the linkage

between the old cultural function of stories as knowledge transferors, to their

role in modern knowledge management. These knowledge managers, who

perceived organizational change as lying in the heart of knowledge

management, felt that using stories is a tool in the hands of the knowledge

manager and his colleagues, in the same way it has been used in cultures

that didn't have other ways of transferring knowledge, because they didn't

know how to read and write.

System no. 000589542

קוצ'.שמ תשס"ד 658.4038