Abstract (Summary)

The second part of a series report on knowledge and leadership is presented. The authority of knowledge leaders is determined to a great degree by their own behavior. Greater knowledge sharing and collaboration will not be possible unless leaders are seen to engage in such activities themselves. Knowledge leaders need to exercise the right skills, establish the right organizational culture, and influence the appropriate changes in individual and organizational behavior. Organizational development (OD) is understood as the systematic application of behavioral science knowledge at various levels, such as group, intergroup, organization, and so on, to bring about planned change. Knowledge leaders will need to know more about OD and practice it as role models; they have to "walk the talk." It is recognized that the successful deployment of new support solutions and methodologies for leadership, including those that involve technology, will need to be accompanied by a process of organizational culture change as guided by OD and knowledge management principles.

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[Headnote]

In Part Two of this article series on knowledge and leadership, Barry Hardy discusses how knowledge managers view the roles of collaboration, organizational development and technology in establishing a knowledge leadership support framework. As before, this article draws on the viewpoints presented and discussed at the Basel knowledge café event held in Basel in Switzerland in April 2007, which was attended by over 30 participants with a mix of business and knowledge management experience.

Contributions to confidence in leadership support

In an article1 in the November/December 2007 issue of KM Review we discussed how the key ingredients of trust and transparency, innovation and change management were all required to establish a robust "confidence hi leadership" framework. In this article, we'll focus on the further ingredients of collaboration, organizational development and technology.

Collaboration

What skills are needed by today's knowledge leaders hi order to facilitate greater knowledge sharing and collaboration with their organizations, departments and teams? No single skill set is sufficient to the task of knowledge leadership.

On the contrary, individuals must demonstrate a broad range of qualities if they are to bring out the best in themselves and their people. Classic leadership qualities such as vision, courage, integrity, honesty, perseverance and energy all feature highly hi discussions on leadership, suggesting that, however it's defined, leadership demands an approach and style that's instantly recognizable as such.

The authority of knowledge leaders is determined to a great degree by their own behavior. Greater knowledge sharing and collaboration will not be possible unless leaders are seen to engage in such activities themselves. In the 20th century workplace, authority was based on what an individual knew ("knowledge is power"). In the 21st century workplace, by contrast, authority is conferred to those who share what they know, and hi doing so, elevate the value of their coworkers and network contacts ("knowledge sharing is power").

Having the courage to engage in this land of sharing is essential to the long-term prosperity of knowledge-driven organizations. This leads to the issue of credibility: a knowledge leader's credibility cannot be driven "top-down"; it has to be conferred "bottom-up".

Thus, knowledge leaders have to lead from the rear as well as leading from the front. Engaging the ideas and opinions of staff at all levels of the organization is essential to establishing credibility and to building trust.

The knowledge leader has to stimulate sharing and collaboration by demonstrating their value and worth. Successful collaborative projects have to be celebrated and communicated. Knowledge sharing has to be incentivized and rewarded (and great ideas should never be "stolen" by management). Original thinking needs to be encouraged. And where necessary, long-standing organizational orthodoxies have to be open to revision.

Moreover, hi a rapidly changing business environment, knowledge leaders will have to recognize that collaboration need not be a purely "internal" exercise. Opportunities for collaboration may well exist with other organizations, perhaps even with competitors.

The future of an organization, then, may be determined by its ability to exploit collaborative knowledge on both a local and global scale.

"Soft" skills also feature highly among the requirements for 21st century knowledge leaders, because knowledge leaders must have the proven ability to:

\* Engage with staff at all levels of the organization and to demonstrate empathy with the challenges they face.

\* Understand the interests and motivations of staff, and in doing so, nurture their innovation and sense of inquiry.

\* Offer feedback and be open themselves to criticism from others.

\* Recognize others for their efforts, ideas and contribution.

\* Create the right work environment and establish a culture of mutual trust and respect.

\* Change the behavior of others by personally demonstrating the qualities they hope to inspire.

\* Encourage leadership and initiative at all levels of the organization, and recognize that by doing so, they are able to strengthen their own authority as leaders.

\* Champion further education and die personal and professional development of all staff.

Knowledge leaders need to synthesize the above skills hi order to address specific organizational needs or problems. Recognizing die right people for a particular project, enabling different motivations to fuse into a single goal, and cultivating the exchange of ideas between different teams are essential skills that enable a knowledge leader to synthesize the best dunking from across the organization.

While "leadership" is traditionally seen through the prism of authority and strength, "knowledge leadership" demands humility and a willingness to have one's own ideas challenged, improved and, if necessary, discarded.

In the knowledge-driven workplace, leaders cannot pretend to know everything, nor can they claim to have a monopoly on good ideas. The education of the knowledge leader begins by acknowledging what others have to teach and how much one has to learn.

This type of leadership must, however, keep the focus on the ultimate vision and goals, and getting people to share that goal. Once the common goal is accepted, the leader can then lead from the rear and gain the full buy-in of his or her team by illustrating that they are there to facilitate and to ensure that people of all talents can contribute and no "stragglers" are left behind on the way.

Knowledge leaders need to exercise the right skills, establish the right organizational culture, and influence the appropriate changes in individual and organizational behavior. Knowledge strategies, meanwhile, have to build on short, medium and long-term goals. To realize these goals, knowledge leaders have to ask a series of questions:

\* What skills will our staff need to meet the challenges ahead?

\* What expertise do we have internally and how can this be improved?

\* What expertise exists outside our organization that we can co-opt or collaborate with?

\* Which people do we need to bring togedier to brainstorm the risks and opportunities we face?

\* How will the knowledge we acquire realizing our current goals benefit other activities?

A careful consideration of these and other questions should enable the knowledge leader to undertake a program of organizational change, so that the organization is better prepared to anticipate and respond to future challenges. The knowledge leader must also be conscious of what's happening hi their industry or sector as a whole. Gathering and exploiting competitive intelligence is essential if opportunities are to be properly realized. Studying competitors thoroughly and [earning from their experiences can help knowledge leaders avoid repeating the same mistakes while leveraging the knowledge gained for competitive advantage.

Ultimately, the knowledge leader must cultivate those "strategic values", respect and knowledge sharing, that will flow into all other organizational processes.

Organizational development

Organizational development (OD) is understood as the systematic application of behavioral science knowledge at various levels, such as group, intergroup, organization, and so on, to bring about planned change.

Its objectives, meanwhile, are a higher quality of work-life balance, productivity, adaptability and effectiveness. OD accomplishes this by changing attitudes, behaviors, values, strategies, procedures, and structures so that the organization as a whole can adapt to competitive actions more quickly and effectively, technological advances, and the fast pace of change within the environment. It's directly related to the concept of organizational learning,

While KM programs are closely related to organizational learning initiatives too, KM may be distinguished from organizational development and learning by its greater focus on the management of specific knowledge needs, assets and development, and the cultivation of the channels through which knowledge flows.

There is, however, a communality between OD and KM, in that both require people - individually and collectively - to change their behavior (thus changing culture), in order to reach higher levels of performance and flexibility, through co-working involving mutual respect, obligation and responsibility, while at the same time rewarding diverse individual needs for success and recognition.

A shared cognitive context is an absolute requirement to align the efforts of all people involved. Do today's leaders do enough to create such a shared vision? Sharing and collaboration should start when a vision is being created; it should not be solely based on a top-down approach. OD can support this, with approaches such as real-time strategic change (RTSC) conferences, which involve a special type of large-group intervention.

Knowledge leaders will need to know more about OD and practice it as role models; they have to "walk the talk'" One idea is that "informal" knowledge leaders, who may be different from the company leadership team members, could be elected or chosen in a participatory process by all (knowledge) workers. This would give them power through high acceptance.

The downside may be that they constitute a potential risk to the formal leaders of the organization. Some forms of leadership - such as "thought leadership" - are quite different to operational and financial management responsibility, but are nonetheless crucial to the success of the knowledge-driven service organization.

Knowledge leaders need to create welfare, for the entire organization, for its people and for society as a whole. Sustainability will lead their work as much as short-term profitability. They are more balanced, not just focusing on one dimension.

Knowledge-driven organizations need to take more risks, be more innovative, experiment more and focus less on solely improving the financial statements year after year. They should behave more holistically, be led by systemic thinking, and deploy approaches and techniques such as open communities, surveys, workflow mappings, interviews, feedback, action planning and change management. Most of these techniques have already been adopted by the KM community for some tune now, but they originate in OD.

Because we know that changing behavior (and thus changing culture) from a less knowledge-flowfriendly environment to a more knowledge-flowfriendly one takes some time and effort, organizations should start sooner rather than later.

The problem is that many organizations are already successful today, and so their leaders believe that they have no real need to change anything. As a result, talking is not often followed by real action. Some managers can be rather self-satisfied and not really prepared to take risks. So while current resources could be invested in new initiatives, many often prefer to preserve the current stability and financial success.

One result of this inertia is relatively high topmanagement salaries, while at the same time, workers can be subject to redundancy and insufficient investment is made hi the future of the organization.

Success is therefore more of a blinder than an enabler today - it seems to be much easier to change an organization under pressure than one that is currently performing strongly in terms of classical financial indicators based on past history

The responsibility for creating sufficient awareness and momentum lies with all individuals in an organization; the problem is that if everybody is in charge, nobody will do the job. Thus, everybody agrees that anybody could do something, but nobody will take the first step. It takes courage, a high level of perseverance, open dialogue and some risk-taking hi order to go one step forward.

Today, it's even more difficult to prepare the majority of people for new challenges, as many businesses and industries are experiencing a prosperous time. Talking about potential crises and dark clouds ahead is not always well received. There is a need to stay in a positive mood.

Although OD is often not generally well understood, it is practiced hi some organizations. It offers a bundle of methods, techniques and processes that can be applied to the knowledge organization to help it grow and become a comfortable, yet also successful, place to work.

Knowledge leaders should not try to use OD without a real need, which can be either a real business problem or a perceived need for change, identified ideally in the organization's vision and/or strategy.

Technology

Large organizations today have to manage vast information and communications (ICT) infrastructures, numerous disparate applications and mountains of data. However, current applications and architectures do not filter, integrate and effectively select information that is tailored to the specific decision-making that leaders regularly need to undertake.

Current desktop designs are largely application-based, rather than driven by the real needs and interests of managers. For example, they need to have all relevant knowledge available to them at the right time - that is, when they are making business decisions.

Moreover, data, projects and planning across an organization are often fragmented and not transparent, so it's difficult for executives to maintain an accurate picture of relevant initiatives, operations and strategic changes. New knowledge-model-based solutions are required to better support the knowledge needs of leadership.

The biggest failure of ICT's support for KM activities is drat such solutions have not yet generally flourished as a human-oriented communications medium that returns measurable value. Instead, individuals and industry continue to struggle with the issues of how to effectively use the technology to communicate, work togedier and build trusting, sustainable work cultures and relationships, inside and outside the organization.

Moreover, many ICT tools have often been developed from an application perspective, with limited scope of domain or activity. Hence, decision makers and leaders lack an integrated ICT support system providing all the knowledge they need at the right tune to make the best decisions. Content is often fragmented between applications and out of context. Lack of intelligence in the creation and manipulation of content restricts greatly its subsequent value and re-use. Furdiermore, most ICT systems have been based on data and inforniation models that have a weak link to the knowledge models that humans use to make sense of and understand their environment, to work together effectively, to collaborate and to innovate. Key aspects of trust and transparency are often not even considered in ICT design.

So what is the answer?1 Increased use of multifactorial "Knowledge Assessment" approaches addressing leadership, innovation, organizational culture and change ingredients (such as addressed hi this article) should accompany technology design, piloting and incremental performance improvement, as they offer significantly improved productivity gains and returns on investment from ICT-based KM support systems.

However, the real-world challenges of shortterm constraints of budget, time and thinking, provide barriers to the adoption of better practices over traditional IT requirements analysis and development, which tend to test and satisfy use case and workflow situations, without addressing more complex issues.

Culture is also a challenge here, as technical experts and managers are often uncomfortable recognizing and discussing such "soft factors".

Systematic knowledge management will be increasingly necessary in order to optimize the value of preceding advances in research and development, and to map high -impact market effects to key product development predictors. Superior methods and tools for semantic classification and retrieval of knowledge, which take hi to account the specific leadership requirements of recipients of knowledge, and that can provide connectors and linkers to new and old data from multiple sources at different times, can help.

Proactive knowledge internalization, supported by emerging knowledge technologies such as web 2.0, the semantic web, ontologies and novel approaches to retrieval of unstructured information, should enhance knowledge discovery, and help transform the challenges of complexity into awareness, and facilitate weak signal detection and innovation.

Powerful questions, reliable answers

A prepared organization should be able to ask powerful questions, quickly obtain reliable answers, have the ability to react proactively and wisely to new and unexpected events, and to integrate risk and uncertainty evaluation in the organization's preparation for the future using all knowledge flows available to it. Principles and techniques that can comfortably accommodate serendipity and ambiguity are needed to focus the organization on resilience rather than stability, and effectiveness rather than a blind focus on efficiency.

Confidence in leadership can be promoted through a variety of KM approaches, for example:

\* Establishment of a code of practice and ethics hi the workplace, which is applied and understood by everyone at work, and regularly updated.

\* Establishment of transparent contexts for organizational communication.

\* Adoption of standardized terminologies and ontologies for cross-functional communication and internalization of knowledge, so as to improve the consistent understanding of benefits and risks for multiple stakeholders.

\* Knowledge translation to ensure the correct interpretation of knowledge by receiver.

\* Application of change management and continuous knowledge-assessment approaches for evaluating the performance and readiness of the knowledge network supporting decision making, based on objective metrics and indicators of knowledge utilization, transfer and application of relevant knowledge hi decisionmaking processes, such as project selection and product development and enhancement.

\* Application of collaboration and organizational development techniques to aid the acceleration of knowledge flows, removal of knowledge gaps, and the creation and testing of new strategies, tools and interventions.

We recognize, therefore, that the successful deployment of new support solutions and methodologies for leadership, including those that involve technology, will need to be accompanied by a process of organizational culture change as guided by OD and KM principles.

We not only need to better use ICT approaches in business situations to reduce project failure rates, but also apply best KM practice, knowledge assessment and translation, and communication approaches. This ensures that more relevant explicit and tacit knowledge resources are available at the right place and right time for decisions to be made.

Contributing solutions may involve explicit knowledge management approaches that provide, for example, integrated real-time information to assist project managers in the early detection and management of project botdenecks, and ontologies to support inference or identification of needed diagnostic and information sources. They should also include tacit approaches involving competency enrichment practices, connecting multiple communities of interest, practice and leadership, knowledge and innovation cafés, and external expertise location and "practice enrichment" working groups, which will discuss the new rules of collaborative work, assess the current performance and potential of organizations, and apply novel interventions to improve that performance.

The "knowledge café" approach used here to promote tacit knowledge exchange, accompanied by a co-creation mechanism for the generation of the explicit knowledge for this article, provides a useful technique for exchanging knowledge, changing mindsets, initiating ideas and change, and can also be used as a broader means for dissemination and communication. It's an effective tool which can be applied to knowledge assessment and to develop knowledge leadership.

[Sidebar]

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[Sidebar]

KEYPOINTS

\* In early 2007, a mixed group of non-KM professionals and KM practitioners convened in Basel, Switzerland, for a discussion on leadership, change, innovation and trust, examining how and why these issues are of critical importance in the coming years, and how they're relevant to effective KM.

\* When it comes to collaboration, the authority of knowledge leaders is determined to a great degree by their own behavior. Greater knowledge sharing won't happen unless leaders are seen to do it themselves.

\* Organizational development (OD) approaches, combined with KM initiatives, can be a powerful stimulus for changing behaviors and practices.

\* The biggest failure of Id's support for KM activities is that such solutions have not generally flourished as a human-oriented communications medium that returns measurable value to individuals and the organization.

"KNOWLEDGE LEADERS WILL NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TO PRACTICE IT AS ROLE MODELS; THEY HAVE TO BE SEEN TO WALK THE TALK."

[Sidebar]

Leadership is not what you believe it to be!

Beat Knechtli, director and chief knowledge officer at Pricewaterhouse Coopers, based in Zurich, Switzerland, sees some distinct problems in modern attitudes to leadership: "Leadership today is mainly used as a synonym for top management - the happy few sitting at the top of organizations," he says. "This greatly constrains innovative thinking and actions and is disrespectful and disempowering to everyone in the organization who is not a top manager."

He takes a rather different view, seeing leadership as the capacity of a human community - people living and working together - to bring forth new realities. "Another way to say this is that leadership energizes. Leadership breathes life into an enterprise, without which, nothing new can emerge. The word inspire, long associated with leadership, derives from the Latin inspirare, literally 'to breathe life into'," he points out.

In Knechtli's view, leaders generate such energy through creative tension: "The principle of creative tension is the essence of leadership. Leaders energize through generating and sustaining creative tension, through fostering commitment to realizing a dream and to telling the truth about what is. Tension always seeks resolution and release. If the vision remains constant, creative tension can be resolved only when reality moves toward the vision. There are no other options. This is not mystical. It is logical."

As such, he says, leadership for a knowledge-driven enterprise (and a knowledge-driven world) must differ from today's approaches. All employees can and must lead, not just the boss, where leadership means promoting new directions as opposed to managing people. Leadership is shifting from position to knowledge. Anyone with critical knowledge that could alter business direction can show leadership. This is called thought leadership. Leadership can be bottom-up as well as top-down. It can even come from outside.

Only management is a formal role. Leadership is an occasional act, like creativity, not a role or position. Those at the top sometimes lead, sometimes just manage. Other times they must operate as venture capitalists investing in the best ideas (leadership) emerging from below.

Thought leadership is radically different from traditional top-down leadership. It can be directed up, as well as down or sideways. It's the basis of innovative change. It is egalitarian, because it can shift rapidly from one person to another. It cannot be monopolized. It has nothing to do with climbing a hierarchy. It changes how people think, hence no action is necessarily implied. Implementation is a separate phase - a managerial undertaking.

Hence, five key activities in leaders' "new work" are:

1. Engaging people in conversations about the future and current reality.

2. Refining the prevailing mental models.

3. Building and sustaining relationships.

4. Setting the organization's learning agenda.

5. Thinking and acting in the best interest of the enterprise: past, present and future.

[Footnote]

Notes

1. Hardy, B. linking Trust, Change, Leadership and Innovation, KM Review, Vol. 10, Issue 5 (2007)