The CMG Knowledge Intranet

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Abstract

CMG is the European IT Services company with a unique culture of sharing knowledge - they are "Knowledge Makers". Rapid growth during recent years required CMG find new ways to bring people, and what they know, together. Intranet technology is used to empower individuals and reinforce the corporate culture. A suite of Intranet Tools enable consultants to collect, store, share, re-use and create knowledge in self administered communities of interest.

1 Introduction

Different organisations value and use knowledge differently. In order to understand CMG's approach to Knowledge Management, one first needs to be aware of what type of business CMG is.

A study of our clients, their demand situations, external environment, culture, structure and strategy revealed three general types of organisation which value and use knowledge differently. These classifications are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

- Knowledge Seekers
- Knowledge Users
- Knowledge Makers

1.1 Knowledge Seekers

This type of organisation is generally older and larger than average. They often operate in a market with similar competitors who are few in number. In many cases they are former monopolies or oligopolies in a technical or engineering focussed industry. These companies are concerned about capital and labour productivity and may have been restructured many times.

Their information culture is top down, command and control. They are generally not innovators in the use of IT. Capital is seen as their primary asset.

Knowledge Seekers want better information about their own operations to seek new efficiencies. They want to communicate more consistent images and messages. They want a global view of markets.

1.2 Knowledge Users

This type of organisation makes money by replicating and extending a perceived core competency or brand efficiently and effectively. They often sell to a mass market for a volume product or service. Customers are seen as their primary asset.

Knowledge Users want more and better information about markets and consumers, also about other industries they can grow into. Information about their core processes is important to ensure efficient operations.

1.3 Knowledge Makers

This type of organisation makes money by selling knowledge, advice and experience through specialised skills. They constantly need to identify new opportunities. The information culture is informal and bottom - up, business growth relies on innovation, creativity and more people. People - employees - are seen as their primary asset.

Knowledge Makers want information about markets and people. Empowerment is important as is morale and job satisfaction. Communications systems are important.

1.4 A Definition of Knowledge Management (KM)

Our study also confirmed a simple but credible definition of knowledge management:

> "Knowledge Management is the deliberate attempt an organisation makes to acquire and use knowledge for benefit or gain"

The nature of the benefit sought from KM, and the attempts an organisation makes to acquire or use knowledge, varies with the type organisation.

2 CMG: A Knowledge Maker

CMG is unquestionably a knowledge business, we are "knowledge makers" who acquire and re-sell know-how.

We are one of Europe's leading IT Services companies. Nearly 6,000 people work for CMG in 40 different countries. Each one has knowledge, skills and experience that represent CMG's products, and knowledge assets.

We have some specific priorities in managing knowledge that suit our type of organisation. Foremost is the recognition that the individual owns knowledge, not the enterprise.

2.1 CMG's Organisation

People are our key asset. Our core business processes are designed to find and keep the best people in order to sell their skills, knowledge and experience.

The organisation has a flat structure and grows organically. Divided into many small divisions, "companies", of around 100 people, new companies are formed when a company grows too big and splits into two. An entrepreneurial approach means that Managing Directors effectively run their own business within the CMG framework sharing resources with the other companies. Like all members of CMG, the Directors are measured on their success, but everyone participates in the success of this family style enterprise.

More than half of our 6,000 employees have an equity interest in the business.

2.2 CMG's Culture

CMG is all about people. It has a very strong culture dating back to its foundation in 1964. Its culture is based on equity, fairness, accountability, openness and honesty.

An environment of trust is created by a culture where everyone gets the same benefits - the same open plan "hot desk" offices (where people may sit in a different desk every day), there are no special executive benefits. The only difference between consultant benefits is their salary - and these are not kept secret. Each consultant has to prove their worth amongst their peers, and financial rewards are frequently reviewed to ensure this.

Except for Group financial results, there are no locked cabinets or files, so consultants can have direct access to practically any file they want. You can review your Director's personnel file at leisure, or comment on documents you may read on another's desk or screen.

The culture is perpetuated through many social occasions where stories are told, heroes are celebrated. There is a conservative dress code, and professionalism is very important. However, most networking at CMG is done at these social events where it is possible to meet new people and find new opportunities.

Consultants are responsible for their own success at CMG, so they must network continuously with others to find projects and opportunities for more work. Traditionally, this networking is done during team meetings and social occasions on a face to face basis (over a beer!).

CMG has grown so rapidly in recent years, however, that it is not possible to personally meet everyone else. In order to maintain our culture, we needed to use technology to keep everyone connected. The sort of things that consultants would talk about in a group needed to be facilitated across the world, and between people who may have never met before. Intranet technology was used to meet this need.

3 Developing the Knowledge Intranet

We used our experience of other companies to help develop our Knowledge Intranet. We found that our clients wanted to use their knowledge better to meet their business objectives, and as for CMG, there were a number of drivers for this.

Typical drivers included:

- Competitive industry forces caused by de-regulation or privatisation;
- Inconsistent or inadequate internal and external communication;
- No corporate memory - not re-using the lessons learned, particularly from large non-routine projects;
- Poor understanding of operations, products, customers - wanting a global view;
- Duplication of resources or effort and inefficient processes;
- A need to innovate or develop new markets to compete.

Knowledge, however, is personal, inseparable and portable. CMG recognised that to manage knowledge, they must first have the support of their people, and that meant meeting their individual and community knowledge needs.

3.1 Reconciling Enterprise and Individual Needs

Since people own knowledge, they must be the centre of any approach to KM. Figure 1 shows the three need domains considered for knowledge in CMG:
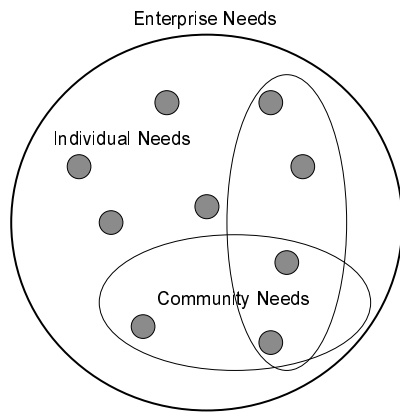
Figure 1: Different Needs in Knowledge Management

Starting with individual needs, we considered what people wanted to do with their knowledge, and how they wanted to manage it. CMG people were most interested in the ability to network with other CMG people. This need was expressed as a desire to find people with similar professional interests to develop knowledge and relationships, or people with business opportunities to jointly exploit. People wanted to find "experts" and case studies (stories) about clients, processes or techniques used within CMG. They also wanted the freedom to organise their own approach to sharing what they knew.

Communities, which form informally and organically in CMG, are an important element to sharing and creating knowledge. The community, or "special interest group", is also an important "greenhouse" of new products, services and methods for CMG.

Communities are groups of people with some common interest or objective. To belong to this type of group, members must be willing to spend effort in sharing and/or learning. In the past, these communities were limited to people who knew each other and worked in the same office. Communities would benefit from an Intranet by removing this barrier and enabling a much wider group of potential members and allow more communities to form. Identity, freedom and flexibility were important to communities.

CMG's enterprise needs for acquiring and using knowledge are now being addressed. Business processes relating to our Clients, People and Operations were identified for "Knowledge Enabling". We found that enterprise needs required more formal and procedural knowledge to be collected from individuals and formal work groups, but the basic skills of collecting and disseminating by people were always required.

Enterprise Knowledge Applications are seen as a specific requirement of knowledge use to meet company goals

(such as Key Account Management). This is done by applying the set of basic skills, or functions, already used by individuals to a targeted business process. These applications will attempt to:

a) Capture people's knowledge an experience as a process input
b) Capture and re-use process outputs
c) Involve more people in the process to increase learning and knowledge creation

The CMG approach is a "walk before you run" method. People are empowered to use new knowledge tools before these are applied to the needs of the enterprise.

3.2 Basic Functions of KM

The basic functions of collecting, storing, re-using, creating and sharing knowledge are considered the enablers of KM. People must be able to perform these before any other knowledge based problems can be addressed.
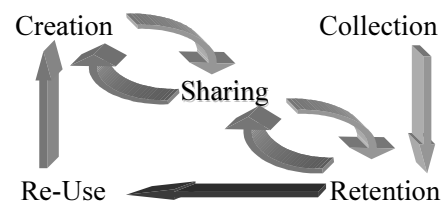

Figure 2: Basic Functions of KM

Section Four of this paper describes the tools that enable CMG people to carry out these functions.

3.3 Other KM System Attributes

From our self examination and looking at other companies, we found a number of KM system attributes were also fairly generic. A KM system should be:

1. Customisable:
   People want a degree of control over the layout, structure, content and processes of their own solutions. People want to be responsible for their knowledge.

2. Flexible:
   Businesses don't want to be locked in to any one product or architecture. The knowledge and information captured by a KM solution must still be used by other systems.

3. Scalable and Extendable:
   Some companies want to be able to share selected knowledge and information with customers or

suppliers via an Extranet or e-commerce. It was important to have a platform independent solution to enable this.

3.3 A Toolkit Approach

CMG took a Toolkit approach to KM. This meant that a common set of tools could be used to build a whole variety of structures that suited different parts of our organisation while performing the basic functions of KM.

Knowledge and information captured, created, shared and stored would be available to applications designed to meet enterprise KM needs (like Competitive Intelligence Systems and Key Account Management).

Everyone needed to be linked together so the best applications could be shared across the group, and the system needed to be simple enough for us to share knowledge with our partners regardless of their own systems.

Beyond the basic Intranet infrastructure (the "plumbing"), connecting all our people together, web browsers and databases, the CMG Knowledge Intranet Toolkit provides:

- Facilities to collect and store knowledge, both tacit and explicit,
- Facilities to capture and store information from external sources or other applications, such as news feeds etc.,
- Facilities to help people create and share their knowledge, network with experts or discuss ideas,
- Applications to retrieve relevant information and knowledge to answer questions or stimulate innovation,
- Applications to create, manage, audit and report on any system facility or application.

4 Using the Knowledge Intranet Toolkit

Five main tools enable people to create a number of different approaches to sharing and managing knowledge.

- Auto-publishing
- Subscribe and Search
- Site Management
- Team Web and Discussion Forums
- Interpersonal Networking

4.1 Auto-publishing

This tool is an e-mail based publishing method that enables every person in CMG to share documents and other files on the Intranet. Anything is allowed from ideas and opinions to reports and analyses. Because consultants don't always know who else will find some information valuable, the email based autopublisher means consultants can CC an email to the Intranet or a discussion forum for anyone to see. Users can also manage their own published material.

Every document, without exception, has an owner who is clearly identified. This owner is always a person, and that means there is always a link between the published information and the person with the knowledge that created it. This means people are connected with people and not just documents - a major difference to most systems we have seen.

4.2 Subscribe and Search

Consultants want to be able to locate other people, information and knowledge easily. They want to participate in communities. The search function helps them find published content using keywords and meta-information (like document type, subject area, author, etc.), while the subscribe function means they will be notified when a document is published in an area of the Internet that they are interested in.

4.3 Site Management

The Site Management tool enables individuals and communities choose how to organise their knowledge on the Intranet. It means that anyone can create a sub-branch employing any categories, links or tools they choose. The "look and feel" or graphical interface can also be customised.

4.4 Team Web and Discussion Forums

Team Web is the virtual community in CMG. Team Webs are sub structures of the Intranet created by one or more consultants who have an interest in a specific area of technology, a market or process. Examples of Team Webs that have formed on the CMG Knowledge Intranet include: "The Oracle Focus Group", "EMU SIG" and "Business Intelligence Technology Systems".

Team Webs create opportunities for consultants to meet people with similar interests and are a place to centralise, store and create more knowledge. Often they lead to new business for CMG too.

4.5 Interpersonal Networking

People to People networking is still the primary way we do business in CMG. The entire approach to KM has been about creating more opportunities for people to interact with each other and the knowledge.

The Intranet also enables CMG to promote awareness of more and more opportunities for CMG people to meet face to face in a social format.

The flexibility afforded by this Toolkit approach means people can publish their own knowledge, create their own structures, network with other people and share knowledge.

CMG enterprise solutions apply these tools to specific business processes - they are not discussed in this paper.

5 Lessons Learned

Approaching KM for the first time, a business organisation should consider what type of business they are. Knowing how knowledge is used and valued by the enterprise will help determine the real knowledge needs.

Careful consideration should be given to individual, community and enterprise needs for knowledge. People have to manage their own knowledge. The enterprise should empower people to manage individual knowledge before attempting to use collective knowledge to meet superordinate enterprise goals.

Because people are essentially social, or tribal by nature, the ability to create knowledge communities by groups of individuals is a valuable step toward enterprise wide knowledge application.

This "walk before you run" strategy will enable behavioral and cultural changes to take place more easily as well.

CMG used an Intranet Toolkit approach to achieve KM, with gratifying results. We have one of the lowest staff attrition rates in our industry, and are one of the top performing companies on the London Stock Exchange for share price growth.

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Originally from a quantitative marketing background, Owen worked as a University lecturer and consultant in Australia for several years. He designed decision tools and computer models of business and market phenomena for business in the finance, sea transport, health care, chemical and agricultural sectors. He authored a strategic business simulator and designed a KM and Competitive Intelligence system for an Australian energy company. Now based in London, Owen now advises a range of industry leaders in KM, Competitive Intelligence and Business Intelligence Technology Systems.

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