

Change of Paradigm in KM – Towards Collaborative Knowledge Management

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Abstract

Knowledge management is generally understood as a means of having better control over the production and usage of explicit and implicit knowledge in organizations of any kind, preferably commercial businesses, but also public administrations, science and education, in particular in e-science and e-learning environments. The paradigm shift in the understanding of knowledge management (towards communications) has come about because knowledge and information are no longer considered as being simply there. The classic view is that knowledge is produced by single authors, is published and stored in information containers (traditionally in printed books, journals, reports, today more and more in electronic forms such as data banks, knowledge-based-systems, non-linear hypertexts, and web sites), that knowledge is distributed to users or is interactively retrieved by end-users. This is the static view of knowledge management and can be called the *knowledge warehouse approach*.

The dynamic or communicative view on knowledge management does not take knowledge and information as fixed, but emphasizes the ongoing growth and renewal of knowledge and information in a continual process of exchange and communication. Information is thus not just the result of a particular distribution or retrieval process, using and applying existing knowledge to new problems – although this, of course will still be a major impetus for innovation -, but is also the result of communication processes. This can be described *as a shift from the distribution and retrieval of existing knowledge to the interactive and collaborative production of new knowledge in the communication paradigm of knowledge management*.

Knowledge and information in all areas and in all applications are increasingly produced, distributed and used collaboratively. Collaboration means cooperating and sharing resources with others in an open, friendly, often non-competitive, but supportive way – collaboration is in general organized in networks, not in hierarchies. The preference for collaborative knowledge management is thus based on the assumption that the quality of collaboratively produced or acquired knowledge is higher than the quality of individually produced or acquired knowledge, even higher than the set union of all individually produced or acquired knowledge in a group . Whether collaborative work is also more efficient (results being achieved faster, more completely and at lower „costs“) than individual work seems to be an open question.

We will discuss this paradigm of collaborative knowledge management more concretely on two examples: firstly, collaborative knowledge production in the context of Wikipedia, the world-wide electronic encyclopaedia (www.wikipedia.org), and secondly, collaborative knowledge management in the context of the Konstanz e-learning system K3 [in English: C3] (stands for “collaboration, competence and communication”) (www.k3forum.net).