



DO YOU EVER WONDER...

what knowledge management really is and how it can improve your competitive advantage?

To get some answers, we talked to Kent Greenes at Science Applications International Corporation—SAIC—who is the corporation's Chief Knowledge Officer and responsible for applying the knowledge management methodology that he helped create at BP to customer initiatives as well as internal programs. Kent believes in the power of learning because he has experienced its effectiveness first hand in previous roles as a business leader, manager of an oilfield, and several other operational and strategic positions.

World Energy: Kent, it seems like knowledge management has become the latest buzz phrase in the industry. How do you define it, and what does it have to offer the industry?

Greenes: Knowledge management is the systematic application of know-how and experience to a specific performance issue or challenge. In other words, tapping into what's collectively known about a particular subject to help achieve business targets or goals. Knowledge management is a business function, like finance or safety or human resources. Although knowledge is difficult to manage outside the individuals and teams that create it, a small improvement goes a long way.

Let's go one step further, then: What is your definition of knowledge?

Knowledge is cognitive understanding and insight gained from experience. Most knowledge resides in people's heads (tacit knowledge). A small fraction of what we do and know is simple enough to codify and can be written down or recorded (explicit knowledge). You can never capture the full richness of what's in people's heads—try writing down the knowledge of how to ride a bicycle in a way that enables a child to go and try it herself, for example—but with practice you can capture some of that richness and make it explicit. Since it's able to be stored and searched, explicit knowledge can be a catalyst for connecting the right people. The key there is to make it easy to share, easy to read, and always linked to the people who created it.

Knowledge differs from information in that it conveys context and requires relationships and trust for re-use and adaptation. People need to analyze information but can act on knowledge. So knowledge is very personal and thus a lot harder to manage than information. But knowledge doesn't replace information—you need both in today's climate of rapid market change. Both knowledge and information require attention and investment.

That brings us to technology. There are a lot of "knowledge management" software solutions being marketed. Do they do the job?

IT plays a vital role in connecting people 'who need and know' and making explicit knowledge visible and accessible. Connection solutions include IT tools that help you find experts and fellow practitioners (often referred to as 'Yellow Pages') and enable simple discussion forums between people who want to share good practices, and those that enable rich collaboration.

You can use many of the existing

information management solutions to search and collect codified know-how if they can handle formats such as video, audio, and other media that support story-telling and rich codification. The HTML format is especially effective since it allows people to navigate collections of codified know-how in a manner that's most effective for them.

So, hopefully it's clear that software solutions and data warehouses alone will not manage the kind of knowledge that makes a bottom line impact on a business. I've seen a lot of companies focus on knowledge sharing in the last few years, but it has not changed their performance. Companies need to support people to get to know each other so they might actually use the knowledge that's shared. To be truly effective, a KM program must include the three fundamental aspects of any enterprise change effort: people, process, and technology. KM roles have to be established as part of the business, and knowledge seeking, sharing and re-use behaviors need to be clearly linked to performance improvement and reward.

What comprises a KM program in SAIC?

SAIC's approach to knowledge management is tailored to clients' business objectives and existing culture. We spend time with business leaders and staff up front to identify the most critical business areas, the ones where a KM focus will deliver big results in a meaningful time frame. Our proven learning processes produce immediate benefits and help capture a firm's key learnings on the job. This knowledge is then rapidly codified, distilled and organized into contextual knowledge assets that include key learnings and experience, good practices and their business results, compelling stories, reusable artifacts, and links to knowledgeable individuals. To create sustainable

change, we coach our clients in the use of simple learning processes and provide the methodology and technology to build communities of practice across their enterprises. Whether the enterprise is local or global, we co-deliver and deploy collaboration and enterprise portal solutions with our clients that effectively support the capture and adaptation of knowledge for business benefit.

Kent, thank you for giving us your view of knowledge management and its benefits. Do you have any final thoughts?

Yes. KM programs have delivered some really impressive results in the energy industry, and are well worth the time and expense necessary to launch them. However, without a culture that promotes and recognizes sharing and the re-use of knowledge, any attempts to introduce KM are going to be a hard struggle. Because many energy companies lack this kind of culture, a KM program must engage the top, middle, and bottom and be championed by individuals who run the business. Without that backing and support, a KM effort may stall before it produces the kind of benefits reported in the press.

SAIC continues to amaze us with the breadth and depth of its own knowledge. Its continuing innovation and application of these learning processes and new technology to nontraditional uses will help its energy customers continue to optimize efficiencies and streamline operations for improved competitive advantage.

For more information, contact:



1900 West Loop South, Suite 300
Houston, Texas 77072
713.346.4100 | saic.com