

TRANSFORMING INFORMATION INTO KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of information within organizations, generated through communication and transactions, internally and externally has created information silos which unless organized and managed using efficient delivery systems, will render them incapable of being transformed into knowledge that can help provide organizations with the advantage over their competitors.

Seen in this context, knowledge is processed information and constitutes the organizations' intellectual capital. Unless organizations realise that information silos can generate knowledge that would enable the management to enhance their decision making and problem solving capabilities, collecting data in the form of statistics, customer and staff profiles, market research findings, etc would be futile. It can therefore be said, that information management is the first step to knowledge management (KM). As shown in Figure 1, knowledge can only be transformed from information via various cognitive processes that require critical and analytical thinking ability.

MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Organizational knowledge constitutes two types of knowledge (a) Explicit or documented knowledge found in minutes, memos, e-mails as well as digital library resources such as e-books, e-journals and the Internet. Tacit knowledge comprises views, opinions, ideas, experiences, etc which are embedded in people's minds and unless expressed into an explicit format, remains untapped and lost to the world of knowledge.

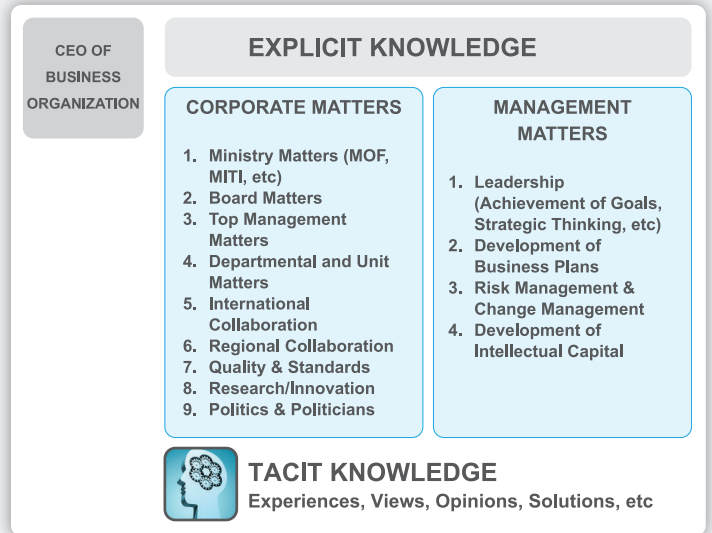


Figure 2: Embedded knowledge in Organization: Using the embedded knowledge of the CEO as example

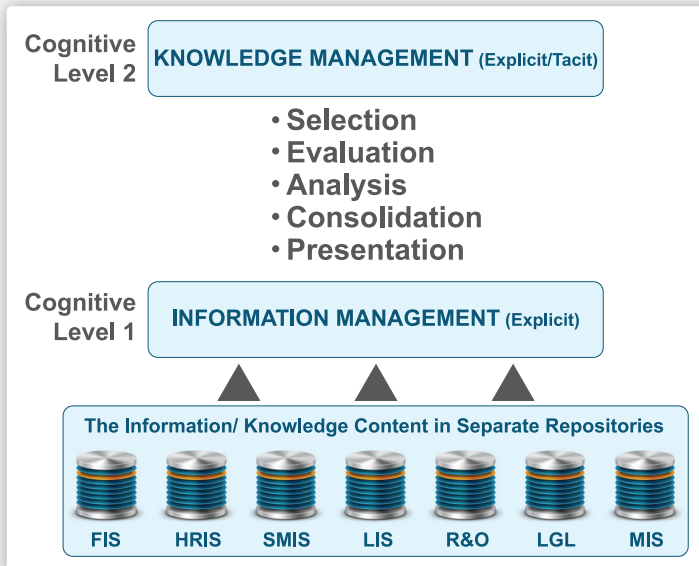


Figure 1: From Information to Knowledge: Processes involved in transforming Information into Knowledge

- Legend**
- FIS - Financial Information System
 - HRIS - Human Resource information System
 - SMIS - Sales & Marketing Information System
 - LIS - Logistics Information System
 - R&O - Retail & Operational Information System
 - LGL - Legal Information System
 - MIS - Management Information System

While explicit knowledge is easily accessible, acquiring tacit knowledge is more complex, giving rise to theoretical models of knowledge capture and transfer such as SECI, Hedlund, Cynefin, etc. On the practical level, knowledge can be captured and transferred using technology. Tools such as e-mails, blogs, facebook, Community of Practice (CoP), etc can be used for knowledge capture and transfer. Figure 3 shows how a problem about a defective car seat is channelled to a source in the form of an inquiry and the solution provided by the source is channelled back to the inquirer.

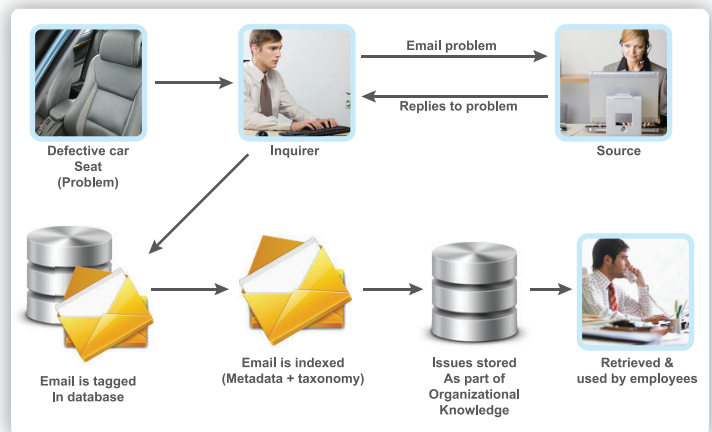


Figure 3: Knowledge Capture & Transfer

In the process, the inquiry as well as the solution are both recorded in the database, tagged via the use of metadata and stored in the database. The next time the same problem surfaces, there is no necessity to go through the whole process of inquiry again. A search in the organizational database using keywords will reveal the solution to the same problem without reinventing the wheel.

Integral to managing organizational knowledge is the need to develop certain competencies in order to ensure that whatever knowledge is stored in the organization's knowledge databases are easily and efficiently retrieved. Towards this end, whatever is stored in the databases must be organized using metadata and taxonomy – new terms to describe the age-old library functions of cataloguing, classification and indexing. The advent of ICT and the arrival of electronic resources have revived the use of the terms “metadata” and “taxonomy”.

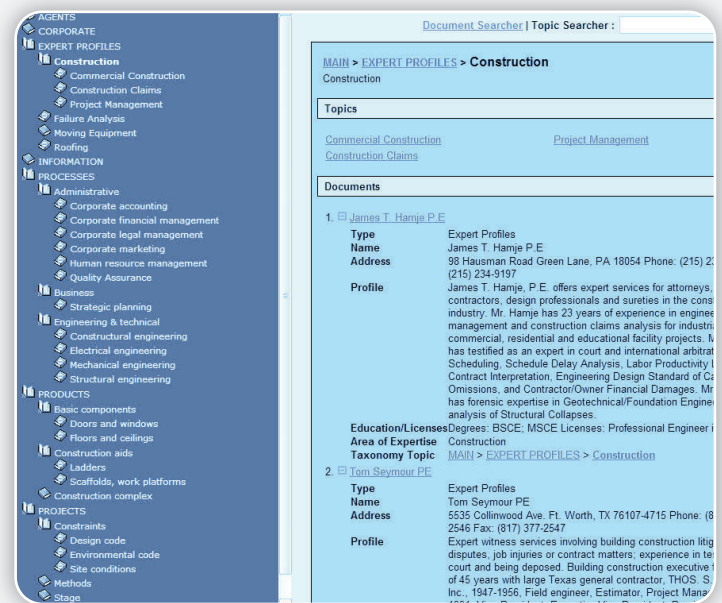


Figure 4: Knowledge Tree of a construction organization

Unlike the traditional library practice however where prescribed subject headings (example Library of Congress or Dewey Decimal Classification) are assigned to each item, in the case of KM, the terms used must be decided by the organizations themselves using terms, phrases, and keywords peculiar and familiar to the organizations only. In this way, the taxonomy is customised and individualized to suit the needs of the organization. The taxonomy used can develop the knowledge tree for the organization which would be used for retrieval purposes.

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Most organizations compile data and statistics daily but much of it remain in their raw form, not analyzed and not used for organizational needs. This is because information is only relevant at the point of need which is normally at the point of making decisions or policies (at all levels) or finding solutions to problems. At the point of need, information or knowledge should be made available so that when decisions are made or problems solved, it should be knowledge-based. With sufficient knowledge, subsequent and consequent action taken by the organization would be better ensured of success.

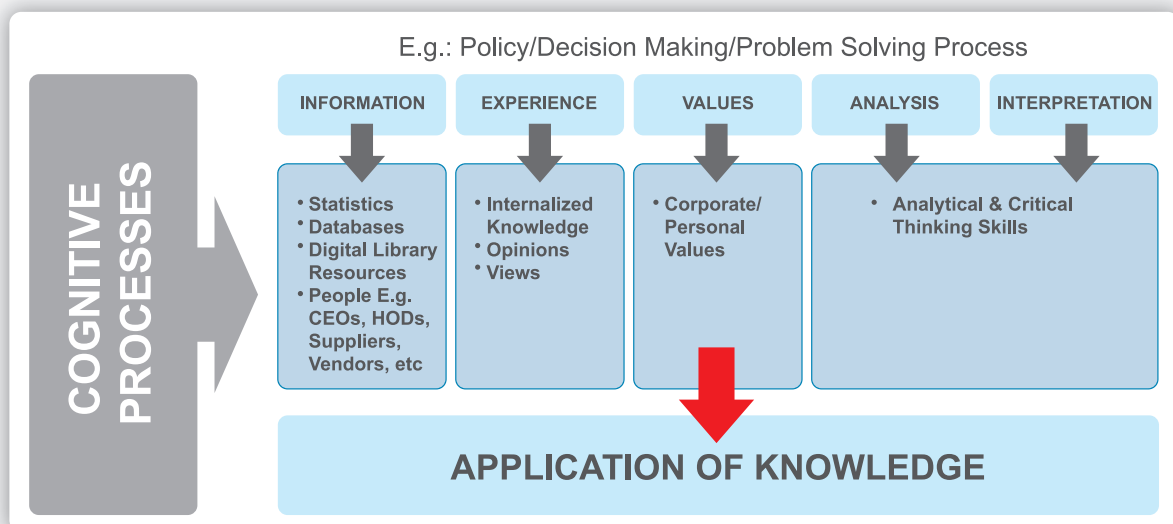


Figure 5: Transforming Information into Knowledge