Knowledge Management in the SocioTechnical World The Graffiti Continues

(Book Review)

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Knowledge Management in the SocioTechnical World The Graffiti Continues
Elayne Coakes, Dianne Willis and Steve Clarke (Eds)
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The book “Knowledge Management in the SocioTechnical World The Graffiti Continues” is about knowledge management from the socio-technical perspective. If you are interested in looking at the critical factors for the success of knowledge management systems in organizations from socio-technical perspective, this book will be of great use to you. This book gives a good collection of case studies and observations based on the individual and organizational experiences. In this process, this book examines the knowledge management taking into account the three important components of knowledge management namely people, organization and technology. Considering the complexity of the issues involved in knowledge management practice this book brings forth importance of bringing a synergy between people and technology for its success. The book gives a very good overview of how the domain of knowledge management is used in different organizations with different cultural and other differences as, it includes case study analysis from a wide range of countries, and with diverse business activities.

The book is divided into four parts based on the critical questions of knowledge management rising from a socio-technical perspective namely know-why, know-what, know-who and know-how. Except for the “how” part which addresses the technology perspective and issues, the rest of the questions namely “why”, “what” and “who” revolve around the social, technical and environment aspects of knowledge management.

The first section of “Know-Why” enlightens us with various recommendations for successful implementation of knowledge management applications based on their observations and experiences in various organizations. The substance of the analysis and recommendation in this section revolves around organizational change, focusing on the human factor at individual level and significance of top management fostering and embracing knowledge creation. Apart from this, emphasis is given on the importance of organizational role, incentive schemes to foster a knowledge sharing atmosphere, integration of social and technological aspects and their interplay in organizations.

The second section of “Know-What” is concerned with identifying and creating conducive condition for developing an effective knowledge management systems highlighting socio-technical aspects. In-depth analysis of people aspect is investigated in this section. Specific factors explored include interaction for effective group dynamics, personality type analysis, use of agent-based modelling and a self-sustaining and regulating culture in organizations. Also, cultural shift and initiatives are recommended to translate individual knowledge to organizational knowledge through creation of socio-technical environment. Besides this, the authors also propose encouraging individuals to contribute rather than hoarding in the knowledge centric organization. It was acknowledged that the technology is only an enabler and not a panacea for all success. On the whole this section concentrated more on people, community and organizational aspects of creating, sharing and communicating knowledge assets.

The third section namely “Know-Who” examines the knowledge management from socio technical perspective through the use of various case studies. It is an interesting and useful section as it uses real life applications. This will help in understanding and visualizing use of knowledge management, its problems and how to resolve
those problems in practical situations. Importance of socio construction approach in order to understand the organizational knowledge is recognized in this section. It is believed such a perspective will encourage social interaction between participating members. Authors also recommend fostering of knowledge sharing, collaboration and expanding organizational social networks. Finally, a case study in a manufacturing company looks at how an IT based information system can be designed to manage knowledge with minimal operational disturbances.

The last section of the book on “Know-how” examines organizational, people and technology aspects of knowledge management through a case-based approach. Core investigation in this section is on capturing, representing, converting and sharing of knowledge asset in various business environments. This section points out that the key components of knowledge management, namely people and culture, business process and technology, are to be considered as a whole and not as piece meal. Authors also recommend the use of SWOT analysis to identify the critical success factor for the organization. They propose the Knowledge Requirement System (KRS) approach to remove the communication gap between the developers of a system and the users of the system. They recognize this as one of the major reasons for systems failure. Technology was viewed as a facilitator for knowledge management initiative. Importance of culture of knowledge sharing and leadership role in encouraging such a culture is recognized in the case study.

The best part of the book is looking at the real application of social aspects of knowledge management in this domain. Another appealing aspect of this book is the inclusion of case studies from a wide spectrum of businesses from all over the world.

Anyone who is interested in socio-technical perspective of knowledge management, this book will be very useful. It does not matter whether you are an academic, a researcher, or a manager, whether you are an expert or a novice in the subject, this book should be a valuable asset for both learning and reference.