A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE REGARDING KNOWLEDGE IN ORGANIZATIONS

By Jon Boyle

How can your organization best leverage knowledge to get things done in the modern, complex project environment?

In many organizations with which I have been affiliated, I have found it can be difficult for practitioners and employees to bring ideas to fruition, and projects to completion, in this type of environment. Just take a look around. In this era of accelerated change, there are substantial efforts across several disciplines to address this question, such as the emphasis on the Agile approach to project management (PM) and the development and implementation of tools designed to harvest the potential benefits of Big Data and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

One facet of the solution that can result in significant gains is a focus on business services that address the capture and flow of knowledge in terms of the organization, individuals, and teams. In today's complex project environment, a strategic knowledge systems perspective is essential to uncover and define project relationships and the risks inherent in project knowledge interfaces.

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Knowledge often represents the unique requirements, solutions, and expertise shared across individuals, teams, projects, programs, and the broader organization. One way to define this knowledge is as *codified knowledge* (scientific knowledge, engineering and technical knowledge, business processes) and *know-how* (individual and team experience, techniques, processes, procedures, craftsmanship).

This knowledge may be further represented in *explicit* (objective) and *tacit* (subjective) dimensions of knowledge.

I have found that one important aspect of the organizational knowledge landscape is the social aspect of knowledge, a component that is often denigrated as a soft skill, seen as perhaps somehow less important than other harder skills, such as quantitative analysis, and is often tacit by nature. However, a better understanding of the social context of knowledge can contribute to desired outcomes, such as improved prioritization and a more pragmatic approach in using knowledge for better decisions.
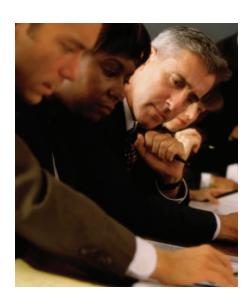
One look at case studies addressing project failures indicate that a disregard for social context can lead to organizations blaming the wrong things for failure, such as pointing to an explicit cause like a defective part (objective) when the tacit causes of poor managerial communications and a lack of organizational learning (subjective) were much more salient in contributing to the failure.

A strategic knowledge systems perspective helps managers and leaders better understand how organizations can improve and adapt in an unforgiving, complex, accelerated project environment. It can provide insight into the nature of the workplace realities that employees and practitioners experience.

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Unless this is analyzed and contingencies are planned for, the risk of failure can increase. Capturing and effectively relating the journey to achieve organizational outcomes is a story that each individual and team creates and shares. Relating this social context in both explicit and implicit perspectives helps to communicate where particular organizations are today and how these shared lessons can inform progress in using project knowledge for tomorrow.

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Dr. Jon Boyle serves as Graduate School USA's Knowledge Management thought leader. He has served in several capacities in public and private sector organizations, from industrial production lines and overseas military combat units to multinational corporations, NASA flight facilities, and academia. He possesses expertise in Cognitive Neurosciences, Industrial Organizational Psychology, Knowledge Management, Group Processes, Human Resources and Workforce Development, Business Strategy, Technology-Enabled Learning, Research and Development, and Process Improvement. Dr. Boyle most recently served in the NASA Office of the Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO), where he contributed to the development of the overall NASA Technical Workforce. He currently serves as a company CEO and teaches in several undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as maintaining an active research agenda.

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