

Regular

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Put it to the board: Yogesh Malhotra

In a recent issue of *CIO Insight*, it was noted that many IT executives said the term KM left a bitter taste in their mouths. This bitterness, however, is of their own making as IT vendors re-label old data-management solutions. Executives have been led to believe that relabelling solutions as KM tools gives them magical powers.

The problem stems from the unresolved debate over the difference between the constructs of data, information and knowledge that has occupied academics, practitioners and IT consultants. However, the dismal state of KM technologies is an issue lost in theoretical debate. Everyone buying and selling these technologies has assumed that meanings and actions are inherent in data stored in databases, programs or archives. Nothing could be further from truth – activities affecting corporations, societies, and nations worldwide are intrinsically human in nature.

While advising the marketing head of a consumer-appliances division, I suggested avoiding the KM label and advised determining desired performance outcomes. I helped the organisation recognise how outcomes could result from the decisions and actions of their executives, managers and stakeholders. Organisational culture and what inspires and motivates stakeholders to commit to a strategy was imperative. We established how technology could enable decision making and action-focused activities that would lead to performance outcomes. We reframed the focus of KM on leveraging consumer insights that mattered to the organisation from a strategic perspective and developed the distinction between 'information' and 'insights'. Our focus on meanings, decisions and actions required to achieve outcomes helped frame how various technologies and systems could facilitate 'anticipate, sense and respond' activities.

We are seeing a strong demand for 'actionable intelligence'. However, intelligence does not come neatly labelled as 'actionable' and 'non-actionable'. Actions result from sense making and interpretation. 'Actionable' is an attribute resulting from decisions and actions, and is not inherent in static data, information or intelligence. Technologies don't make decisions and take actions; decision makers and responsible executives do. Regardless of the level of accuracy or reliability of information, data, logic and assumptions that go into the decision-making process, bottom-line performance results are the responsibility of those executives.

In future, don't blame decision-making and performance failures on labels such as KM. Technology is important, but it is employees, customers, partners and suppliers who you depend on for creating data and logic, sharing information, making decisions and taking actions that really matter. Cater to your people, processes and purposes first. Getting the right technology will better meet performance expectations once you have sensible business processes and an organisational culture that makes sense for your business strategy.



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