

Intellectual Capitalism

TURNING KNOWLEDGE INTO PROFIT

Does KM=IT?

There's a dangerous idea making the rounds that could retard your knowledge management efforts

BY CAROL
HILDEBRAND

OF ALL THE BUSINESS TRENDS of the past decade, perhaps none—possibly excepting reengineering—is more closely associated with technology than knowledge management. Quality circles don't demand a computer. Nor does the development of a learning organization or the adoption of a balanced scorecard. Technology will likely play an enabling part in these activities but not to the extent occasioned by knowledge management. In fact, KPMG LLP's Chief Knowledge Officer Michael J. Turillo says that "knowledge management cannot be done without technology." Maybe not. But knowledge management is in danger of being perceived as so seamlessly entwined with technology that its true critical success factors will be lost in the pleasing hum of servers, software and pipes. As vendors label their document management, database or groupware products "knowledge management solutions," executives can be excused for mistaking the software for the solution. It's not.

Yogesh Malhotra, founder, chairman and CKO of the @Brint Institute in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and @Brint LLC, a Web site devoted to knowledge management (www.brint.com), has identified some myths that surround the murky confluence of information technology and knowledge management.

MYTH: Knowledge management technologies deliver the right information to the right person at the right time. Malhotra says that this idea applies to an outdated business model. Information systems in the old industrial model mirror the notion that businesses will change incrementally in an inherently stable market, and executives can foresee change by examining the past. "The basic premise is that you can predict...how and what you'll need to do and that IS can simplify this and do it efficiently," he says. The new business model of the Information Age, however, is marked by fundamental, not incremental, change. Businesses can't plan long-term; instead, they must shift to a more flexible "anticipation-of-surprise" model. Thus, it's impossible to build a system that predicts who the right person at the right time even is, let alone what constitutes the right information.

MYTH: Information technologies can store human intelligence and experience. Technologies such as databases and groupware applications store bits and pixels of data. "But they can't store the rich schemas that people possess for making sense of data bits," says Malhotra. Moreover, information is context-sensitive. The same assemblage of data can evoke different responses from different people. "The reason this is important is that many information textbooks say that

Advertisers



CIO

ConsultWare

click to
demo
ConsultWare

Learn More...

Knowledge Management Research Center

(<http://www.cio.com/forums/knowledge/>)

while people come and go their experience can be stored in databases. But unless you can scan a person's mind and store it directly into a database, you cannot put bits into a database and assume that somebody else can get back the experience of the first person."

MYTH: Information technologies can distribute human intelligence. Again, this assumes that companies can predict the right information to distribute and the right people to distribute it to. And bypassing the distribution issue by compiling a central repository of data for people to access doesn't solve the problem either. "The fact of information in a database doesn't ensure that people will see or use the information," Malhotra says. "Most of our knowledge management technology concentrates on efficiency and creating a consensus-oriented view. The data therein is rational, static and without context." And such systems, he adds, do not account for renewal of existing knowledge and creation of new knowledge.

So when you next hear that KM is an IT-based activity, capitalize the *I* and lowercase the *t*. **CIO**

Senior Editor Carol Hildebrand can be reached at cjh@cio.com.

Find It Online

@Brint LLC

(<http://www.brint.com/>)

KPMG LLP

(<http://www.kpmg.com/>)

The CIO Service Center:

In this Issue of CIO:

▶ **Printer-friendly version**

▶ **Subscribe to CIO**



CIO Magazine - September 15, 1999
© 1999 [CIO Communications, Inc.](http://www.cio.com)

http://www.cio.com/archive/enterprise/091599_ic.html