

A study on the critical success factors for corporations embarking on knowledge community-based e-learning

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Abstract

Corporations have felt the pressure for fast-paced innovations and knowledge transfer as major driving forces in raising their sustainable competitive advantage and organizational total productivity. Thus, the development of the knowledge community through e-learning is an important strategy in implementing knowledge management policy. This paper illustrates an empirical study with which to conduct qualitative research of learning organization. From the case company's real progress and practical experience, some core principles were extracted from four managerial aspects, such as: strategy, technology, process, and personnel. These aspects were analyzed in order to understand the value chain framework and the major concerns of knowledge community development. Further, the main benefits are addressed and certain critical factors are proposed and shown in this paper to ensure the success of corporations embarking on knowledge community-based e-learning.

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1. Introduction

The learning capacity of a company's members determines its organizational competitiveness in this age influenced by a growing knowledge-based economy [20,30,37,43]. Since results generated from training and education programs, including company e-learning system establishment efforts, are often far from ideal [1,18,26,27,34], many companies have failed to achieve desired results. However, corporate competitiveness may be determined from the content of e-learning and social learning groups [32,33,41]. Therefore, it may become an essential corporate strategy to connect with the rapid development of knowledge communities surrounding e-learning while in the process of promoting knowledge management [16,17,19].

The primary goal of this study is to explore e-learning systems in the virtual communities associated with knowledge transfer. These systems are usually aimed at reducing costs and increasing efficiency (e.g., an

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effective use of long-distance education can reduce travel and other expenses). However, the primary objectives of training and development are to transform individual professional capabilities and to enhance overall the competitive advantage of the organization. Therefore, the focus points of this research are as follows:

- What differences are there between knowledge community-based e-learning systems and ordinary e-learning systems?
- How is a company to handle its social learning groups in order to facilitate organizational effectiveness and transform groups into active knowledge communities?
- What are the prominent points of procedural design and system planning necessary for establishing an organization climate of knowledge transfer?
- What are the benefits of knowledge community-based e-learning?
- What are critical success factors for knowledge community-based e-learning implementation?

This research exams an empirical study to conduct qualitative research for learning organization. In Section 1, basic concepts about e-learning and knowledge management were demonstrated, and then in Section 2 related literature reviews were presented. In Section 3, four aspects of the core principles drawn from the case company's real progress and practical experience were analyzed, namely strategy, technology, process, and personnel so as to understand what value chain framework and major works will be met with further development of knowledge community-based e-learning. The final section illustrates some critical factors to ensure the success of corporations attempting to create a knowledge community-based e-learning system. Last of all the main conclusions are summarized.

2. Literature review

2.1. Goals of e-learning

e-Learning [25, p. 28] is defined as, “[T]he use of Internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and performance.” The e-learning goals are to establish a learning organization and nurture a corporate culture based on knowledge sharing [20,23,28–30]. Hopefully knowledge innovation can be promoted through the learning of an organization, the sharing of knowledge, and the creation of a knowledge community. This way knowledge dominance can be achieved more speedily and consistently maintained. This in turn can hasten the collaborative climate of higher intellectual capital, organizational creativity, innovative business models, and raise the overall company value and efficiency [15,21,31,36,38,39].

2.2. Knowledge management and e-learning

Davenport and Prusak [6] point out that knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. Jennex [13] defines knowledge management as the process of selectively applying knowledge from previous experiences of decision making to current and future decision making activities with the express purpose of improving the organization's effectiveness. O'Dell and Grayson [22] see knowledge management as a strategy to be developed in a firm as a way to ensure that knowledge reaches the right people at the right time and to share the information to improve the overall function of the organization. However, since there is no universal definition of knowledge management, it is often recognized in a generalized sense, for example: as a generic process through which organizations generate value from knowledge and also as the creative and innovative capacity of human beings [2,4,9].

Knowledge management can also be relevant to the use of e-learning systems within a company, systems which are extremely beneficial to company growth. Hammer and Champy [10] use four important aspects of business – cost, quality, service and speed – to demonstrate the value of e-learning systems. Rosenberg [25] points out four critical success factors for implementing an e-learning strategy which includes culture, champions, communication, and change. In addition, since knowledge management is regarded as an important part of developing e-learning, finding a way to successfully transfer ordinary e-learning to

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