

Extract from the article ‘Strengthening lateral relations in organisations’

through knowledge management

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An extract from the interesting article by DNV Consultant’s Rob van der Spek, Eelco Kruizinga and Annelies Kleijnsen



Organisations are regularly restructuring their activities in order to maintain a firm grip on their business area. In doing so, they are struggling with the challenges of orientation to regions, customer groups, technologies, disciplines, projects and products. Knowledge management can contribute to the successful implementation and realisation of restructuring issues. This article by DNV focuses on ways to anticipate inherent weaknesses in the knowledge infrastructure.

Knowledge management and organisational design

There are numerous examples of organisations, both from the private and the public sector that have shifted their focus from product orientation to customer orientation. In contrast, counter-examples exist of organisations that have moved in the opposite direction.

Organisations’ drive to re-direct their orientation is largely inspired by external developments (e.g. market, competition), but internal considerations – particularly those relating to cost efficiency (synergetic effects, shared services) – may also play a role. Reorganisations of this type usually result in an organisational design with a dominant orientation: customer, technology or market, solutions or projects. Organisational development energy is subsequently focused on the newly chosen orientation and the process that should lead to the “new” organisation.

Although early management literature already stressed the importance of lateral relations, existing knowledge infrastructures based on natural relations in the organisation may nevertheless be weakened. For instance, whereas a collective knowledge infrastructure for acquiring, storing and sharing knowledge about products will be developed in the case of product orientation, this infrastructure may well become suboptimal and even obsolete in the case of a transition to customer orientation: it is unclear who knows what about the products, experts are hard to find and, ultimately, mistakes will hamper service delivery to customers.

Knowledge management can be applied specifically for the purpose of developing knowledge infrastructures that compensate for these “weaknesses” in “newly structured” or existing organisations. Central to this approach is the identification and implementation of lateral relations creating cohesion between organisational units and facilitating collective knowledge and learning processes with a focus on relevant orientations. The article illustrates such an approach by introducing two case studies. Subsequently, steps and additional measures are discussed that need to be taken by organisations in order to apply this approach. The article concludes with a review of various prerequisites for successful implementation of this approach.

More information

If you want more information, please look at www.dnv.com/knowledgemanagement. Or contact Managing Consultant Rob van der Spek by e-mail (rob.van.der.spek@dnv.com) or tel.nr. +31-0-2308900. If you want to read the complete article, please take a look at:

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