

Knowledge Portal: A Tool to Support Scholastic Honesty Program

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Abstract: Complexity and fast growing amount of information that organizations have to deal with, creates a need for Knowledge Management Systems. Knowledge portals represent effective applications of knowledge management thanks to their versatility, functionalities and ease of use. These portals should be dynamic, providing each individual user with their own view of the information resources that is current. Scholastic Honesty program at Vysoka Skola Manazmentu/City university has been dealing with issues of effective information dissemination and knowledge sharing in this specific area since its introduction as a part school's efforts to ensure academic integrity. This short paper provides an overview of advantages of a knowledge portal as a supportive tool in this effort. It discusses the main componets and functionalities of knowledge portal that provides knowledge transfer, storage, creation, integration and application by providing access to knowledge artifacts. The challenges of deployment of such portal with proposals to their solutions are also discussed.

Keywords: knowledge, knowledge spiral, knowledge management system, knowledge portal, knowledge portal components, knowledge portal functionalities, scholastic honesty, academic integrity, knowledge portal challenges

1 Introduction

Knowledge is viewed as basic resource for organizations which means that organizations can be viewed as knowledge systems. The fact that knowledge is kept in minds of individuals makes it dispersed and not readily available when and where it is needed. This problem can be solved by knowledge integration through knowledge portals that serve as single access points to organizational knowledge reprocessed in a way that is applicable and useful to knowledge seekers.

A basic portal can be defined as a gateway to network-accessible resources (Intranet, Extranet, and Internet) which could be represented by a simple Web page. The first portals were rather simple, offering the visitors a static view of content from a small number of sources. They have been created as internet applications providing single access point for miscelaneous online information such as research documents, news, or links to specialized web pages [2]. For easier access to a vast amount of information, portals include advanced search engines and organizing schemes. Due to their focus on information, they are called information portals. These provide services supporting selection, organization, decription or evaluation of useful sites. YAHOO! was one of the first such portals. Gradual spread of such portals seems to be going against its original purpose as single access points, however it actually emphasizes the fact that portals are created to reflect common interest of certain community of users with common tasks and interests. That applies especially to internal organization portals. Here different departments have different requirements for information access and their organization. Information portals used by knowledge works are referred to as knowledge portals [5].

As the awareness of Internet in communities has increased, so did the expectation of a usable and acceptable Web portal. People are no longer satisfied with generic portal designed to meet the lowest common denominator of all of the target audiences. Nowadays, there is an increased need for personal portals which are personalized and possibly customizable for an individual. These portals should be dynamic, providing each individual user with their own view of the information resources that is current [6].

2 Knowledge portals

One of the main aspects of knowledge management is getting expert knowledge created by knowledge workers throughout their working experience and providing access to this knowledge for a community of coworkers. Information technologies enable this through knowledge portals that have been developed as one of the key means for support of knowledge work tasks. Knowledge portals are systems focusing on providing easy and quick access to information as well as support for knowledge workers communities that share the same goal.

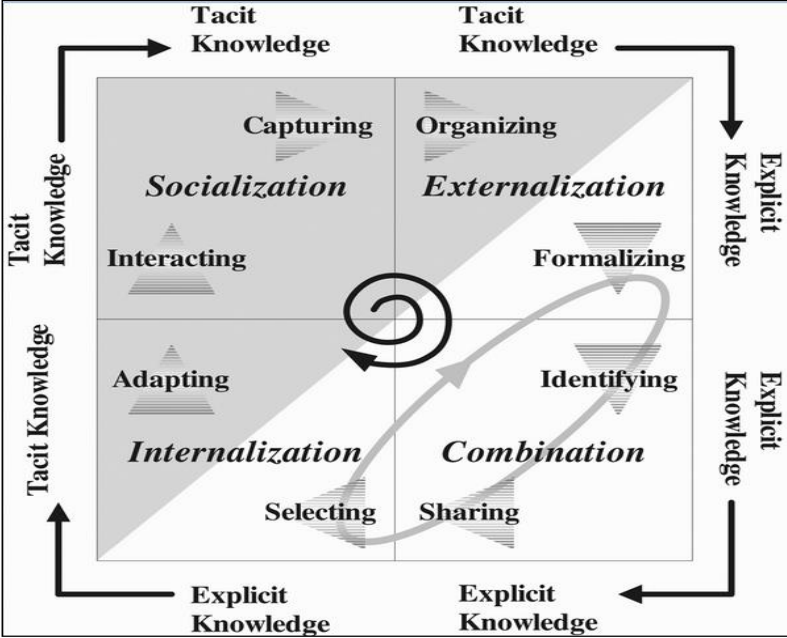


Figure 1, SECI model [7]

When we get back to SECI model of knowledge transformation depicted in Figure 1, application of explicit knowledge to problem solving in an organization, creates tacit knowledge initiating new knowledge spiral. In this model, knowledge is continuously converted and created as users practice and learn. This cycle cannot function without technological support which is represented by knowledge portals [5].

The goal of a knowledge portal is to make knowledge accessible and allow users knowledge exchange. They are addressing a specific area of interest, thus serving a certain community of users. Even small sized

portal can contain a vast amount of stored information which can be difficult to present and refind. The question of how to effectively manage such knowledge becomes urgent.

The Knowledge portal is a type of portal that provides knowledge transfer, knowledge storage, knowledge creation, knowledge integration and knowledge application by providing access to knowledge artifacts [4]. In addition to repository function of a regular portal, knowledge portal should provide network oriented components and functionalities. Knowledge portal should enable connectivity of users based on their expertise through collaboration and communication tools. Typical components and functionalities of knowledge portal are Knowledge Organization Systems, Repository Access/Knowledge Repositories, Applications and Services, Collaboration and Communication Tools, Personalization and Role Management and Unified Interface as depicted in Figure 2.

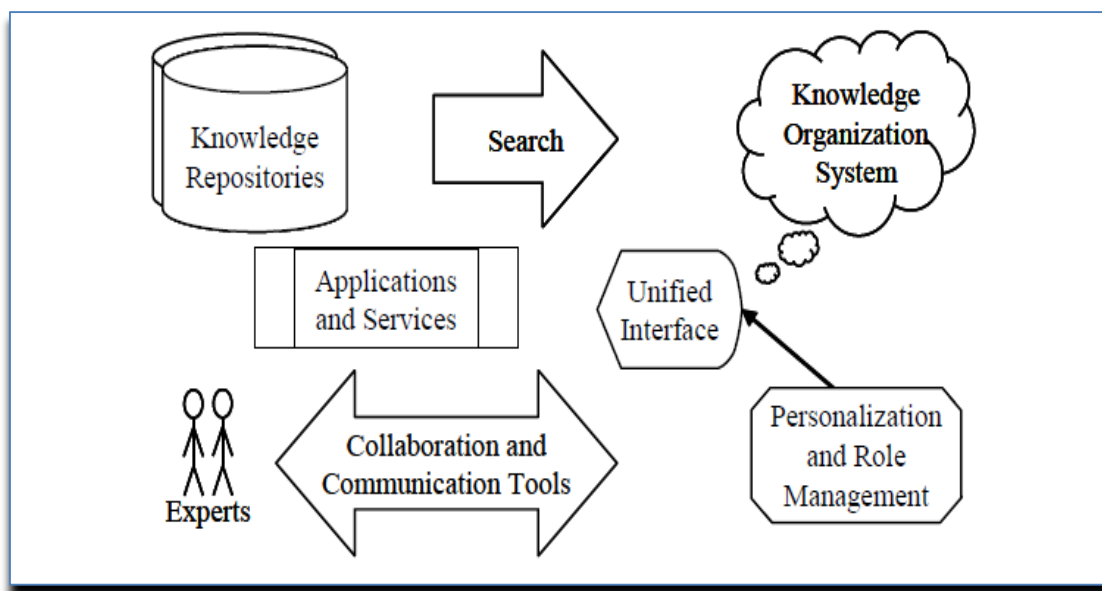


Figure 2. Components and Functionalities of Knowledge Portal [4]

Knowledge Organization System is represented by a system responsible for codifying and classifying knowledge artifacts from different sources. Components of this KOS are categorizations and registers. The key feature of knowledge portal is knowledge integration through access to *Knowledge Repositories* of an organization. These repositories can be simple or more complex enabling storage, indexing and synthesizing of knowledge artifacts that promotes knowledge reuse. Knowledge retrieval process is ensured by *search* function. That makes a search engine a fundamental component of knowledge portal. In order to facilitate a knowledge work, knowledge portal needs to provide an integrated access to various *software tools and variety of services*. They include multi-repository support and web service applications. As mentioned above, knowledge portals offer communication and collaboration tools to connect individuals to support knowledge transfer. These tools include email, shared document writing spaces, net meetings, video conferences. *Personalization and Role Management* represent and upgrade functionality compared to regular Web portal. It is an important feature to achieve higher degree of structure and usefulness of retrieved information. The purpose of personalization and management roles is to predetermine knowledge

flows to specific user groups. Personalization can help to avoid an overload of information and save browsing time. The last component involves *unified interface*. It represents the visual contact with a user and provides direct access to relevant features of the portal [4].

3 Scholastic honesty program supported by knowledge portal

What makes portals so useful, is their efficiency. As the amount of data in organizations is growing, it is essential to provide focused information within a short time frame. It should not provide just a collection of content, but more importantly integratoin of applications. Portal will never satisfy all information needs, but organization can create a gateway providing a significant amount of core information. A vast amount of infomraon in educational institutions is stored in different ways and it may be challenging tho provide this information to those who need it and can benefit from it the most. Many time such infomration is tored or published in means that are contributive to immediate and broad dissemination. Knowledge portal could be helpful in increasing this distribution, integrate dynamic query and display of data, and thus greatly increasing the utilization of critical knowledge for institutional decision making [6].

Vysoká Škola Manažmentu v Trenčíne/City University is unique in Slovakia in the area of scholastic honesty and application of zero tolerance to the acts of dishonesty by its students. The school in cooperation with its mother university City University of Seattle has been trying to implement effective tools to fight acts of scholastic dishonesty. The ultimate goal of this program is not to punish cheaters, but to build a name as an institution whose graduates are people with high ethical standards.

The success of each program (system) depends on the ability of the organization to implement such system and the capabilities of people implementing it as well as all those who are going to be affected by the system, or will become its part. There are several areas in which the Scholastic honesty system at VSM can be improved. Whole program could function better by applying knowledge management principles of workgroups and creating knowledge sharing culture. That will help to create a knowledge management system from existing system. Another way to enhance the whole system of Scholastic honesty is by creating a knowledge portal.

Currently, there are problems with effective information dissemination among academics, staff as well as students. The main source of information on SH is the institution portal, specifically one of its parts consisting of posted documents representing the basic information on Scholastic Honesty Program at VŠM/CU. Based on the recent study conducted on a sample of 363 students from a population of 1440 students, second most significant source of information on SH issues after teachers was considered the VŠM portal [3]. Thus, by focusing more on this source of information and by creating Knowledge Portal including above mentioned components and functionalities, we could synthesize the knowledge of all involved parties and to interconnect individuals in order to provide “one-stop knowledge shop”. There are many other documents, databases, reports, minutes, case studies that are available, but are not organized and structured in a knowledge repository. All the instructors participate in hearings of the scholastic honesty committee to deal with cases of violation of scholastic honesty policy, including student body representatives. Their experience and knowledge gathered during these hearings is however not stored and

managed to provide a source of knowledge for the entire academic community. Although there are reports being provided on regular basis by the chair of the scholastic honesty committee through email, systemized knowledge base is missing. There is no platform for discussion groups, chat, web conferencing or other ways of sharing among the academics, staff and students focusing on scholastic honesty. An effective knowledge portal could provide all that in order to increase awareness of importance of scholastic honesty for the entire institution's community efforts to insure academic integrity, which is the basis of any school's reputation and the value of its degrees.

4 Challenges of knowledge portal implementation

In order to make the launch of a knowledge portal successful, that means it being frequently used by users and providing useful knowledge, there are 3 challenges needed to be considered as defined by Loebbecke and Crowston [4]. The challenges are:

- A) Encouraging sufficient contribution
- B) Having favorable organizational culture
- C) Achieving knowledge integration

These three challenges are to be dealt with when developing the knowledge portal for scholastic honesty program. The authors are offering some proposals for coping with these challenges.

The first one is referring to usefulness of knowledge portals. They are useful only if knowledge is contributed by the users. This concept involves costs represented by time and effort devoted to creation of implicit or explicit knowledge. Knowledge means power and by sharing the knowledge, people may feel loss of power by making their knowledge less unique and valuable. The proposal to this challenge is to increase motivation for knowledge sharing. The costs may seem to be higher than benefits received from knowledge sharing, so the motivation should come from reciprocity, i.e. ability to seek knowledge later on as a compensation for an own contribution. Another source of motivation may be altruism. The joy of helping others without expecting anything or little in return can be a motivating factor – e.g. Wikipedia. This works better for environments where the knowledge contributor has some connection to other users.

The second challenging factor is the organizational culture. It can affect the people's willingness to share knowledge or to use a system to seek knowledge. Competitive culture may motivate people to knowledge hoarding instead of sharing. On the other hand, culture that is supportive may lead to creation of environment in which a person does not consider his knowledge to be distinct from organization's knowledge. Organizational culture can create strong social norms that reduce knowledge hoarding. The key role in successful deploying of knowledge portal is played by senior management. Still another incentive is a use of group-level performance rewards rather than an individual-level performance rewards.

The third challenge relates to factors which complicate knowledge integration. Systems in general are good in handling a codified knowledge, i.e. explicit or tacit knowledge that is explicated. These however create costs and loss of knowledge which takes place when codifying the explicit knowledge and thus dissociating it from its context. Next difficulty comes from variance of users. In order to integrate customer's knowledge, different mechanisms have to be used because this type of knowledge is more

dispersed than organizational knowledge. It involves also the leakage issue since easily available knowledge to customers is also available to competitors. The quality of knowledge in knowledge portal repository is assured by validation processes. Stronger efforts in this area will increase perception of knowledge quality and enable knowledge integration. However, these efforts may be costly, since contributors will be less motivated to knowledge sharing when they know their contribution are going to be reedited, rejected or delayed.

All of the above mentioned challenges and suggested proposal for their solutions are depicted in Figure 3.

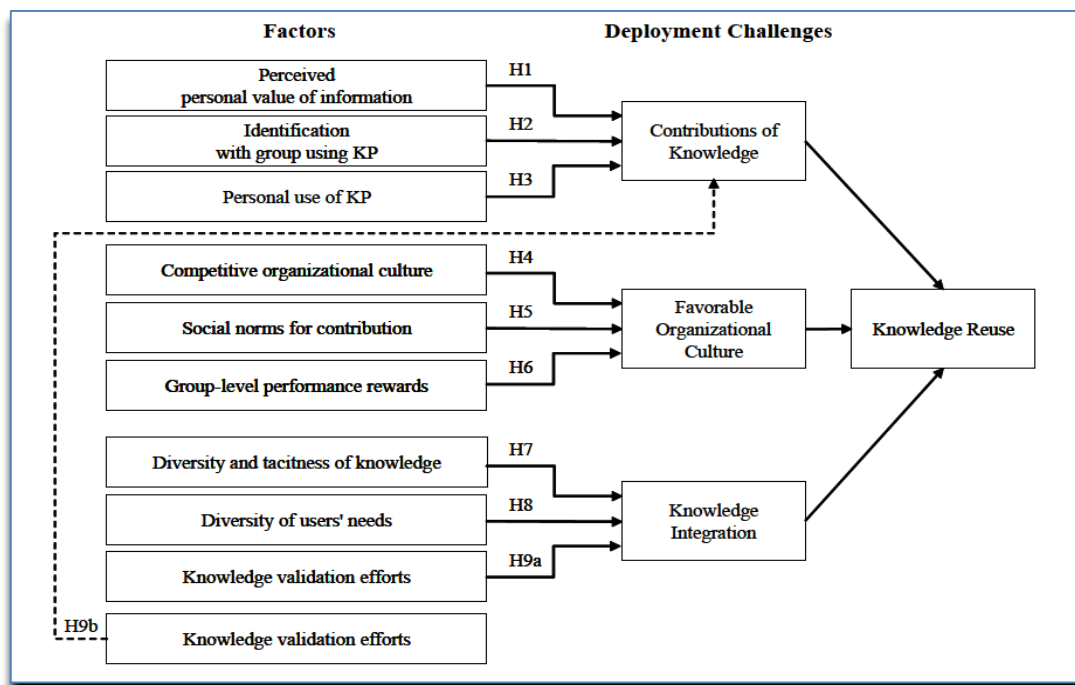


Figure 3. KP Implementation challenges [4]

5 Conclusion

All of the above mentioned challenges to be overcome require creation of knowledge sharing culture in an institution. Knowledge sharing can be a natural for functioning of many organizations, but for others it may be an unknown term. Examples of Organizations as Whirlpool or Hewlett-Packard show that successful organizations are based on social networks [1]. Knowledge is gathered from experience and sharing of experience with colleagues. Creation of such environment requires providing for opportunities to share knowledge. Knowledge portals can be powerful tools when they motivate individuals to contribute, operate in favorable organizational culture and support knowledge integration.

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