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Knowledge is Power

In March we were invited to join a very interesting event organized by the Chamber of Commerce in Lüneburg. The topic was "Knowledge Management". It was mainly about keeping the knowledge of leaving staff members in the company. The speaker, Prof. Gudrun Behm-Steidel gave us a lot of information and inspiration.

From a strategic point of view, knowledge management is of essential importance. What would happen in your company if knowledge carriers were not there anymore? One of the participants told us that he had spent hours searching for an important email that one of his employees (who had called in sick) had saved somewhere in the file system. Well, they just could not find the mail.

A graphic consisting of a blue rectangular border containing the text "I QUIT!" in large, bold, black capital letters.

This is even more difficult when employees have left the company. It might cost you a lot of time and money to get the knowledge back.

There is a solution: Knowledge Management

There are a lot of methods to set up a successful knowledge management system. You will find an abundance of literature covering this topic. The heart of your system could be a data base of all tasks and procedures, combined with necessary competences and all employees who presently manage these areas. You might need a special software to do it, but you can also check software you already use if it can work for this list, too. Please consider data protection rules in your country as you work with personal data. In Germany this is a central issue.

Here is a good way for a simple start:

- Set up a simple (Excel) table.
- In the columns, write the names of the employees, and in the rows list up all the tasks and processes in your company.
- Now you can decide how much every employee knows about a task or a process. You can

create classes to describe the state of knowledge. Find your own names or symbols for these classes or use recommendations from books. Here is an example, inspired by Dr. Klaus North, one of the main experts of knowledge management in Germany:

- „Specialist“ who works in this area and knows everything about it,
- “Experienced Player” who knows a lot but not as much as the specialist,
- “Occasional User” who knows a little bit about the topic but could not do the full job.

Now you can mark the level of knowledge of the employees concerning the tasks. You can easily see any danger right away: For example, if you have only one specialist for an important task, there will be a problem if this person leaves or is sick for a longer time.

Please be aware that you can hardly force an employee to share knowledge. Her or his willingness will be strongly influenced by your company culture. Should employees find out that they get promoted faster when they keep their knowledge and information private, sharing knowledge will not make sense from their point of view. Therefore, it is a good idea to reflect on corporate culture and create an atmosphere of openness and team spirit on all hierarchy levels.

I strongly recommend that you start working on this interesting and demanding topic and use the power of knowledge in your company.

Editorial Notes

About the Author

Wiebke Brüssel is a graduate in business administration and managing partner of Strategiebüro (The Strategy Office) in Germany.

We moderate planning processes - including preparation and documentation. From a single question to strategic corporate planning. Our clients are companies and organizations in the private, social, and public sectors, companies at the beginning of their development, and founders.

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