5 Knowledge Management Tools

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Today, the support of daily work with software tools is normal. The use of software is expected just as much for simple work, such as writing a letter, as for the introduction of new methods for the organization of work. Even knowledge management is assumed to be able to offer more than a theoretical approach: it must also be practicable.

As a universal tool, the computer is used to handle the diverse tasks of many employees in a firm. However, work and the exchange of knowledge still take place in discussions, meetings, and so forth, as well as on the computer. Not all knowledge has to be or can be saved explicitly and directly in the system.

On the one hand, software that supports knowledge management should intelligently use as many existing electronic sources of knowledge as possible. On the other hand, such solutions should provide a means for the user to include knowledge that is not already explicitly available. All this should be acquired with the least possible user effort.

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Fig. 5.1: Verbal Communication Dominates

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situated more to the left of the graphic, meetings and conferences are situated more to the right.

Computer-based tools for knowledge management only improve a small part of the exchange of knowledge in a company. The richness and effectiveness of face-to-face communication should not be underestimated.

Computer tools promote knowledge management. The access to knowledge they enable is not subject to time or place. A report can be read in another office one second or a week later.

In the following chapter, the reader is provided with a general classification of knowledge management tools that is oriented on the basic functions of knowledge management (core activities are: create, store, distribute and apply). This makes it possible to independently classify tools according to one’s own needs with the functions of knowledge management in mind. In addition, examples of market leaders and innovative products are included in our classification. This is very helpful for investment purposes.

First, we need a definition of which knowledge is targeted with knowledge management tools and what tools mean in this context. In order to specify the demands for tools we need a common understanding about the content, i.e. what does knowledge mean? The term ‘tool’ also needs to be specified in order to demonstrate the support for knowledge handling.

5.1 Definition of knowledge

Data, information, and knowledge are inter-related: the transition from one to the other is not always clear-cut. These three concepts form a continuum. In our opinion, a philosophical discussion about the use of knowledge management in firms cannot achieve goals. We will therefore formulate a pragmatic definition in this chapter.

Data means the individual facts that are found everywhere in a company. These facts can be easily processed electronically and the gathering of large amounts of data is not problematic today. However, this process alone does not lead to appropriate, precise, and objective decisions. Data alone is meaningless. It only becomes information when it is relevant and fulfils a goal. Relevant information is extracted as a response to a flood of data.

However, which knowledge is sensible and useful is a subjective matter. The receiver of information decides whether it is really information or just noise. In order to give data meaning and thus change it into information, one condenses,

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