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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AS A BUSINESS PROCESS

The R&D department of the Recticel group started in 2000 with a knowledge management program. Not just like that - or because many companies did…

The R&D department started one year earlier with a self assessment according to the EFQM model (European Foundation of Quality Management). Within this framework it became apparent that KM was one of the projects that was of extreme importance as a key process in R&D. The self assessment revealed not only the proof of the need - but also resulted into a common choice of the R&D management to have KM as a key element in the daily life of an R&D engineer.

It thas become clear that KM is not to be looked after as just another IT issue - it is much more than that. From past experiences as well as from our recent work some of the lessons learned can be generalised - also for other business environments :

- Knowledge should not reside in the heads of experts or in cupboards , get dusty and as a function of time become inaccessible. The R&D department divided its knowledge in three different types : know who (is the expert), know how (the knowledge how to do things), know what (the knowledge on products and processes).

- Knowledge doesn't flow by itself - this needs to be organised. The use of knowledge should be made easy - without hurdles - in a format that is very recognisable throughout different business units. For that reason the way of working in different business areas was put onto a common platform.

- KM should be looked after as a process and not as a one time action. It has to be thought through what will be put in and very important the input has to be reliable and not outdated. Therefore a process with its appropriate owners has been set-up - taking care of approval & archive processes.

- A good knowledge management set-up may well lead to a redesign of some business processes. Such an example is Recticels project follow-up of R&D projects. ISO 9001, QS 9000, good project management requirements have all been put inherently into one new way of working - with a tremendous advantage that all the needs are build in and become by definition daily practices. It is also of an absolute need that the organisation is open for such a change. This openess was mainly created by the fact that KM was not handled as just another ad-hoc issue - but fit in a broader total quality context.

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