First Quarter, 1996

Strategy • Management • Competition   Strategy & Business
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Some Principles of Knowledge Management (Abstract)

By Thomas H. Davenport

We do not know one millionth of one percent about anything," said Thomas Alva Edison who probably wouldn't have appreciated Professor Davenport's observation that the most valuable asset companies have is the knowledge of their employees. More than ever, companies are realizing that their real advantage lies in what they know. But how do you manage knowledge?

Enunciating 10 principles of knowledge management, Professor Davenport establishes a framework which senior company executives can use to govern their approach to knowledge. He also uses the Hewlett-Packard Company, in an accompanying case study, to illustrate how rapidly the knowledge management concept can spread throughout a company even without a top-down mandate.

Systems such as the World Wide Web and Lotus Notes are giving managers real opportunities to capture and distribute knowledge. Hewlett-Packard's Product Processes Organization (P.P.O.), for example, has formed a Knowledge Management Group and is developing a Web-based knowledge management system called Knowledge Links. The group intends to develop a variety of services with applications not only for P.P.O. but for Hewlett-Packard as a whole.

Professor Davenport warns that managing knowledge in organizations will lead to new problems and issues, even resistance by what he calls an 'anti-intellectual' orientation in the United States. But he points out that as free natural resources and cheap labor are exhausted, the last untapped source of commercial advantage is the knowledge of people in organizations.

Reprint No. 96105