

A radio interview with a human resources manager

**Interviewer:** Hello. Today on Business Focus I am talking about Knowledge Management with Ms. Twomey, who is the Human Resource Manager for a large, multi-national company. Ms. Twomey, has Knowledge Management changed the way your company works?

**Ms. Twomey:** Oh yes, since adopting Knowledge Management strategies, we have had to make many changes to the way we work, from changing the technology we use and the way we use it, to changing people's ideas about the best way to work.

**Interviewer:** And what has been the biggest challenge?

**Ms. T:** Without a doubt it is has been trying to get our staff to accept and adopt knowledge management practices. This was a tough challenge because our company had a culture which was not particularly open to the idea of knowledge management. So, I would say definitely the people side required the biggest change.

**Interviewer:** You mention a company "culture". Can you explain what you mean by that?

**Ms. T:** Yes, certainly. Imagine you start work for a particular company. In the beginning you are not sure what you can and can't do. For example, can I go for a coffee break at 11? Or, who should I speak to if I have a problem with the computer? Over time, you see what your fellow colleagues do – you take their lead – and you adapt your way of working to how the other employees in that company work. You learn what is acceptable behaviour for that company. One of the best definitions of company culture is "it's the way things are done round here".

**Interviewer:** Why did your company culture create such a challenge when adopting Knowledge Management?

**Ms. T:** Well, knowledge management is often about knowledge sharing – the company wants to be able to make the useful knowledge that one person has, available for other people to use. However, people can be very protective of what they know, there is prestige in being a recognised "expert" and having people ask you for your help. Obviously, if you share your knowledge so that it is freely available to everyone, you are giving up some of that prestige and you may also feel that you are giving up some "power". You may think that your knowledge is the reason why you have a job in the first place. So for a company it is obviously not enough just to say – "well, now we think you should share your knowledge". And in our company, experts did have status and there was also considerable prestige gained by thinking up new, original ideas rather than re-using the good ideas which worked for other people in other offices. So in these 2 areas of trying to implement Knowledge Management strategies, that of sharing knowledge and that of re-using knowledge, our company culture, the way we did things round here, had to change.

**Interviewer:** How were you able to overcome these problems?

**Ms T:** Well, first we had to make sure that our people understood the competitive advantage the company stood to gain if we changed our way of working. We organised staff meetings in each of our offices to introduce the aims of the KM strategies we were going to adopt. We also set up a group of Knowledge Management Champions throughout our network of offices. The duty of the Champions was to help get people on board and enthusiastic about KM and to be a point of reference on KM for the local offices. The Champions were fundamental to spreading the KM message and also provided an important link between HQ and local offices.

As well as the personnel aspect of KM, we also had to bring in new technology to help us. We set up special pages on our intranet which provided information on what was happening in our offices and we asked employees to advertise their fields of experience and interest so that it became much easier to find the knowledge we needed – we put these on a special database which everyone had access to. We also invested in new technology which made having online conferences easier to organise.

**Interviewer:** It sounds like it was a lot of work...

**Ms. Twomey:** Indeed it was and in the beginning there were some problems and hiccups but we are really seeing the benefits of implementing Knowledge Management now, as there is greater communication between the offices and people are realising that if we all work together, we can achieve much better results.

**Interviewer:** Well, thank you Ms Twomey, for agreeing to talk to us about Knowledge Management. That is all for today from Business Focus. Next week we shall be talking to the managing director of a chemical company who... (fades away)