



Common Knowledge: How Companies Thrive by Sharing What They Know

Nancy M. Dixon

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Breakthrough research on knowledge transfer reveals five proven methods for making knowledge sharing a reality - which are right for your company? While external knowledge - about customers, about competitors - is critical, it rarely provides a competitive edge for companies because such information is equally available to everyone. But internal 'know-how' that is unique to a specific company - how to introduce a new drug into the diabetes market, how to decrease assembly time in an automobile plant - is the stuff of which sustained competitive advantage is made. Nancy Dixon, an expert in the field of organizational learning, calls this knowledge borne of experience 'common knowledge', and argues that in order to get beyond talking about knowledge management to actually doing it, companies must first recognize that all knowledge is not created - and therefore can't be shared - equally. Creating successful knowledge transfer systems, Dixon argues, requires matching the type of knowledge to be shared to the method best suited for transferring it effectively. Based on an in-depth study of several organizations - including Ernst & Young, Bechtel, Ford, Chevron, British Petroleum, Texas Instruments, and the U.S. Army - that are leading the field in successful knowledge transfer, "Common Knowledge" reveals groundbreaking insights into how organizational knowledge is created, how it can be effectively shared - and why transfer systems work when they do. Until now, most organizations have had to rely on costly 'trial and error' to find a knowledge transfer system that works for them. Dixon helps managers take the guesswork out of this process by outlining three criteria that must be considered in order to determine how a transfer method will work in a specific situation: the type of knowledge to be transferred, the nature of the task, and who the receiver of that knowledge will be. Drawing from the successful - but very different - practices of the companies in her study and providing compelling illustrative stories based on the experiences of real managers, Dixon distills five distinct categories of knowledge transfer, explains the principles that make each of them work, and helps managers determine which of these systems would be most effective in their own organizations. "Common Knowledge" gets to the heart of one of the most difficult questions in knowledge transfer today: what makes a system work effectively in one organization but fail miserably in another? Going beyond 'one-size-fits-all' approaches and simple generalities like upper management involvement and cultural issues, this important book will help organizations of every kind construct knowledge transfer systems tailored to their unique forms of 'common knowledge' - and in the process create the best kind of competitive advantage there is: the kind that can't be copied.

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