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Skills Management – does it work?

Len Norman is principal of Conquest Consulting Pty Ltd, an Australian Company dedicated to making effective skills management a reality for all organisations.

He has had more than 20 years experience working with various approaches to skills management and during that time he has found no software tool with sufficient capability to effectively define the intellectual capital of an organisation. Thus Len, after leaving a 33-year professional development career at IBM, set about designing the perfect skills management vehicle. The result is SKILLSPEAK, a product invented, conceived, developed and owned in Australia.

SKILLSPEAK is disarmingly simple to use, as all good applications should be. It incorporates a flexible design, which provides functionality to meet the specific needs of a multitude of organisations and industries.

How is SKILLSPEAK different?

Len explains that to understand the answer to that question, one must look back into history and the very evolution of this class of application.

As long as people have had computers, they have attempted to gather data in organisations about what their people can do. These first took the form of basic spreadsheets in 2 dimensions. Topics or Skill Areas were cross-referenced to people and a basic skills audit resulted. Len calls this Phase 1. Many organisations still use this method with its inherent limitations.

In Phase 2, popular since the mid 80s, the big difference was the way skill areas were defined. Verbs appeared as a device to more accurately describe what people could do. Examples would be – Install Windows, Analyse Company Financials, Manage Projects, Troubleshoot Networks or Design Database Solutions. In this Phase, search facilities became more sophisticated. However these still lacked capability, flexibility and ease of use.

Phase 3 provides these missing attributes. SKILLSPEAK is the only tool available on the market which sits firmly in Phase 3. In this phase a skill definition is purely what any user wants it to be. The data is fully owned and controlled by users and any user may also instantly add any skill more perfectly representing what they can do or what they want done, thus eliminating “Charlie Chaplin look-alike contests”. [The apocryphal story goes that Charlie entered a look-alike contest and finished third!]

The Death of the Resume

SKILLSPEAK has the capability to cover the shortcomings of the resume, fast being discarded as a means of letting a prospective employer know what a candidate can do. The organisers of the “Charlie” contest would have been delighted to have a perfectly matched candidate but were denied that privilege by Charlie’s silence. Whenever people are being matched to work assignments, the level of accuracy now afforded by SKILLSPEAK is unprecedented. Deployment, Task and Recruitment Managers will be assured their role will have a greater positive impact on profit than ever before.

The Role of Experts in Profit

SKILL**S**PEAK is all about creating experts. People are managed towards relative expertise not only in their currently defined job but also compared to their career outlook. This gives unprecedented early warning to shift the organisational knowledge base in time to meet changing market demand and a suitably adjusted business plan. SKILL**S**PEAK provides a wealth of information to cost-effectively train people for their new challenges.

Experts create wealth in many ways including –

- promoting repeat business by quality service
- working at optimum efficiency and productivity
- finding profitable new opportunities
- spreading their knowledge internally
- commanding premium charge-out rates

Mining the Knowledge Gold Lode

Lew Platt, former CEO of Hewlett Packard, once proclaimed “If HP knew what HP knows, we would be three times more profitable”. The Knowledge Management community has been working ever since in pursuit of this “holy grail”. Len believes SKILL**S**PEAK has found the key to achieve this.

Len maintains that the business community has not yet become aware of the forces driving the success or otherwise of its professional workforce. They believe that “they do not have a problem”, or if they have a problem “it will be solved by the large, costly HRIS systems” or they have a problem but “this stuff is trivial and they will build their own in-house solution”.

Len’s message to these people is that if they take this too lightly they will miss a huge, timely opportunity to turn their businesses either into profit or into unprecedented profits. The solutions are there for those who can reach out for them. Len has acknowledged this trend and has set his organisation the task to establish as many strong reference accounts as possible and to take the word out to business. One clear message is that while employees perform, they would want to stay with an employer exercising superior people development practices. Instead of adding to attrition statistics, those good employees will postpone or even cancel a decision to resign. Job stability is not dead but simply waiting for the kiss from the prince to bring it back to its former glory and status as the greatest contributor to growing corporate profit.

When the CEO of a company using SKILL**S**PEAK techniques says “Our people are our greatest asset”, it is likely to be the truth.

Business will experience the adage “Work evaporates in the hands of an expert”

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