

M.B.A. DEGREE EXAMINATIONS JANUARY 2009

Fifth Trimester

P07BA543 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Time: Three Hours

Maximum Marks: 100

Answer ALL Questions:-

PART A (1 x 20 = 20 Marks)

1. Analyse the case and answer the questions given below:-

Stikeman Elliott Computerizes Its Brainpower

Stikeman Elliott is an international business law firm based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, noted for its work in mergers and acquisitions, antitrust, banking and finance, insolvency, intellectual property, and technology. The firm started with two lawyers in 1952 and today operates with more than 440 lawyers in eight offices in Canada, New York, London, and Sydney. It is one of the top business law firms in Canada.

Stikeman Elliott tries to promote a culture of initiative and high-performance standards. The key to creating and maintaining such a culture is in finding the best way to share the vast repositories of knowledge that reside in the brains of the lawyers and in the documents and files that the lawyers have been collecting throughout their careers. Foremost among the forms of knowledge critical to lawyers are precedents, which can include documents, forms, guidelines, and best practices.

Stikeman Elliott realized that an effective knowledge management (KM) system would enable the firm's lawyers to be more productive and contribute to sustaining the growth of the firm over the long term. In 2001, Stikeman Elliott selected Hummingbird Enterprise WebTop from Hummingbird Ltd. to build a portal for the firm's corporate intranet. The portal officially launched in 2002 under the name STELLA, which is a play on the name of the firm.

With STELLA in place, all of the firm's lawyers have easy access to the firm's knowledge assets, including important precedents, through a single access point using a Web browser. STELLA includes an expertise database, identifying lawyers with proficiency in specific areas. The portal also codifies the generation and organization of new precedents. Margaret Grottenthaler, the co-chair of Stikeman Elliott's national knowledge management committee, points out the importance of STELLA to the firm's junior employees: "It's the way to access all our research, all the legal how-tos. It's absolutely critical they use it. The more junior they are, the more likely they are to use it for those purposes."

An additional benefit of STELLA has been its ability to encourage the sense of community that Stikeman Elliott wishes to foster in its firm by growing organically rather than through mergers or acquisitions. Everyone in the firm, regardless of which office they work in, has access to the same resources. With everyone on equal footing, the multiple-office structure maintains the feel of a single organization. Stikeman Elliott believes that this working atmosphere positions the firm well among its competitors. The increased level of communication among the offices also prevents lawyers from duplicating work that has

already been done. Lawyers can customize the portal's home page so that they have quick access to the information they need most, whether it is their case files, news about their clients, or news about their clients' industries.

Stikeman Elliott integrated its portal closely with its document management (DM) system, which was also based on Hummingbird DOCS Open software. (Hummingbird has since been acquired by OpenText). Stikeman employees use the Hummingbird SearchServer search engine to search through the firm's document repository and internal legal and business content, including e-mail, and some external resources, such as LexisNexis.

Of course, a KM system is only useful if it is populated with the knowledge of its users. Some firms have difficulty with partners who hoard their knowledge, it being a valuable commodity. At Stikeman Elliott, the greater obstacle has been time. Partners are often too busy to contribute their work to the system. To combat this problem, the firm is building tools to automate the population of the knowledge database. With these tools, lawyers can easily create Web sites for their cases, clients, and industry research. STELLA has extranet capabilities that enable Stikeman Elliott to create sites on which clients can review and work with documents pertaining to their cases in a collaborative manner. Grotenthaler points out that the firm's KM system is actually geared toward the client, not the lawyer, because the ultimate goal is to serve the client better.

The KM team at Stikeman Elliott includes library staff and law clerks in addition to lawyers. All three groups can add precedents, memos, and even meeting notes to the system. The team emphasizes the importance of the human presence in KM and keeps in close contact with the firm's lawyers to make sure they have access to the knowledge they need. A human subject matter expert also reviews content that has been added and categorized by automated procedures, which ensures the quality of the information.

Questions

- i. What are the problems and challenges that a law firm such as Stikeman Elliot faces?
- ii. What solutions are available to solve these problems?
- iii. How did implementing Hummingbird address these problems? How successful was the solution? Did Stikeman Elliott choose the best alternative?

PART B (10 x 2 = 20 Marks)

2. Assess the role of knowledge management and knowledge management programs in business.
3. What are called the intellectual capital of an organization?
4. What are the five Cs filters that convert data to information?
5. Explain the three basic processes of knowledge management.
6. How can knowledge servers be basis for integration of existing technology, tools and information resources?
7. What are the basic sets of needs that KM platform must satisfy for effective collaboration across the enterprise?

8. Why the knowledge of an organization need to be audited?
9. Who comprises the knowledge audit team? What is their role?
10. What are the user interface features that need to be considered while designing the KM system?
11. What are the reasons that make mobile agents so attractive in designing KM platforms?

PART C (4 x 15 = 60 Marks)

12. a) "Internet offers hope for true integration of the islands of information and knowledge that dot the organizational landscape". Do you agree? How can a company best prepare to use the Internet as a channel for knowledge sharing? (15)

(OR)

12. b) "Knowledge Management is a complex activity that cannot deliver business impact without a concrete plan". Illustrate the roadmap involved in implementing Knowledge Management in organizations. (15)

13. a) Comprehend the technology components of a KM platform. (15)

(OR)

13. b) (i) Outline how alignment of KM and business begins with strategic visioning. (7)
(ii) Explain the process of articulating the link between business and knowledge strategies. (8)

14. a) "Companies do not know where they stand in terms of the knowledge that they possess". Illustrate the various steps involved in conducting the knowledge audit that helps them to identify the knowledge. (15)

(OR)

14. b) Discuss the structuring and role of KM team and their desired characteristics. (15)

15. a) "Building a KM system can often be the best, albeit more expensive, way to go, but customizing an off-the-shelf system is usually a faster alternative". What factors influence the Build or Buy decision of KM system? (15)

(OR)

15. b) How does the seven layers within the KM system architecture provide a guideline for the choice of technology components that enable effective sharing of knowledge across a distributed enterprise? (15)
