



JUJITSU AND THE ART OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

© ISYS Search Software Inc

ISYS Search Software Worldwide

United States

ISYS Search Software Inc
8775 East Orchard Road
Suite 811
Englewood, CO 80111
USA

Phone: +1 303 689 9998
Email: info-us@isys-search.com
Fax: +1 303 689 9997

Australia

ISYS Search Software Pty Ltd
Suite 102,10-12 Clarke St
Crows Nest NSW 2065
Australia

Phone: +61 2 9439 5800
Email: info-au@isys-search.com
Fax: +61 2 9439 8569

United Kingdom

ISYS Search Software (UK) Ltd
The Steam Mill
Steam Mill Street
Chester CH3 5AN
United Kingdom

Phone: +44 (0) 1244 313 216
Email: info-uk@isys-search.com
Fax: +44 (0) 1244 313 003

IT finds itself under renewed pressure to deliver more with less. In these pragmatic times, talk of five-year implementation plans and ten-person KM project teams strikes ice in the hearts of IT managers.

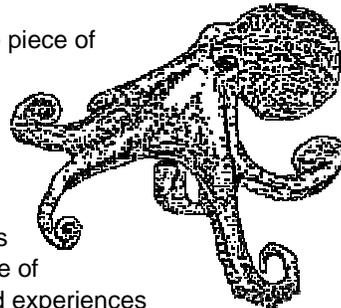
Knowledge Management is a particularly intractable problem. The accepted wisdom is that you must hire knowledge engineers and a CKO, build taxonomies, promulgate change through your organisation and purchase some very expensive software.

But this is completely the wrong approach. Knowledge Management isn't hard - it's easy.

We in IT are accustomed to building traditional software systems for which analysis, specification, design and implementation is exactly the right approach. Anything else would be doomed to failure.

But knowledge is an entirely different beast. It defies analysis and it thwarts design. Knowledge tends to infuse through an organisation and waft about in informal ways, gathering as amorphous pools in unexpected places.

Further, knowledge changes with time and viewpoint. A single piece of information might be seen as six completely different items of knowledge depending on your job title or task at hand. Thus to design a complex system or container for your knowledge is like wrestling a tofu octopus.



But knowledge desperately needs managing. As organisations downsize, or as people get promoted, their intimate knowledge of the job, what has been done, and a myriad of salient facts and experiences evaporate. Normal staff movements condemn any organisation to a form of creeping corporate amnesia. But even without this, organisations can spend an inordinate amount of time reinventing wheels.

Knowledge is less formal and more tacit than the information we're accustomed to dealing with in IT, and our innate desire to get our heads around the problem, analyse it and design a big-picture solution works against us.

What's remarkable is that it's exactly these attributes which make knowledge easier to manage, not harder.

Jujitsu and the Art of Knowledge Management



How does the unmanageability of knowledge make it easier to manage? It's like Jujitsu, the ancient martial art of self-defense which uses the attackers' own weight and strength against them.

Over-engineering and over-design are your enemy. So the key to success is to have a virtually "designless" solution. The immediate benefit is that you can't get the design wrong. Second, you don't need many people to make it. And third, it doesn't take long to do.

Your CKO should really be an evangelist of the benefits of knowledge, not a designer of cathedrals surrounded by a team of assistants. His charter should not be to have the grandest possible vision, but to deliver something simple that produces benefit as soon as possible.

Your expectations should change from a timeframe of months or years to one of days or weeks. The important thing is to get started, even if only deploying in pockets, and to take an evolutionary approach and get some early runs on the board.

Successes in KM tend to be very visible, and so the process of infusing KM into your culture will power itself. The trick here is to ensure that your KM deployment does not involve people changing their work habits in any way. KM should be the lubricant that makes things work better, not the abrasive that causes friction.

Of course, much of this sounds like the panaceas that IT has been chasing for the last 40 years. In traditional IT systems developments, we have no choice but to do it the hard way. In Knowledge Management, we can use the intractability of the problem against itself by choosing an appropriate product-based solution that avoids the long, complicated and error-prone bits.

Knowledge Management deployments don't have to be massive tasks, and if people are telling you it's a big job, then talk to different people. Knowledge Management offers a unique opportunity to score some tangible and visible IT wins in an organisation with little risk and effort.

Ian Davies is managing director of ISYS Search Software, makers of the ISYS range of KM and search engine software. <http://www.isys-search.com>.