

Case Study On Knowledge Management Mechanisms at Viant

Viant is a Boston-based consulting company specializing in helping clients build e-commerce businesses. It considers knowledge management as a key objective of the processes through which new employees are initiated into the organization and existing employees are rotated across functions and locations as mechanisms for knowledge management.

Viant makes excellent use of the orientation process to provide newcomers with knowledge of key clients, some company-specific skills, and the beginnings of an informal network. New employees begin their Viant career with three weeks in Boston. On arrival employees receive their laptop, loaded with off-the-shelf and proprietary software. Later that week they learn team skills and take a course in the company's consulting strategy and tools. For the next two weeks they switch back and forth between classroom work and teams, participating in a mock consulting assignment. They bond, meet all the officers, listen to corporate folklore, and party with the CEO. Employee rotation also plays an important role in knowledge management at Viant. In fact, conventional reporting relationships do not work here. Because people rotate in and out of assignments, consultants have no fixed relationship to a boss; instead, senior managers act as "advocates" for a number of "advocados." Performance reviews emphasize the growth in the employee's own skill level, and stock options recognize the knowledge they share.

Further this company uses a variety of means to capture knowledge. It employs a number of simple but unavoidable forms. Before every project, consultants are required to complete a quicksheet describing the knowledge they will need, what aspects of knowledge can be leveraged from prior projects, and what they will need to create along with the lessons they hope to learn that they can share with others later. A longer report, a sunset review, is produced at a team meeting to document what worked and what did not work well. Forgetting these reports is hard due to several reasons: "First, almost every document ends up on Viant's internal Web site, hot-linked every which way. Second, sunset reviews are done with a facilitator who wasn't on the team, which helps keep them honest. Third, every six weeks Newell's knowledge management group prepares, posts, and pushes a summary of what's been learned."

- *Source:* Stewart 2000. 1See <http://www.viant.com>.