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The term *citizenship* has both a legal and a social meaning. In a legal sense, citizenship is that set of rights and responsibilities granted to people in recognition of their attachment to a particular country or community. In a social sense, citizenship refers to the participation of people in their community as they fulfil and debate their rights and responsibilities.

We have the opportunity to engage in the information economy in a more meaningful way by recognizing our citizenship to this community. The Information Citizenship column focuses on our rights, roles and responsibilities as citizens of the information economy.

Defining our role as information citizens

1 Introduction

The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines citizenship as the state of living in a particular area or town and behaving in a way that *other people who live there expect of you*, alternatively, being an *active participating member* of society with *obligations, duties and privileges*. If citizenship implies the development of rights, responsibilities, duties and appropriate conduct of an active and involved member of a community, what are the rights, responsibilities, duties and appropriate conduct for knowledge workers or citizens belonging to the information economy?

Previously, economic theory was centred on two factors of production: labour and capital. Within the last 20 years, information and knowledge have been replacing capital and energy as primary wealth creating assets. A new economy that is based on networks of people is beginning to emerge. While human capital and financial capital work congruently in order for economic development to transpire, the emphasis is shifting to the creativity of human thinking within a constantly changing context.

Knowledge workers thus have several responsibilities and duties to fulfil if the knowledge economy is to remain vital and sustainable, including:

- Ensuring the capacity to develop a futures context
- Ensuring the capacity to continuously innovate
- Ensuring the capacity to identify and utilize cutting-edge technology
- Ensuring the capacity to unlearn, relearn and upskill, to become a learning community

In addition, as the world economy becomes more complex and fast-paced, the ability to collaborate to help others achieve success will become more and more important. This will require an internal, personal transformation that is more mature and sees competition, not in a destructive, winner-takes-all approach, but one that is constantly creative, competing to add to the abundance of social and economic needs. Such a transformation in thinking and action requires people who accept their responsibility as citizens of the knowledge economy, to see new patterns of potential and who can link people, ideas and organizations at a deeper level.

2 How do we assume our information citizenship duties?

There are as many ways in which knowledge workers can participate and fulfil their obligations as information citizens as there are information channels. However, there are three areas wherein significant contribution can be made, namely through our individual information behaviour, our personal attributes as knowledge workers and our commitment to lifelong learning.

2.1 Our information behaviour

Information behaviour refers to how individuals approach and handle information. This includes searching for it, using it, modifying it, sharing it, hoarding it, even ignoring it. Consequently, when we manage information behaviour, we are attempting to improve the overall effectiveness of our information environment through concerted action (Davenport 1997).

The value of an information economy lies in its knowledge. To take better advantage of this knowledge, changes in information behaviour must be introduced. Understanding how we handle information is at the core of all information behaviour analysis.

2.1.1 Types of information behaviour

Davenport (1997) speaks of three critical types of information behaviour that improve an information environment, namely sharing, handling overload and dealing with multiple meanings. Citizens in strong information cultures need to do all three:

Information sharing

Information sharing or the voluntary act of making information available to others is the most likely way to make the biggest difference to an information culture. Sharing is different from reporting, which is an involuntary exchange of information on a routine or structured basis. The term 'sharing' implies volition; the sharer could pass information on but does not have to.

There are many valid reasons why individuals may not want to share information. For example, knowledge workers may view information as being of unique value to their own careers, they may think certain information may reflect negatively on them or their organizations, they may be suspicious of what the recipient of the information will do with it, they may even believe that they will have to spend time supporting the information if they share it. Davenport (1997) suggests that information sharing in organizations is almost an unnatural act.

It is clear that, in order to manage communication and sharing of information effectively, standards and guidelines must be in place on how information must be shared, who information must be shared with and the type of information that may be shared.

Handling information overload

When trying to handle information overload , when information is everywhere, the commodity in shortest supply is attention. If we want to make full use of all information generated by an organization, our community, even ourselves, our perspectives and actions have to change dramatically. While access to information has traditionally been regarded as the primary goal, this is not enough. While new sources of information and media are appearing all the time, the old ones (books, paper mail, newspapers) do not go away. Given

the confusing array of options in most information environments, it is vital that knowledge workers develop competencies to identify, disseminate and use valuable information.

Dealing with multiple meanings

Dealing with multiple meanings for key units of information is an old problem, one that predates computers and most other forms of information technology. When a group of people try to create categories or lists of information to be used by others, there has always been problems in the maintenance of these meanings. Multiple information meanings can be managed and controlled by defining common information and maintaining them by monitoring and regulating their use.

2.2 Developing knowledge worker (information citizen) attributes

Successful knowledge management is a by-product of technology, culture change and acknowledgment of knowledge worker attributes. Webber (2005) states that knowledge workers are those workers who continually update their knowledge, continually question what has previously been accepted, continually redefine old problems, sense new problems and continually search for better solutions. Knowledge workers are changed by the information in their environment and in turn seek to influence others through knowledge. New information is sought out, reused, shared and filtered in opportunistic ways.

Discordant knowledge culture can sometimes be attributed to citizens' lack of awareness of their knowledge responsibility and possibly the lack of knowledge absorption capacity. Citizens should be aware that personal flexibility, time, desire to question the status quo and a positive attitude are essential requirements of participating in the knowledge economy.

Knowledge worker attributes that are most common include the interpersonal skills of teamwork and the ability to collaborate in pursuit of a common objective and leadership capabilities. Intra-personal skills include motivation and attitude; the ability to learn; problem-solving skills; effective communication with colleagues and clients and analytical skills.

2.3 Demonstrating commitment to lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is the concept of continuous personal development through personal (self-actualized) learning. The process involves changing one's perceptions and practice to meet the rapidly changing demands of the knowledge society, by moving away from learning as preparation for life and work, to learning as an integral part of life and work.

The most important component in lifelong learning is the motivation, which drives the learner to engage in either self-directed learning, learning on demand, informal learning, and collaborative and/or organizational learning. The desire for lifelong learning must come from the person. It requires discipline and initiative and it requires a person to assume responsibility for his or her continued learning. Lifelong learning is more than training, as people need to learn by themselves in order to adapt to new environments after training.

Lifelong learning is crucial for citizens to be able to compete in the global economy, but it is important for other reasons as well. By improving a person's ability to function as a member of his or her community, education and training increases social cohesion, reduces crime and improves income distribution. Lifelong learning impacts learners' lives and changes their mindsets. New technologies also offer new possibilities for people to learn in their lifespan.

3 Conclusion

Information citizenship refers to our responsibilities, duties and appropriate conduct for inclusion and participation in the knowledge economy. Our behaviour towards information, our knowledge worker attributes and our commitment to lifelong learning and development are key components to becoming 'model' information citizens.

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