

LCM in industry practices; it is not *all* about tools

Learnings from a multinational corporation

Environmental life cycle management (LCM)...

...implies a perspective where environmental impacts are considered in the whole product life cycle (from raw material extraction through end-of-use management). This approach extends traditional company boundaries, as product chains often connects several actors together in global product chains.

LCM...

...often focus on available tools to use (figure 1), and on generic 'success factors' that are proposed to be valid for all organizations working with an LCM approach. But LCM research lacks to adequately address the challenges of working with LCM in everyday business management.

A empirical study of organizational aspects of LCM...

...in actual practice was conducted at a large multinational corporation with explicit LCM ambitions, using; 1) semi-structured interviews, 2) observations at the strategic sustainability department, 3) document studies, and 4) workshops.

Literature reviews were also conducted on LCM and knowledge management literature (and literature that in some way relates the fields). It showed that an explicit discussion on the management of life cycles and its relation to different perspectives on knowledge has previously not been made - even though the implicit assumptions practitioners have of knowledge will lead to differences of how LCM is managed.

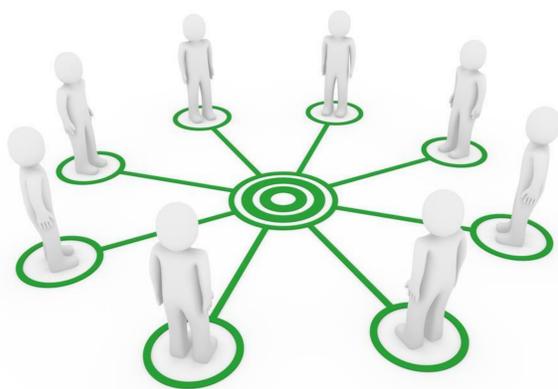


Figure 2. LCM integration internally in organizations would benefit from complementing existing tools and targets focus, with a focus on social processes for knowledge sharing and interaction, e.g. via communities of practice

Conclusions

- LCM is not as straightforward in practice as in theory
- Management of life cycles tend to focus on tools and measures
- LCM integration internally in organizations would benefit from a complementary focus on knowledge sharing and interaction through social processes (figure 2) e.g. via communities of practice



Figure 1. How to manage LCM in industry practices? It's not *all* about tools. An important challenge concerns internal management and organization.

The study of LCM in practice...

...demonstrated that the studied company had explicit LCM ambitions, and several sustainability initiatives targeting different parts of a product chain. But the study also showed that the main challenge was to integrate these strategies and initiatives into the everyday business activities.

Three paths used for integrating LCM in the organization was identified;

- to include sustainability aspects in existing tools and processes
- finding ways to connect top management intentions with operational level activities
- using networks and social interaction as a way of creating commitment

Different assumptions of knowledge management...

...affect LCM. The studied company focused mainly on transfer of explicit knowledge, and the use of tools, measures and top-down managed networks. Another management approach would be to view knowledge as a process, best shared through social interaction, and possibly through bottom-up managed communities of practice.