Foreword

Even in ancient times, information was a staple of daily interaction in social, economic, and political settings. Individuals conversed at home and outdoors, in the marketplace and in work settings. They would exchange ideas about past events, present activities, and future scenarios. In organizations, large, and small, teams and groups interacted on the basis of both solid news and informal gossip. Government agencies and military establishments relied on messengers who would bring updates on political leanings and troop locations.

However, it was not until after World War II, that information has become ‘the flight map’ for both individuals and organizations to navigate in a complex world of technical progress, political upheavals, and changing social customs. While data in the form of census-taking by governments and record-keeping by companies occurred earlier, the collection, storage, and retrieval of economic and business information did not happen until the 1950s when computer hardware and software made their appearance.

In his pioneering book a half-century ago, ‘The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the U.S.’, by Fritz Machlup (1962), noted that millions of data bits were now yielding much more than ‘mere information’. Studying diverse industries and occupations he observed that knowledge has become a resource for professionals and for business organizations.

Knowledge management became an established discipline after the publication of Nonaka’s 1991 and 1994 articles in which he dealt with types of knowledge (explicit and implicit); levels of knowledge (individual and organizational); and the promotion of organizational learning. The field of KM or knowledge management now constitutes a range of processes and practices whose common feature is the goal of generating value from knowledge. The field of KM currently encompasses many organizational functions ranging from technical research to human resources, from intellectual property use to strategic planning.

The current volume, ably edited by Dr. Andrea Bencsik of Hungary, supplements as well as complements previous books by other authors published by IGI Global. Dealing with the various aspects of knowledge management, especially in the setting of small to medium size establishments, the contributions offer descriptive details, analytical insights, and lessons learned. The various chapters, 17 in all, focus on a wide variety of topics that encompass many managerial activities and organizational processes. The geographical settings include Thailand, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Romania, Italy and Portugal.

The various contributors deal with a range of topics, but the focus is on both explicit and implicit knowledge, that is ‘knowing about’ and ‘knowing how.’ The sharing of knowledge among members of teams and divisions of organizations is rightly emphasized. Both problems and solutions need exposure in order to advance the well-being of firms. Knowledge is seen as a resource, as a capital, and as one that can accumulate and yield ideas for current and future action in a competitive landscape. Small and
medium organizations must harness the knowledge of employees and become “learning entities.” Good practices need to be emulated until further refinements are made. KM is seen as a link that holds together effective governance, corporate goals, and daily activities.

The authors focus on specific activities at the level of the organizations. Coverage here ranges from family-run businesses in Hungary to state-operated enterprises in Brazil. KM plays a major role in proper logistics; indeed, supply chain management is as much a conceptual undertaking as it is the physical arrangement for transport and storage. KM plays a major role in today’s world of instant and constant telecommunication—with organizations emphasizing both internal dealings among departments or divisions and interaction with suppliers and customers. In a world of complexity and cost-cutting, frugal innovation should be the preferred mode of operation.

The writers look at broader implications of KM with emphasis on system building, organizational response to challenges, bridge-building to government agencies, academic institutes, and private sector participants. Thinking and acting in a spirit of collaboration is recommended; today’s rivals can become tomorrow’s partners. ‘Decisions in the global village’ means thinking and acting together, soliciting input from above and below, creating an interface in both directions.

The knowledge needs of firms are likely to expand in the coming years. The acquisition, development, and management of knowledge are fundamental to the growth of firms.

Chapters in this book manage to delve into the above facets and offer useful insights and lessons.

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Andrew Gross has served on the faculty of Cleveland State University since 1968. He was also a visiting professor at various universities in Australia, Canada, and Hungary. In 1989 and in 1992 he was a Senior Fulbright Scholar in his native Hungary. Earlier he was a consultant to the Science Council of Canada and other organizations, both profit and non-profit. He worked in industry as an engineer and was the first employee and later a Board of Directors member of a major market research organization. He is the lead or co-author of four books, fifteen monographs, and over 100 refereed journal articles in management, marketing, economics, and environmental studies. He serves on various editorial boards and is active in various associations and community organizations.

REFERENCES

