Preface

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

The Challenge

For the past two decades, executives have struggled to develop effective ways of sharing what their organizations know. Organizational leaders are now seeking ways to share knowledge with both internal and external stakeholders driven by concerns such as downsizing, the impending retirement of baby boomers, terrorism, and a host of other organizational challenges. Despite the best efforts of many innovative leaders, few organizations have achieved the desired level of knowledge sharing. This is certainly not due to a lack of energy, enthusiasm, or excitement on the part of managers, but rather the result of immature, complicated, and expensive tools, techniques, and technologies. Equally, a culture based on a need-to-know rather than one based on a need-to-share prevented the transparency necessary to achieve organizational knowledge goals.

Today we are seeing some very promising results from third-generation knowledge projects, which focus on connecting people and facilitating collaboration. Many organizations are now reaping the benefits of using social media such as wikis for collaboration and social networking tools for connecting people. These emerging tools and techniques provide flexible, agile, and intuitive solutions for connecting people with people and facilitating coordination, communication, and collaboration (Girard & Girard, 2009).

Unlike first-generation knowledge projects, which focused on collecting and capturing knowledge, or second-generation projects, which sought to codify tacit knowledge, these third-generation projects are very social in nature. The projects seek to connect people with people who in turn will share what they know. Although much of what they know is in the tacit form the projects do not rely on codification but rather connection. Consider the following quote from Clever: Leading your smartest, most creative people, which emphasises our point:

The knowledge of clever people is tacit. It is embedded in them. If it were possible to capture their knowledge within the organizational fabric, then all that would be required would be better knowledge management systems. It isn’t. (In fact, as alluded to by Kamlesh Pande [an HR manager in organization under study], one of the great disappointments of knowledge management initiatives to date is their failure to capture clever knowledge.) For the people we are talking about, a great deal of their cleverness resides not in what they know but who they know and how they know it (Goffee & Jones, 2009)
The focus of this book is third-generation knowledge projects. Our interest, like many organizational leaders, is how we can apply the social tools, techniques, and technologies to better know what we know. This quest, knowing what we know from an organizational point of view, is not new. Carla O’Dell and Jack Grayson (1998), authors of *If Only We Knew What We Know*, empowered many organizational leaders by outlining successes in the transfer of internal knowledge. Their pioneering work sparked a knowledge revolution that substantially enhanced the state of knowledge management in many organizations. Today we are ready for the next revolution, one that focuses on the social side of knowledge transfer.

**The Wisdom of Many**

As is often the case when the academic and business worlds collide, there is some debate about the exact meaning of the term *Social Knowledge*. We do not attempt to curtail this debate, as it would be premature to expect consensus in this nascent field. That said, we did provide the following definition to the chapter authors to begin the debate:

*Social Knowledge is the use of social media to create, transfer, and preserve organizational knowledge – past, present, and future – with a view to achieving the organizational vision.*

This book is particularly unique in several distinct ways. First, this is one of the very first collections to consider what leaders should be doing today to enhance the intellectual capital of their organization through the strategic use of social media. Second, the book considers social knowledge in the broadest possible way. To be sure, some will question the breadth and depth of the domain as articulated by the authors. In fact, as we launched this book we underestimated the scope of the domain and we have been surprised at how many innovative tools, techniques, and technologies are in place or under consideration. Third, this book includes chapters from a diverse group of interested parties; this diversity is geographic, linguistic, professional, and experiential.

The book is organized into 15 chapters based on our definition of social knowledge. The first five chapters chronicle social knowledge in action. The next four chapters focus on the cultural components of social knowledge. The final six chapters examine social knowledge tools, techniques, and technologies. Together these three sections provide an exciting look at how executives may use the enablers and components to achieve their organizational vision.

**Section 1: Social Knowledge in Action**

In *Chapter 1*, David and Alex Bennet (2011) explore the factors and conditions which influence the social creation and sharing of knowledge. Their exploration includes clear definitions of information, knowledge and learning. The Bennets discuss social interaction, including environmental impacts on the creations and sharing of knowledge and they close with an insightful examination of the individual learning and knowledge activity at the societal level.

In *Chapter 2*, Kimiz Dalkir (2011) focuses on how social network analysis (SNA) can be used to assess the quantity and quality of connection, communication and collaboration mediated by social tools in an organization. A real-life case study illustrates how SNA can be used in a pre-test/post-test evaluation design to conduct a comparative assessment of methods that can be used before, during and
after the implementation of organizational change in work processes. Dalikr suggests SNA is a good candidate to analyze the connections between people and content as well as people with other people.

In Chapter 3, Suzanne Roff-Wexler, Loretta L. Donovan, and Salvatore Rasa (2011) explore the assumptions we make, the questions we ask, and the “social knowledge” we use to make decisions about our personal and business lives. Personal experiences and anecdotes provide context for scholarly ideas and references. The chapter offers its readers a method to continue the dialogue.

In Chapter 4, Cindy Gordon (2011) argues that innovation growth is tightly tied to the collaborative process of socializing knowledge. In this chapter, Gordon tells the story of change agents that are helping to move from vision to execution successfully. Each of her cases is rooted in a clear business need either for employee engagement or customer engagement needs.

In Chapter 5, Benjamin Hentschel and Parissa Haghirian (2011) describe a qualitative study conducted in a Japanese organization. Specifically, they investigate the extent to which social knowledge influences communicative behavior, and looks at the implications for organizational communication patterns in Japan. The findings of this study point towards changing patterns of social knowledge in Japanese firms.

Section 2: Cultural Aspects of Social Knowledge

In Chapter 6, Andrew Miller (2011) considers what cultural barriers are being raised against social media adoption and how can management re-align their understanding of social media to better utilize resources and take advantage of the opportunities this technology presents? He describes how organizations who harness the massive data warehouses behind social media networks have the ability to significantly alter individual lives and society at large; for better or worse.

In Chapter 7, Paul McBride (2011) describes how and why organizational culture is paramount towards endeavors of social knowledge and knowledge management systems. He argues that a culture based on honesty, trust, and openness is best suited for knowledge management. McBride suggests organizations that employ social media to aid in culture development will build systems of knowledge management that lead to competitive advantage.

In Chapter 8, Scott Mackintosh (2011) describes the military’s approach to social media and outlines the security controversy it views as an inherent issue associated with condoning and promoting the use of social media. He discusses the use of social media as a vehicle of transformational leadership. Mackintosh makes recommendations to facilitate a better adoption of various forms of social media by the military.

In Chapter 9, Nhu T. B Nguyen and Katsuhiro Umemoto (2011) conducted the first study that investigated the process of cross-cultural knowledge creation and the role of leadership in this process. Their findings will contribute to developing KM in a new way that can be applied to practices in utilizing and creating cross-cultural knowledge for KM activities. In addition, they offer many practical implications for leaders to manage effectively cross-cultural knowledge of members in organizations.

Section 3: Social Knowledge Tools, Techniques, and Technologies

In Chapter 10, Stefania Mariano (2011) provides a practical approach for managing social media. Her study investigates how knowledge is created, transferred, and shared in social media and proposes a way to manage social knowledge. Mariano’s findings revealed that knowledge transfer was the primary
knowledge process in the management of the Web log and highlighted common issues, concerns, and suggestions on how to develop a more effective virtual social environment.

In Chapter 11, Nick Bowersox (2011) provides practical ways in which the United States Air Force can increase participation in Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoPs) among its workforce, as well as providing theoretical frameworks upon which further research can be conducted. He proposes a set of testable propositions that may serve as the basis for future research.

In Chapter 12, Jagdish K Vasishtha (2011) discusses the needs of knowledge workers for effective knowledge capture and team collaboration. His analysis considers knowledge fragmentation due to technology, relevancy of information to a user, and Push vs. Pull approaches of accessing information. He also explores how these challenges can be addressed by social knowledge workspaces and what should be some of the key characteristics of these technologies under development.

In Chapter 13, Haris Papoutsakis (2011) evaluates the contribution of shared knowledge and information technology to manufacturing performance. His findings are useful to researchers and the business community alike as they may be used as a springboard for further empirical studies and can help put together strategies involving knowledge management and information technology.

In Chapter 14, Chethan M and Mohan Ramanathan (2011) explore the convergence of many ideas and innovations and the technology that is building these networks. They argue that social networks have changed the way people connect, redefining the knowledge value system that is being shared without borders or limits.

In Chapter 15, Fjodor Ruzic (2011) suggests that social knowledge is not a new category; however, in these times of information-communications systems maturity, it becomes an extremely important and valuable asset. He finds that in the context of social knowledge, information technology should be constantly harmonized with cultural milieu characterized mostly by invisible culture and its actions.

REFERENCES


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