

# Foreword

“Remember that information flows, but that knowledge grows” is what I once told the graduate students in the PhD seminar on knowledge management that I co-taught at USC with my colleague Dr. Alexander Hars in the late 1990s. How could one possibly apply a transportation or flow metaphor to something as evolving and capricious as knowledge? And everyone seemed comfortable with that. It gave them a way of thinking about knowledge that captured its organic nature and its distinction from information, and perhaps it also had some intellectual playfulness in a memorable one-liner. I had even exported that image to the Swedish School of Business and Economics in Helsinki, Finland where I co-taught the doctoral workshop on knowledge management in 1997. Even the Scandinavians who are culturally and historically the masters of knowledge sharing and participation accepted that distinction. Furthermore, in 2001, I published a book on redesigning enterprise processes for e-business, and, in it, the link between business processes and knowledge was mainly about increasing the knowledge-creating capabilities around a specific business process. Mark Nissen, with this innovative and mold-breaking book, has elegantly shown that my statement and approach around knowledge growing rather than flowing were limiting. Knowledge too can flow — and regarding it as such has many operationally practical benefits to management, decision making, and the execution of business processes. As enterprises grow to be more knowledge-intensive and knowledge permeates all business processes (even the very mundane ones), Dr. Nissen’s view is an increasingly useful one.

The concept that organizational knowledge moves and flows from how it exists and where it is located to how and where it is needed in order to enable work and organizational performance is a very powerful idea in this book. It

heralds the emergence of a school of knowledge dynamics that combines in an operational manner the capriciousness and elusiveness of tacit knowledge with the down-to-earth phenomena of process flow analysis. It also brings to the attention of both academics and practitioners the notion of the “knowledge divide” in terms of the difference between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” The book’s driving notion is that there are different kinds and levels of knowledge within an organizational setting, and there is a critical need for a principled way of managing this distribution of knowledge in order to enhance organizational performance. This book is both conceptually elegant and operationally useful and is a much needed contribution.

Dr. Nissen gives us solid principles and techniques that we can use to manage knowledge flows, and the 30 knowledge flow principles are practically useful to anyone who would like to understand how to harness knowledge management as a strategic capability for enhancing organizational performance. The principles lead us through the logic and “how to” that explains the unevenness of distribution of knowledge and how it must flow for organizational performance, the criticality of tacit knowledge, and what drives the flow of knowledge. It unearths some very new and previously untreated issues, such as the tendency of knowledge to remain at rest, the relationship between workflows and knowledge flows, and how knowledge flows lie on the critical path of workflows and, hence, influence organizational performance. The principles take into account how knowledge flows and organizational change are linked in multidimensional ways and the role of information technologies in enhancing and managing knowledge flows. The 30 actionable principles are a treasure chest for understanding, diagnosing, and enhancing knowledge dynamics and organizational performance.

The second section of the book has the application cases that test the mettle of those principles and provide ways of relating to a variety of organizational contexts that help managers apply these principles to their own organization or enterprise setting.

Dr. Nissen weaves the phenomena in this book like a probing doctor who identifies medical pathologies with a knowledge flow stethoscope, and yet he anticipates future issues like a skilled urban planner who needs to better allocate knowledge as a public good. The book brings together the conceptual richness of a new way of diagnosing knowledge flows with the practical operational how-to of linking that to organizational performance and the requisite organizational change for long-term competitive advantage. It identifies archetypes of knowledge flow patterns that help diagnose and uncover problems, but also directly links that with management interventions.

Finally, the book does something that will, in my opinion, become increasingly important in the coming years: It sets the stage for better management of real-time organizations. As the environment continues to speed up, techniques for real-time management will increasingly influence organizational performance. Knowledge dynamics is at the heart of managing real-time enterprises and organizations, and Dr. Nissen's book is showing us the way of the future and how we can apply it now.

I think my new pseudo-rhyming one-liner should now be something like, "Comatose knowledge flows help you diagnose where organizational performance goes..."

I am honored and proud to write the foreword to this mold-breaking and immensely useful book.

*Omar A. El Sawy*  
*Professor of Information Systems*  
*Marshall School of Business*  
*University of Southern California, USA*