

Foreword

I am delighted to write the Foreword to this new, creative, and innovative encyclopedia on Communities of Practice (CoPs) in information and knowledge management (KM). The global importance of knowledge management has been recognized only recently, and KM is still in its infancy. It is, nevertheless, a complex and challenging area of enquiry. This encyclopedia is therefore especially welcome at a time when recognition that the creation, retention, and dissemination of knowledge are key to organizational survival and competitiveness.

By addressing a major aspect of knowledge management (CoPs), the authors help provide understanding where there has previously been mystery. Although this is one (major) area of KM, the authors have been careful to take a holistic approach to the issues, and have avoided the temptation of a reductionist approach. This makes the encyclopedia comprehensive in scope, and appropriate for students, managers, and academics. The encyclopedia is highly readable, highly enjoyable, and full of superb insights that may be used and adapted to many different settings.

The notion of ‘Communities of Practice’ has arisen alongside the development of knowledge management. As with KM, CoPs have existed far longer than they have been recognized, but their importance for the public and private sectors, and for other organizations, is only just beginning to be understood. The appropriate use of technology to support such communities is key to their success, but it is the word *appropriate* that must be emphasized. Unlike many texts that purport to address KM, but which really deal solely with information technology, this encyclopedia addresses the key organizational and communications issues that are the real challenges facing us in the 21st century. Technology is an enabler, but the drivers for action must come from the needs of the community, be it a public organization, a large company, a charity, an SME, or a group of people who share interests and directions, or who want to develop those interests in a cooperative fashion. If technology becomes the driver those needs become subsumed, and all too often it is apparent that systems are serving themselves, rather than the communities they should be serving.

The *Encyclopedia of Communities of Practice in Information and Knowledge Management* contributors provide a wonderful collection of material that will both interest, and serve as reference, for anyone who wants to think about the world in which we now live, and who want to improve that world.

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