Chapter VII
Accountability and Ethics in Knowledge Management

Frank Land
London School of Economics, UK

Urooj Amjad
London School of Economics, UK

Sevasti-Melissa Nolas
London School of Economics, UK

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to argue the case that the study of Knowledge Management should embrace considerations of ethics and accountability. Knowledge Management—a relatively new discipline—is often seen as a necessary but benign component of any modern business organization. This chapter suggests that underlying modern notions of knowledge management are the far older practices comprising the management of knowledge prevalent in most spheres of human activity. Many of these are political in nature, and distort and manipulate knowledge to achieve ends which may include criminal activity and fraud, but often merely serve to further the aims of organizational actors. The discipline called Knowledge Management has much to learn from the ancient art of the management of knowledge.

In science, knowledge is an unmixed good; in ethics and politics it is bad as well as good

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this discussion paper is to make the case for integrating ethics and with it accountability into research about Knowledge Management (KM). Ethics refers to the motives and methods...
Accountability and Ethics in Knowledge Management

for KM processes, and their impact on individuals, on organizations, and on society. Ethical issues are also relevant to the researcher studying KM, where the subject being researched and the way the research is conducted can raise ethical issues. The interaction of actors, processes, and technology in all aspects of KM from research to design, and actual use can raise a wide range of ethical dilemmas.

KM has been described by a range of commentators as comprising of practices used by organisations to identify, create, represent, store, distribute and share information. It has been an established discipline since 1995 with a body of university courses and both professional and academic journals dedicated to it. Knowledge Management programs are typically tied to organisational objectives such as improving performance, competitive advantage, innovation, transfer of lessons learned, and the general development of collaborative practices.

Motivation and behaviour related to KM initiatives are necessarily embedded in power relations. Such power relations play a role in the design, implementation, use and research into KM systems and processes have, sometimes deliberately, overlooked questions of accountability—what we have called the dark side of knowledge management (Land et al. 2005a,b). Examples are provided from both the business and public sector. The first part of the chapter establishes why an ethics dimension is necessary in KM theory and practice; and the second part identifies questions on how an ethics dimension could be integrated with current KM research and practice.

WHY KM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE NEEDS AN ACCOUNTABILITY DIMENSION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND ETHICS

Ethics relates to codes of conduct regarded by a community as ‘right’ and ‘good’. They may be based on notions of morality or values. They may be faith based, determined by rules of proper conduct laid down by some higher authority. As such, we note the conflicts that can arise where values clash or rules differ. Ethical principles are rarely the subject of absolute standards. Nevertheless, conforming to ethical standards does require some consensus at least within defined communities such as those represented by professional associations. Some communities consider ethics sufficiently important to subject their activities to scrutiny by an ethics committee, which may operate on a mandatory basis with legal sanctions against those who flout its rulings. Others work on the basis of voluntary agreement. The medical profession has led the way in being subjected to mandatory ethical audits as well as voluntary agreements.
www.igi-global.com/e-resources/library-recommendation/?id=1

Related Content

Winning Large Value Deals: Who is Your Best Bet?
www.igi-global.com/article/winning-large-value-deals/125584?camid=4v1a

Knowledge Management and Entrepreneurship Cases in India
www.igi-global.com/chapter/knowledge-management-entrepreneurship-cases-india/46857?camid=4v1a

Incorporating Technology Acceptance and IS Success Frameworks into a System Dynamics Conceptual Model: A Case Study in the ERP Post-Implementation Environment
www.igi-global.com/article/incorporating-technology-acceptance-success-frameworks/69780?camid=4v1a

Temporality and Knowledge Work
www.igi-global.com/chapter/temporality-knowledge-work/20867?camid=4v1a