Chapter XXII

Visions and Directions:
Balancing Academic and Practitioner Positions on KM

Abstract

This final chapter of the current book outlines key visions and directions for knowledge-management research and practice. The following sections present the results from a small survey of academics and practitioners about the present and future of knowledge management, a synthesised vision and direction for KM future, and the author’s own views on how this book can help promote scholarly inquiry in the field.
Introduction

For the last chapter of this book, it was appropriate to consider what expectations were held about the future of KM. In order to help the author with direction setting and signal the kinds of topics and methods that may be particularly important, the author felt it was appropriate to obtain informed views of other academics and practitioners interested in KM. In order to achieve this, the author has decided to carry out the follow-up analysis of data from a small survey conducted by Edwards et al. (Edwards, Handzic, Carlsson, & Nissen, 2003) and compare views of academics and practitioners interested in KM.

However, readers are issued a “health warning” that the survey reported here does not reflect the kind of scale, detail, and rigour that one would normally expect for a research article (Edwards et al., 2003). For example, there are too few responses, there is a bias towards those who actively participate in certain KM activities, and the instrument used has not been validated. Thus, the survey design or results are not offered as an exemplar of rigour. Rather, the interest was to quickly “feel the pulse” of academics and practitioners, especially to help indicate the breadth of backgrounds and issues relevant to KM. Therefore, a relatively informal survey of researchers and professionals with an interest in KM was conducted.

The criterion for “interest in KM” was participation in KM conferences and e-mail lists (two of each). After pilot testing, 158 questionnaires were distributed to different people or e-mail addresses, although it is possible that, in a few cases, two distinct e-mail addresses may have represented the same person. One reminder was also sent by e-mail. Twenty-five usable questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 15.8%, which is acceptable by normal survey standards. The initial results of the collected survey data are reported in Edwards et al. (2003).

The results of our follow-up analysis comparing academic and practitioner views are presented in six sections. The first examines the respondents’ demographic information. The second presents respondents’ views about KM, influential ideas in KM, and influential people in KM. The next three sections examine their views on the most useful forms of support for KM activities; the most important types of KM technologies; and the most important factors in KM initiatives, respectively. The final results section presents respondents’ views on the most important challenges facing research and practice in the field of knowledge management. The chapter and the book end with a synthesised vision and direction for KM from the author’s perspective.
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