Chapter I

On Knowledge Management in the Internet Age

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Introduction

Knowledge management in general, and Internet-based knowledge management in particular, is one of the foremost strategic directions being investigated and adopted by corporations today. The promises of better decision making, faster turnaround times, improved organizational communication, and higher levels of cooperation and interaction among personnel, have all combined to create a holy grail kind of aura. Yet, like the grail the goals here are elusive, and the road to reaching them is long and fraught with pitfalls.

Each of us, as individuals, performs a variety of functions that can be termed knowledge management. We remember things: names, numbers, experiences, and procedures. We know how to do things such as ride a bike; bake a cake; calculate a derivative; fix a flat tire. We know where to find information that we don’t remember on our own: we write things down; file them; enter them in a PDA. Some of us do it better, some of us are chronically disorganized, but at the end of the day each of us is performing his or her own knowledge management function.

When many individuals work together forming some corporate entity or organization, we encounter a new level of knowledge man-
management. In addition to our personal knowledge management, we now become part of a larger organism in which others need our knowledge, and in which we require access to the knowledge of others. Knowledge passes through an organization on a daily basis. How much of it is captured by individuals? How much of it is captured by the organization as a whole? How can we effectively identify and apply this knowledge in the future?

Increasing levels of complexity can be found when we move from physical organizations to virtual ones. In a virtual organization, where ad-hoc distributed work groups may be transient, there is a heightened need to connect the participants to usable, relevant bodies of knowledge. But, paradoxically, it is precisely these organizations that have the least opportunity to spend time developing and fine-tuning such systems.

In this introductory chapter, we begin by presenting a number of alternative definitions for organizational memory (OM) and knowledge management (KM). This is followed by a brief description of a number of challenges facing OM/KM research today – some of which are addressed in this book, some of which are not. Building on the diverse research presented in this book, and on other related work, we present the Acquire-Organize-Distribute (AOD) model for knowledge management in the Internet age and discuss how it both evolves from and contributes to the ongoing work in this dynamic field.

**Organizational Memory and Knowledge Management**

There are a number of different definitions of knowledge management prevalent in the literature today. A fairly representative and detailed one is that of van der Spek and Spijkervet (1997):

“...Knowledge management focuses on knowledge as a crucial production factor and consists of activities that aim at optimal use and development of knowledge, now and in the future. KM determines which knowledge, where, in which form and at which point of time, should be available within an organization, company or network of institutions. It employs a broad spectrum of techniques and instruments to improve
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