Chapter X

Theories and Models: A Brief Look at Organizational Memory Management

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Abstract

This chapter introduces theories and models used in organizational memory. As organizations continue to automate their business processes and collect explosive amounts of data, researchers in knowledge management need to confront new opportunities and new challenges. In this chapter, we provide a brief review of the literature in organizational memory management. Some of the core issues of organizational memory management include organizational context, retention structure, knowledge taxonomy and ontology, organizational learning, distributed cognition and communities of practice, and so forth. As new information technologies are available to the design and implementation of organizational memory, we further present a basic framework of theories and models, focusing on the technological components and their applications in organizational memory systems.
Introduction

Organizational memory, a crucial component of an organization’s knowledge ecosystem, plays a critical role in the overall performance and competitiveness of a business venture (March & Simon, 1958; Mort, 2001; Watson, 1998; Zhang, Tian, & Qi, 2006). In order to realize a benefit or strategic advantage, however, this knowledge must be properly managed. Consequently, many organizations are using formal knowledge management practices to improve performance. Knowledge management is best described as a process in which information is transformed into actionable knowledge and made available to the user (Allee, 1997). Effective knowledge management enables businesses to avoid repeating prior mistakes, to ensure the continued use of best practices, and to draw on the collective wisdom of its employees, past and present. Organizational memory is the collection of historical corporate knowledge that is employed for current use through appropriate methods of gathering, organizing, refining, and disseminating the stored information and knowledge (Ackerman & Halverson, 2000; Nevo & Wand, 2005).

The objectives of this chapter are to survey the organizational memory literature and present a basic framework on organizational memory systems (OMSs) and applications while focusing our attention on IT-based organizational memory. Research in organizational memory management deals with the creation, integration, maintenance, dissemination, and use of all kinds of knowledge within an organization (Alavi & Leidner, 1999; Cross & Baird, 2000). It is also confronted with new challenges because recent developments in information processing technologies have enhanced our ability to build the next generation of organizational memory management systems. Through our research studies, we found that much of the organizational memory is ignored or lost in the corporate collaborative processes in spite of the existence of several enterprise collaboration management tools. The consequence is that employees spend too much time re-creating common elements from online and off-line meetings, calendars, and various project-related activities.

In the next section, we review the literature of organizational memory management. Then we present a basic framework of technological components and their applications. Next we discuss some important research issues and future trends, and then conclude the chapter.
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