Editorial

Knowledge Management

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The Editors are pleased to offer this opportunity for the associate editors for Knowledge Management to outline their domain, and seek contributions from potential authors.

Knowledge management has been a major topic for Management academics and practitioners alike in the 1990s. Is this just another 'fad' served up to business managers as 'all purpose solutions to the often intractable and subtle difficulties of managing competitively' (Davenport & Prusak, 1998)?

Yet eminent business thinkers have been developing the concept of knowledge in business for some time. Indeed the concept is not unique to the late 20th century. For example, Drucker, referring to Frederick Taylor's work in Pennsylvania in 1875 on productivity, states that it is 'the result of the application to work of the specific human capital resource, knowledge' (1980).

Knowledge management is in reality a way of considering management within a business. It has been described as 'the systematic management of the processes by which knowledge is created, identified gathered, shared and applied' (Newing, 2000). Inventing the best products and services, the most efficient and innovative business practices 'requires an intense interaction within firms and between them' (Petzinger, 1999). Knowledge management is often used by managers to gain necessary perspectives on their work and to assist them in better management. Knowledge is recognised to be 'the primary resource for individuals and for the economy overall' (Drucker, 1995). Drucker also considered it 'the only meaningful economics resource of the post capitalist or knowledge society' (Drucker, 1993) and even more important than capital or labour. The management community have come to realise, within any organisation, that what 'its employees know is at the heart of how the organisation functions' (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Knowledge has come to be seen as the most valuable

business commodity and thus its management is of vital importance in every business.

Knowledge management has also been defined as the extraction and conversion of 'tacit' knowledge at individual and organisational levels into 'explicit' knowledge. This explicit knowledge often takes the form of specific electronic 'tools' or 'assets' which can be manipulated for competitive gain, for example, intranets, groupware and knowledge repositories. 'Tacit' knowledge, on the other hand, is often described as the 'hunches, intuition and know-how' or 'skills and routines competencies'. There is some scepticism towards the extent to which this often highly subjective knowledge and learning can actually be made explicit, and feeling that knowledge management is no more than a new form of technology. Knowledge is much more than technology - it is personal, often dormant or unconscious and closely bound up with Learning and Organisation Theory.

A growing number of studies have called for a more holistic, systemic approach to knowledge. They argue that whilst knowledge management has been confused with previous management practices, many companies use it to 'foster long term innovation' through 'human motivation'. It is not simply a 'tool' or 'resource' so much as a social construct. It is a reciprocal, interdependent process of learning arising from knowledge transfer and information flow and communication - a Socio-Technical perspective that amalgamates the 'dualism' of people and technology.

It is clear that operational researchers have contributions to offer to the area, especially by bringing holistic and multi-disciplinary perspectives. These might include case studies; theoretical developments; or agenda-setting contributions; as well as analyses that are qualitative, quantitative, or a mixture of the two.

Contributions are invited on any aspect of knowledge management including (but not limited to) the following:

- Knowledge management and information management
- Systems thinking
- Technology management
- Managerial and organisational cognition
- Human resource management
- Learning styles
- Teamworking
- Organisational design
- Social networks
- End users
- Human computer interaction
- Design and implementation of information and communication systems
- Evaluation of information and communication systems
- Empowerment and information users
- Corporate/organisational memory
- Processes and systems for knowledge creation, transfer, organising, sharing, storage, use or re-use
- Promoting a knowledge sharing culture
- Managing knowledge management projects
- Multi-cultural and cross-cultural issues
- Wealth creation through knowledge management and intellectual capital management
- Human centred assets
- Communities of practice

References

- Davenport T & Prusak L (1998) 'Working Knowledge', Executive Excellence, 10th September 1998.
- Drucker P (1980) Managing in Turbulent Times, London: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Drucker P (1993) Post-Capitalist Society, New York: Harper Collins.
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- Newing R (2000) 'Connecting People - both through IT and face-to-face', FT.com, Available: <http://www.ft.com/ftsveys/industry/sc70a2>, Accessed: 8 February 2000.
- Petzinger T (1999) The New Pioneers, New York: Simon & Schuster.

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We look forward to receiving your contributions.