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.

At a recent conference it became clear that the topics that were now interesting scholars, academics and practitioners had moved on since we wrote our first Knowledge Management editorial for OR Insight in 2001. At this conference, on Organisational Knowledge and Learning, there were eleven separate topic tracks. Some tracks, such as that for the Epistemology of Knowledge attracted a smaller audience than others. Popular tracks and topics were those that looked at Communities of Practice; Knowledge Networks and Networking; Intangible Assets and Social, Intellectual and Cultural Capital; Managing Organisational Knowledge; and Competence and Integrating Knowledge across Organisations.

It would seem from the number of attendees to this conference and others that there is a considerable interest in the field of knowledge management both from practitioners and academics. The conference mentioned above is only one of several that now run annually dedicated to this topic. Many other conferences now also have significant knowledge management clusters. In addition, there are now some journals that are specifically dedicated to the topic (of which Knowledge Management Research and Practice, a recent addition to the OR Society journals published, is fast gaining an International reputation) and other journals, such as OR Insight here, have regular articles or editions on the topic.

We now also have the annual MAKE awards -

the Most Admired Knowledge Enterprises - which have been running for some years, and few of the larger organisations in the UK and worldwide, find themselves without a knowledge management officer of some type. Thus it would seem that knowledge management has become mainstream organisational practice and integrated into how management can manage staff to provide (added) value for the organisation. Knowledge management is however, inextricably linked with organisational learning (OL). Without organisational learning (OL) - from the knowledge - there is little point in undertaking this activity. Processes - and it is here that Operational Researchers can contribute - have a large part to play in knowledge management. These processes can be improved with OL, can share their outputs from this learning, and can be designed with learning cycles built in (Sanchez 2001). Processes can be core business activities themselves, they can improve business activities, or can contribute to the improvement of overall business capabilities (Oinas-Kukkonen 2004). Operational Researchers have both a practical and theoretical understanding of how systems work and should be able to demonstrate a strategic understanding of what can be done with processes as a result. Competence transfer is also an area with which OR people should have an understanding. If we look especially to projects and how knowledge is shared from past experiences (with particular processes) we may see where both group and individual competences can be used and shared effectively and thus OL may take place.

Knowledge management, it is beginning to be acknowledged more widely, is a sociotechnical

activity (Lehaney et al 2004). Thus we saw the interest in the human and social aspects of knowledge management demonstrated in the conference mentioned above. Knowledge management has had a great deal of promise so far but the reality of implementation has been patchy and has not fulfilled all the promise. Often this has been a result of the over-reliance on technology as a 'fix'. Thus the human aspects have now come to the fore. Humans may resist knowledge management for a number of reasons, some personal but others that are related to the organisation in which they work; their national culture; the methods for sharing that may be inappropriate for the type of knowledge; the uncertainty as to what the knowledge is to be used for (or can be used for) and so on. It is also clear that not all knowledge that is shared (or can be shared) is necessarily useful, perhaps because the recipient of the knowledge cannot make use of it, or perhaps because it is delivered in a form that is inappropriate or difficult to comprehend.

When considering competence transfer for instance we need also to consider people's motivation and willingness to share knowledge. Some (van den Hooff, (2004) are willing to share for the common interest and donate and collect both explicit and tacit knowledge for the common good through rich media; others are eager to share because they 'know a lot' (and want you to know it ...). These latter types of knowledge sharers are individualists rather than collectivists and donate for their personal gratification through lean media (not face-to-face for instance), they do not contribute to knowledge-enriching and the discussions but tend to be one-way conduits. So we see that individual culture as well as organisational culture will impact on knowledge sharing and the mechanisms that can be used in an organisation.

Some organisations have attempted to tackle some of these issues by (for instance) setting up Centres of Excellence, standardising products and processes and ensuring that there are clear

organisational roles and responsibilities. Organisations such as Webasto AG have co-ordinating committees and have tried to ensure a balance between centralisation and decentralisation of control. They have organised the company as far as possible along processes rather than divisions. In addition, Webasto exchange people within teams and projects, hold international management seminars to share best practice and provide people development and rewards for knowledge-sharing.

We would now like to hear about your companies and your issues and successes with knowledge-sharing. Does your company / organisation work like Webasto or are you a leading company in the MAKE chart? Have you got experiences in knowledge management where it went wrong (and do you know why)? Or are you a researcher exploring these issues and have some suggestions and theory that might make a practitioner's working life easier? If you would like to make a contribution to the knowledge management debate in any of the areas suggested (or any others that you think are relevant) please forward your submission to: Elayne Coakes (coakese@wmin.ac.uk) or Dianne Willis (D.Willis@leedsmet.ac.uk) or directly to the Editors. We look forward to receiving your papers.

- Lehaney B., Clarke S., Coakes E., Jack G., (2004) *Beyond Knowledge Management* Hershey: IGP Press
- Oinas-Kukkonen H., (2004) The 7C Model for Organisational knowledge Creation and Management *OKLC* April Innsbruck
- Sanchez R., (2001) *Knowledge Management and Organisational Competence* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Van den Hooff B., (2004) Eagerness and Willingness to Share: The Relevance of Different Attitudes towards Knowledge Sharing *OKLC* April Innsbruck