

Book Selection

Edited by J Crocker

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Capitalizing on Knowledge: From e-business to k-business

DJ Skyrme

*Butterworth Heinemann, 2001. xix + 331 pp. USD 24.99.
ISBN: 0 7506 5011 7*

Journal of the Operational Research Society (2002) 53, 1396. doi:10.1057/palgrave.jors.2601462

David Skyrme is a prolific author on knowledge management and related topics, including his own knowledge management web site at <http://www.skyrme.com>. The subject matter of this book is, literally, exactly what the title says; how to go about making money out of what you know. This topic is addressed at all levels from the corporate to the individual.

The author has a down-to-earth style, using many practical examples to illustrate the arguments he is putting forward. An interesting feature of this book is to give some of these examples, together with other important points, the status of “knowledge nuggets”. These appear in boxes in the text, and have their own separate index at the front of the book; this is a very effective device, not least because the nuggets include examples of failures as well as successes.

Turning to the content, the subtitle ‘from e-business to k-business’ is slightly misleading. Although one chapter out of the nine is specifically devoted to e-business, and another to Internet marketing, e-business is not the main theme of the book. The Internet is presented, quite rightly, as just one of many influences on business at the start of the 21st century. The book’s theme is in fact the identification and uses (actual and potential) of knowledge assets. Topics covered include the recent history of knowledge management; knowledge-based businesses; knowledge markets; “productizing” (sic) knowledge; knowledge-based marketing; and the knowledge economy. Throughout the book, the author strikes a nice balance between the broad picture and specific examples.

There seems to be a slight disagreement between Skyrme himself and whoever wrote the publisher’s blurb on the cover as to the intended audience for the book. The Preface states that “[t]his book is primarily for practitioners”, but also that “[academics and students] . . . will benefit from reading this book”. The cover claims it “gives professionals, managers and business students insights”. Not surprisingly, the author knows his capabilities best. There is a mass of good practical advice, even including various templates and checklists in four appendices that can be used to test the suitability of a k-business idea or a web site. The view presented is a balanced one; emphasising the benefits, yes, but not with too much hype, and including the pitfalls as well. Many will find the glossary of terms useful as well.

Skyrme at one point apologises for his lack of academic rigour, but in fact it is rare to find such a practical book that cites all its sources and includes (on average) more than 20 footnotes to each chapter, ranging from academic texts to TV programmes.

I think anyone interested in the future of knowledge-based businesses, whether practitioner, academic or student, will find this a very worthwhile read.

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JS Edwards

ELECTRE and Decision Support: Methods and Applications in Engineering and Infrastructure Investment

M Rogers, M Bruen and L Maystre

*Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999. xii + 208 pp. £76.
ISBN: 0 7923 8647 7*

Journal of the Operational Research Society (2002) 53, 1396–1397. doi:10.1057/palgrave.jors.2601463

ELECTRE (elimination et choix traduisant la realite = elimination and choice translating reality) is the French connection to multi-criteria decision methodology, restricted in the planning of engineering infrastructure projects, its