



EDITORIAL

John S Edwards

Knowledge Management Research & Practice (2006) 4, 259–260.
doi:10.1057/palgrave.kmrp.8500117

This issue completes the fourth volume of *Knowledge Management Research & Practice (KMRP)*, which has again contained more papers than any previous volume. The six regular papers in this issue come from authors based in six different countries, continuing the international perspective, and address topics as diverse as organisational learning, knowledge management strategy, rewards for knowledge sharing, and knowledge creation. Two of the papers also break away from the typical organisational focus of most of the knowledge management (KM) literature, one considering knowledge cities, the other looking at the scientific method as a knowledge creating activity.

The first paper is 'Learning Cycles in Knowledge Intensive Organisations' by Bastiaan Rosendaal. Rosendaal explores organisational learning using a questionnaire based on Boisot's Social Learning Cycle (Boisot, 1998). Responses have been obtained from employees of four departments in three knowledge-intensive organisations in the Netherlands. Rosendaal has a particular interest in the extent to which empirical findings bear out theories of organisational learning in general, an area he identifies as under-researched. In the specific case of the Social Learning Cycle, the findings support the theoretical framework partially but not completely. The Social Learning Cycle is based on the three dimensions of Boisot's Information Space (I-Space) model. These three dimensions, codification, abstraction and diffusion are clearly present in the empirical data. However, the six stages of the Social Learning Cycle do not emerge so clearly: Rosendaal suggests that they might perhaps be reduced in number, and that the relationship of the stages with the dimensions of the I-Space needs further research.

The next paper is 'Knowledge Management in SMEs: The case of Icelandic Firms' by Ingi Runar Edvardsson. As readers might expect from the title, Edvardsson presents the findings of a survey of SMEs in Iceland, which achieved responses from 265 firms. In Iceland as elsewhere, the vast majority of organisations are SMEs, yet the vast majority of the knowledge management literature concentrates on large organisations. Interestingly, 24% of respondents stated that they had a KM programme in place, even though only 21% claimed to have a KM strategy in place. One wonders what guides the KM programmes in the other 3%, although larger organisations are not immune from this error either. Edvardsson's findings also reveal that the use of ICT is widespread even in the smallest firms, but these are usually basic technologies such as Internet, intranet or data warehousing rather than more sophisticated support for KM. Those firms that have implemented KM programmes are very positive about the benefits achieved.

The third paper is 'Knowledge Sharing and Rewards: A Game-Theoretical Perspective' by Ulrike Cress and Stefan Martin. Cress and Martin address the individual's problem in deciding to contribute (or not) to a shared database. If knowledge is power, then some individuals may be reluctant to share their knowledge unless (perhaps even if) they are rewarded for it. But from the organisation's point of view, the cost of additional rewards needs to be less than the benefit the organisation gains from the sharing of knowledge. Cress and Martin model this knowledge exchange problem by treating it as an example of a 'public-goods dilemma', and demonstrate that it is possible to devise a bonus system which is effective from both the

individual's and the organisation's viewpoints. The analysis also suggests that a shared database is likely to be most effective in a group that has low resource overlap and high interdependence between members, such as a community of interest.

The fourth paper is another case, 'Applying the KnowCis Methodology to a Greek Municipality: A Case Study' by Kostas Ergazakis, Kostas Metaxiotis, John Psarras and Kostas Grammatikos. Ergazakis *et al.* pursue the concept of the 'knowledge city', which has been discussed in previous papers in *KMRP*. This paper differs from previous work in that it reports on an ongoing project to develop the Greek municipality of Maroussi (part of the metropolitan area of Athens) into a knowledge city by the use of an explicit methodology. Progress in the 1 year or so to the time of writing has taken the project through the definition of its strategic direction and on to the creation of an appropriate set of action plans. Thus far, the methodology has proven effective, although the most important test will be the implementation of the various parts of the action plan. Readers will no doubt look forward to a further progress report in due course. The work so far has highlighted that it would be beneficial if more computer support could be provided for using the methodology itself.

The penultimate paper, 'Knowledge Creation through Boundary-Spanning' by Rebecca Mitchell and Stephen Nicholas, examines the process of knowledge creation in organisations. Mitchell and Nicholas develop a model of knowledge creation, which focuses on boundary spanning, on the basis that 'the ability to transfer knowledge across boundaries is paramount to continued learning and innovation in organisations'. They go on to

devise five propositions for future empirical testing. These relate to the effects of cognitive diversity, transactive memory, trans-specialist knowledge and specialist boundary roles.

The final paper is 'Knowledge Management and Scientific Knowledge Generation' by Mariana van der Walt. Van der Walt's paper looks at science as an activity of knowledge management. In particular, she considers whether the rates of success in knowledge creation that have been achieved by 'the scientific method' in the natural sciences can be paralleled in the social and human sciences. In doing so, she makes use of concepts from complexity theory and soft systems. Her arguments are illustrated by the case of the South African Navy's Institute for Maritime Technology. The work is exploratory at present, the aim of the case being 'to show how a framework that incorporates the insights of this study might look'.

To continue the theme of moving away from 'traditional' KM territory, Heiner Müller-Merbach's 'Philosophers and KM' article looks at Mittelstrass's triad. Here knowledge is contrasted with information, as happens widely in the literature, but the third heading is opinion – rarely mentioned explicitly on the same level as the other two headings. Inexorably this leads to the consideration of 'opinion management': does this relate to the popular concept of 'spin'? Definitely a question for readers to think about.

We trust that you have found something to grab your attention in this issue. As always, *KMRP* welcomes articles on any topic relating to managing knowledge, organisational learning, intellectual capital and knowledge economics.

Reference

BOISOT MH (1998) *Knowledge Assets*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.