KNOWLEDGE UNPLUGGED

The McKinsey&Company
global survey on knowledge management

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acknowledgements

Almost 2½ years ago, an engineer and a physicist sat together in the garden of an Italian restaurant on the outskirts of Darmstadt. As they relaxed over an espresso, they started to wonder about all the hype surrounding knowledge management. The engineer was Prof. Dr.-Ing. Herbert Schulz, Director of the Institute of Production Engineering and Machine Tools (PTW) at Darmstadt University of Technology, and I was the physicist, at least by training. Professionally at the time I was head of McKinsey & Company's global Automotive & Assembly sector. Much had been published in the academic world about knowledge management, and there were case studies that seemed to support the belief, however vague, that knowledge management might be the key to success in managing businesses. The mysteries still surrounding the topic defied our backgrounds in the hard sciences: knowledge was difficult to measure, hard to explain, but it was clearly becoming increasingly important. Our conclusion was obvious. We decided to try to demystify the topic and transfer proven analytic tools to the field of knowledge management. We wanted to identify success patterns and develop a pragmatic approach for managers to improve the utilization of their companies' knowledge base. This book is one result of that effort.

A joint team of doctoral students at the PTW and McKinsey consultants set out with an ambitious work plan and the even more ambitious goal of blowing the smoke away from the knowledge management discourse and shattering the mirrors. In January 2001, the third generation of team members met with Prof. Schulz and me for the final project review meeting.

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