

PREFACE

Knowledge management is an emerging discipline with a long history. Knowledge management processes, on the other hand, such as knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge discovery, knowledge organization, and knowledge retention have long been recognized as important factors in achieving organizational effectiveness. The advances in information and communication technologies, globalization and the shift toward the knowledge economy have led to a growing interest in knowledge management for profit as well as non profit organizations. In this ever expanding age of technology and innovation, organizations are more aware of the needs of consumers, the status of competitors and the increased demand for improved products and services. The digital interconnectedness of the world has facilitated collaboration and sharing of information and knowledge between organizations and individuals bringing new challenges and opportunities to the organization's management team. A few added prospects include not only increased collaboration, but also the incorporation of learned practice knowledge from the experts, both inside and outside of the agency, innovation, and maintenance of intellectual capital. Knowledge gaps and loss of productivity are major issues organizations are dealing with as a result of the aging workforce and information overload. As the need for people with skills and competencies to deal with these issues grows, the discussion about knowledge management as profession will continue.

The issue of whether knowledge management should be treated as a separate profession or just integrated in the existent professions has great implications on the types of skills and competencies that information and knowledge professionals must acquire to succeed in this highly digital and interconnected environment. The concept of the information and knowledge management profession is fairly new. It has been difficult to define exactly what is encompassed in the field and who should be considered a professional. At its broadest construct, every employee of an organization and their subsequent clientele could be considered a knowledge management professional since each individual brings to the workplace knowledge, information, and experiences that are beneficial to the mission of the organization. As a result, limiting knowledge management to a single group within an organization is not the most efficient and effective use of company resources. The most successful organizations are those in which knowledge management is incorporated into everyone's job, inclusive, and also includes a process of infusing knowledge of the consumers. Having said this, there is still a need for knowledge management champions who will be able to see the big picture and recognize the importance of people as key knowledge resource. Someone who will be able to work closely with knowledge workers understands their needs, provides directions and motivation, as well as facilitates knowledge management activities and practices.

Historically, information professionals, mainly librarians were charged with the role of gathering, processing, organizing, and disseminating explicit knowledge (information). A significant shift in the way information is gathered, processed, and disseminated took place as a result of the advances in information and communication technologies. New areas of focus centered on computers and information systems such as information science (IS) and management of information systems (MIS) have emerged and continue to expand. Although these areas might appear as light weight computer science, their focus is still on information related activities. Information professionals struggled for years in search of a common conceptual framework that could adequately describe and define the domain of the information and knowledge work.

Today, the increased interest in tacit knowledge and intellectual capital does not necessarily make that task simpler but to some extent this change brings a missing piece that is essential to the information and knowledge domain. Managing tacit knowledge brings an added level of complexity to the picture, which up until now has been frequently neglected or downplayed. The new element involves a human centeredness and therefore the social context within which knowledge is developed. In other words, it is almost impossible to manage knowledge without taking into account the human and social construction in which true knowledge exists. Managing both forms (tacit and explicit) of the knowledge domain requires an understanding of these complexities incorporating the nonlinear, holistic, and social attributes of societies, cultures, and organizations. The current challenge is to develop mechanisms that will merge these complex, nonlinear, social processes into the linear processes of information management.

This challenge is no where greater than in the non-profit organizations. Knowledge management can bring tremendous benefits for non-profit organizations and assist them in achieving their missions even though they have been slow to embrace knowledge management practices and technologies. One reason for this lack of enthusiasm from human service organizations can be attributed to the lack of knowledge management tools sensitive to the evolving, non-linear, contextual nature of the work they do. Other reasons include a consistent lack of resources, time, and technology expertise often seen in these agencies. Putting these issues aside, the non-profit, human service organizations can offer some interesting skills and lessons learned to knowledge management professionals who are trying to assist in efforts to meld in these social complexities. The social science professionals, such as the social worker, sociologist, or human service worker, who have been trained and are comfortable, working in the nonlinear and holistic realm of life, can be a knowledge management asset. Encompassing the human centered perspective also involves examining issues of owners of knowledge and the proliferation of knowledge. For instance, whose knowledge has more power, juxtaposed with the importance of inclusivity when sharing and incorporating knowledge with marginalized communities, and the diverse definitions of social and intellectual capital. In this era of

discussion of the new knowledge management professional, the use and influence of this sector must be highlighted. Bringing these two perspectives together can enhance both professions.

As the demand for trained information and knowledge professionals grows, the urgency to develop a defined set of required skills and standards is increasing. Generally, information and knowledge professionals are the ones traditionally charged with acquiring and maintaining information essential to the organization success. Today, we see a need for these professionals to go beyond information incorporating the nonlinear, holistic, and social attributes of societies, cultures, and organizations. They must work in a highly digital interconnected and complex knowledge environment with confidence and professionalism. An information and knowledge professional is someone who is trained to use information and knowledge to advance the mission of the organization, harnessing technology to create and manage information and knowledge resources and services. Given the great diversity in the roles in which they operate, it is vital that information and knowledge professionals come together to set and maintain high level of standards for themselves if this is to become a truly respected and recognized profession.

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