

Knowledge Management
Harnessing Individual Capital Through
Information Systems
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Abstract

Knowledge management (KM) is a “field of study that promotes the creation, capture, sharing, and application of an organization’s knowledge.” (Becerra 2014) To completely understand KM, this paper will first take a closer look at what knowledge is, as well as outlining the benefits of harnessing knowledge, and the capital that each person’s knowledge has. After taking a deeper look at knowledge, the paper will explore how information systems (IS) are involved with KM. The relationship between KM and IS will be united by examining the latest trends, the benefits of using IS, and some of the challenges. To make this full exploration, the paper will be looking at the analysis of KM through the eyes of Frank Leistner, Irma Becerra-Fernandez, and Dorothy Leidner. To understand individual capital, as well as the impact a person's knowledge capital, can have in an institution, the paper will discuss Pierre Bourdieu and his perspective on cultural capital.

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Aristotle and Plato believed knowledge is more than just absorbing sensory observations. Aristotle and Plato knew, as well as many other philosophers, that often times one's senses can be deceiving. Therefore, it can be argued that knowledge is making logical connections that can also be tested. The storing of observational data has been around since the beginning of human history. Data has become more scientific over the years, but humans have always struggled with implementation. Recently institutions have begun efficiently using collected data with the help of computers and information systems (IS) and building a network that allows people to be connected all over the world. This giant network of people facilitates the sharing of knowledge that has been gathered from each individual's life. The ability to manage the sharing of this knowledge is called knowledge management (KM) (see Appendix for more information about KM). This paper will explore the various technologies that can be used create direction from data findings, and the connections that are made between data points.

Data, Information, and Knowledge

In the field of information technology (IT) there is a hierarchy regarding data, information, and knowledge. The first step is data, which is “devoid of context, meaning, or intent but can easily be captured, [and] stored.” (Becerra-Fernandez & Leidner, 2014) Data has no real meaning on its own, it is raw and unprocessed. Next is information, which is where data is given context. Trends within data can be seen at the information level, and patterns emerge. Knowledge is the top tier of this hierarchy and is considered to be the most valuable. Knowledge is the ability to connect data and information together in order to produce statistical outcomes for

the future. (Becerra et al., 2014, p.5) Knowledge is the ability to infer from evidence and probability. There are two types of knowledge, explicit and implicit. Explicit knowledge is “knowledge that has been expressed in words and numbers, and it can be easily codified and shared as data, specifications, computer programs, videos, etc.” While tacit knowledge, “is difficult to express and share, such as intuitions and insights.” (Becerra et al., 2014, p.5)

There are many programs that have recently enabled companies to gain insight into tacit knowledge, but this technology also requires a human element. There is no magic bullet technology. Frank Liestner, Chief Knowledge Officer for SAS Global Professional Services says “it is very clear that people think that all they have to do is buy and install the right software to be successful.” (Leistner, 2010, p.135) In order for the information systems to properly operate Liestner writes that there are five fundamental requirements for “knowledge flow.” (Leistner, 2010,p.57) These requirements are passionate initiative support, culture, trust, executive support, and multiple drivers. Passionate initiative support is the “enthusiasm and the desire to make [the IS] work no matter what challenges are encountered on the way.” (Leistner 2010, p61-62) Culture is local and organizational. Local culture is primarily focused on the people in that particular area. The neighborhood, city, state, country are examples of local culture. Organizational culture is the company culture. The structure of a company plays a large role in how enthusiastic employees will be regarding new IS. Trust comes in two major variations, personal and topical. Topical trust is whether a person trusts another “skills or knowledge.” (Leistner 2010 p.64) Topical trust can inhibit KM through IS if employees do not trust adopting one another’s knowledge. Executive support is the top executives of the company supporting their employees by means of enhancing

the work environment and overall making “[employees] feel appreciated.” (Leistner 2010 p.68) Multiple drivers are “the motivations or triggers that influence people to participate.”

Information Systems

Irma Becerra-Fernandez, who is the Knight Ridder Research Professor of Management Information Systems at Florida International University College of Business Administration writes that, “Learning how to manage organizational knowledge therefore may produce many benefits, including leveraging core business competencies, accelerating innovation and time-to-market, improving cycle times and decision-making, strengthening organizational commitment, and building sustainable competitive advantage.” (Becerra et al., 2014, p.4) It is no wonder then that so many institutions have invested heavily in IS to exploit individual and collective cultural capital.

Social Networks

The identity of social networks is relatively recent. According to Mariam Alavi, the vice dean of the Goizueta Business School of Emory University and John M. and Lucy Cook’s Chair in Information Strategy, “[research on] social networks focus[es] on the relationship between actors, the characteristics of these relationships, and their outcomes.” Research on social networks has been very slow until the development of the internet, which has allowed for social media like Facebook and LinkedIn. (Becerra-Fernandez & Leidner 2014) Now researchers can observe people from an extreme macroscopic level and view the entire world interact. Reddit is an excellent example of KM at a global scale. Reddit holds regular Ask Me Anything (AMA) sessions via the internet, where people who are archetypes of their field answer questions from people all around the world. It is the ultimate exchange of knowledge.

Conclusions and Further Study

Any one of the sub categories of this paper could easily encompass a person's entire career. Human's seem to be entering an age where there is no longer an inhibition of access of knowledge as much as a question of what to explore. What do we as individuals want to invest our time and energy into learning? The knowledge is readily accessible via the internet. It is only a matter of choosing what field to invest in. At the same time, it is increasingly important to keep in mind the difference between absorbing sensory information and what it means to truly know a field of study. The internet has much more sensory information than knowledge. It is easy to feel a sense of authority after watching an expert speak on their particular field of study, when in reality it is only the very beginning of the knowledge journey.

References

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Appendix

1)The term knowledge management (KM) was not regularly used until 1998, when management consultants and software organizations began trying to define the sharing of databases as well as the connections that individuals were making between data points. (Leistner 2010)