

Chapter XX

Knowledge Fusion: A Framework for Extending the Rigor and Relevance of Knowledge Management

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ABSTRACT

The article proposes a simple framework termed ‘knowledge fusion’ to extend the rigor and relevance of knowledge management (KM). It points to some gaps in the current body of knowledge about KM, and provides a parsimonious set of ‘partitions’ that link to and from traditional knowledge management research and practice. It proposes that attention be paid to knowledge mobilization that reflects the demand side that is dominated by knowledge being part of individual identity and hence personal choice of whether, where, why and with whom to share knowledge and expertise as oppose to just understanding the traditional knowledge management that addresses only the supply side of information and the creation of environments for communication

and collaboration, especially those “knowledge” largely being independent of the individual.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to point to some gaps in the current body of knowledge about knowledge management (KM) and in doing so to suggest extensions to its frameworks and to areas of investigation that build on its strengths. We propose a simple framework for what we term knowledge fusion, based on the following line of argument that captures what knowledge management is as a field, rather than what many of its critics feel it should *not* be as a domain of intellectual study and social action:

1. Knowledge management is axiomatically a mission-driven, corporatist field. Its focus is not on knowledge but on management processes that use information resources and related corporate “assets” to enhance innovation and collaboration: knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, and knowledge dissemination. There are many valid and powerful alternatives to the axioms of KM, explicated by Ekbja and Hara (2004), Ekbja and Kling (2003), Wilson (2002), and Fuller (2001), but they basically reject KM for its mission as much as its methods and intellectual base. To a large degree, “membership” in the KM field of both research and practice involves accepting the corporatist mission. We choose the word “corporatist” carefully, since it captures the view of knowledge as organizational assets, the aggressive goal of innovation, and the purposive intentions of generating a high return on investment that drives KM in both the private and public sectors. This view generates conflict for many thinkers who do not believe that knowledge is to be valued mainly for its contribution to organizational payoff.
2. KM as a corporatist practice is in many ways an announcement by the information systems community that it has positioned to move beyond information organization to information deployment; that shift is signaled by the choice of “knowledge” as the target of “management.” A constant tension in the KM field is the difference between information and knowledge, but at its core KM has been information-centric. It aims at connecting innovation and growth, the core goals of the enterprise, back to information-based capabilities, one of the obvious means to that end, and to raise its own centrality as a strategic force in and of itself rather than as a support base for change management, process innovation, and business capability development. KM is thus as much an organizational ambition as a domain of research and practice.
3. A major current limitation to progress in KM application and impact is that there is a very clear difference between the fundamental dynamics of knowledge management and of knowledge *mobilization*. Knowledge management addresses the supply side of information organization, creation of environments for communication and collaboration, leveraging of intellectual capital, and incentives for shifts in work practices, especially those that either impede or facilitate knowledge-sharing, with “knowledge” largely being independent of the individual; it is a corporate asset. Leonard’s (1989) assertion is representative here: “Just as organizations are financial institutions, so they are knowledge institutions.” Knowledge mobilization, by contrast, reflects the demand side that is dominated by knowledge being part of individual identity and hence personal choice of whether, where, why, and with whom to share knowledge and expertise (Keen, 2006; Qureshi & Keen 2005). Knowledge mobilization views information and knowledge in terms of situational needs—“what do I need to know *now*?”—while knowledge management tends to focus more on “what knowledge can we provide to our employees and what mechanisms can we put in place for them to make most effective use of it?” The push-pull tension between management and mobilization is captured in a comment by a manager that, “The organization does not understand how knowledge is shared here and I tend to ignore the knowledge management initiatives wherever I can” (Von Krogh, Roos, & Sloucm, 1994).
4. There can never be a universal “theory” of knowledge management, any more than there is any consensual agreement on what is knowledge in the mainstream of philosophy or any shared operational agreement as to its

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