



Chapter 2

Conceptual Linkages: An Analysis of the Organizational Learning, Collaborative Technology and Intellectual Capital Literature

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The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, it seeks to establish a conceptual link between three distinct bodies of literature dealing with:

- (1) learning organizations,
- (2) collaborative technologies also referred to as groupware, and
- (3) intellectual capital.

Huber (1991) notes in his critique of the organizational learning literature that much opportunity exists for any further investigation that seeks to link these seemingly disparate bodies of literature that cover knowledge acquisition (intellectual capital), information distribution (groupware), information interpretation, and organizational memory. Second, the analysis reviews the theoretical underpinnings of aforementioned bodies of literature to ascertain the scope and breadth of the theory base behind organizational learning. Third, candidate areas for further research are explored.

The following macro- and micro-level questions raised by authors and researchers who study organizational learning and groupware technologies serve as a point of departure.

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1. In an information age economy is organizational learning increasingly dependent on information technology to transfer information and knowledge (Huber 1984; Drucker, 1994)?
2. Do information age organizations need to develop and transfer intellectual material to survive (Badaracco, 1991; Peters, 1992; Drucker, 1994)?
3. Can organizations survive without continual learning (Garvin, 1993)?
4. Do collaborative technologies such as Lotus Notes (Notes) foster collaboration (Kling, 1991, 1993)?
5. How can organizations accelerate the process of converting individual learning into organizational learning (Kim, 1993)?

These structuring questions serve as focal points for a critical review of the literature. Particular attention is focused on how individual learning, knowledge, and insight is transferred to the organizational level. Within the intellectual capital literature, the focus is on capturing and transferring intellectual material. To accomplish the goals of this analysis, this section is broken into three parts. Part 1 contains the results of a content analysis of the literature.⁷ Part 2 explores the theoretical bases underpinning organizational learning and technology use. Part 3 focuses on an integrated critical review of the three literature bodies. This section is organized to respond to the aforementioned questions posed in the introduction to this chapter. Also, conceptual linkages, common themes, and gaps in the literature are discussed.

PART 1—CONTENT ANALYSIS

To explore the aforementioned questions and to ascertain if conceptual links exist between the aforementioned bodies of literature, a review of the qualitative and empirical research is necessary. A content analysis was conducted to accomplish this task. A fundamental assumption underlying an analysis of the literature and the content analysis is that organizational learning is increasingly dependent on information exchange and sharing and technology use (Kling, 1991; Hendrick, 1994; Stewart, 1994; Schein, 1993; Drucker, 1994). The object of the content analysis is to ascertain if commonalities exist within the context of the articles, books and studies that comprise these respective bodies of literature. The literature is full of normative prescriptions and anecdotal references to linkages between these three bodies of literature. With the exception of Brynjolfsson's (1993) review of the related information technology and productivity literature, there is scant systematic analysis of the nexus between these literature bodies (Huber, 1990).

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