

# Chapter 112

## Motivation in Collaborative Knowledge Creation

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### INTRODUCTION

The importance of motivation in knowledge management (KM) debates is now generally acknowledged. Motivation affects the overall quality of knowledge used and produced in the work situation, the willingness to contribute to KM systems, the willing engagement in knowledge sharing and many other facets. Lacking sustained motivation in association with an insufficiently knowledge-friendly culture has often been mentioned as the principal culprit for failed KM initiatives and

programs (Davenport, DeLong, & Beers, 1998; McKenzie, Truc, & Winkelen, 2001). As Hislop (2005, p. 44) notes, KM authors have not always recognized this prime role of motivation. In the era when KM was – wrongfully – equated with information technology by many authors, an era that is – again wrongfully – labeled as first generation KM by some authors, motivation was one of many socio-cultural factors that were ignored. In recent years, the KM literature has incorporated and elaborated older, sometimes more critical debates regarding social aspects of knowledge and its role within organizations. These broader developments, fuelled by such concepts as communities-of-practice and social epistemologies and informed by critical rebuttals of KM proponents' managerialist ideologies, have secured a place for motivation in the KM arena

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as a socio-cultural factor that is indispensable for understanding knowledge processes and KM.

## **BACKGROUND**

The basic reason for recognizing the key role of motivation in KM is the acknowledgment that knowledge does not just have explicit aspects, but is fundamentally embodied, tacit and inextricable from practices of individual human knowing (Hislop, 2005). An economically-inspired account of knowledge as an organizational resource that primarily builds on the explicit, theoretical and generalization sides to knowledge is bound to treat motivation as an external factor that may have an effect on knowledge processes, but that is not in center stage. An appreciation of the individual's role as a member of epistemic communities with possibly conflicting collective worldviews shows that the ontological and epistemological foundations of knowledge cannot be separated from issues of motivation (Hendriks & Sousa, 2008). What Blackler (1995) describes as the embodied (or individual tacit) and encultured (or collective tacit) sides to organizational knowledge cannot be fully understood unless socially-mediated individual incentives for engaging in knowledge-producing or knowledge-using activity are included.

Notwithstanding its increasingly recognized relevance to KM, knowledge about motivation issues in the KM arena is scarce and scattered. Huber (2001, p. 72) argues that "the management practice literature is replete with reports of practices being used to motivate a firm's knowledge workers... to participate with commitment in the firms' knowledge management system." Empirical research on the effectiveness of such practices, however, is in short supply. With respect to the connection between KM practice and motivation for knowledge work, our ignorance exceeds our knowledge (Huber, 2001). Whereas empirical research on the impact of KM practices on motivation is lacking, research does exist that addresses

how motivation affects aspects of knowledge work. Studies show the role motivation plays in explaining knowledge worker turnover and career development (e.g., Tampoe, 1993; Kubo & Saka, 2002). Others address how motivation is linked to knowledge aspects of work, such as creativity and other facets of knowledge exploration, and cooperation and knowledge transfer in knowledge teams. Questions addressed in such studies are how motivation plays a role in the establishment of key mechanisms that will lead to knowledge becoming organizationally valuable (e.g., Amabile, 1997; Janz et al., 1997; Osterloh & Frey, 2000).

Understanding the effect of KM practices on motivation presumes an understanding of how motivation plays a role in knowledge-related aspects of work. Regarding these aspects, the focus in KM debates is on the combination of (a) the collective element in organizational knowledge that surfaces in knowledge transfer, distribution and sharing and (b) the learning focus in such knowledge processes as knowledge application and knowledge creation. The label we will use here to combine (a) and (b) is 'collaborative knowledge creation'. The organizational setting – including KM programs – simultaneously forms the background for collaborative knowledge creation processes to emerge and is constituted by these processes. The agenda for addressing the connections between motivation and collaborative knowledge creation follows from this conceptualization. Firstly, work motivation needs to be defined and work motivation theories have to be specified. Secondly, the link has to be established between these theories and the role of individuals in collaborative knowledge creation. Thirdly, the mutual connection has to be addressed between the role of motivation in collaborative knowledge creation and the work context. This agenda defines the structure of this article.

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