



The Phenomenon of Knowledge Management: What Does it Mean to the Information Profession?

by Marianne Broadbent

Knowledge Management: An Emerging Concern

Knowledge management is emerging as a key concern of organizations, particularly those who have already redesigned their business processes and embedded a total quality approach into their practices. Major consulting firms are now gearing up to add knowledge management to their lines of business.

What does this mean to library and information service professionals? Does it mean that the nirvana of public appreciation and value is here? After all, don't librarians organize and provide access to knowledge? Is it yet another management fad of the type referred to by Hilmer and Donaldson¹ that promises to be the technique to manage organizations smartly and effectively? Does it reflect a shift of balance in the business world to an emphasis on the knowledge end of the data-information-knowledge spectrum? Is knowledge management just a new income stream for consulting firms when other buzz words lose their luster? Or perhaps knowledge management is an oxymoron, and it will be followed in a few years by "managing wisdom" when neither are really possible.

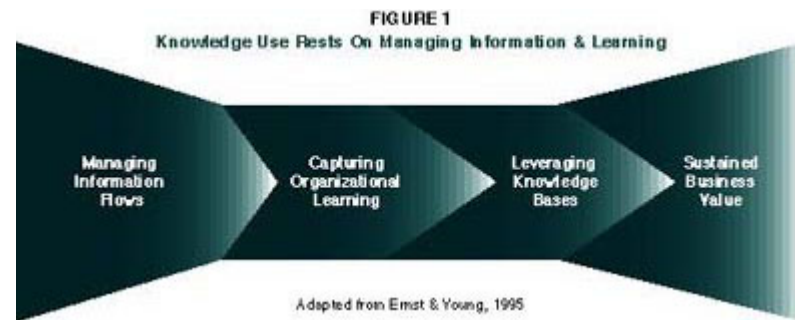
This article explores the phenomenon of knowledge management from the viewpoint of a management academic with a professional background as a librarian. My perspective is a critical and informed one--laced with a healthy dose of scepticism. In the early to mid 1980s, I struggled with defining the field of information management, of identifying the differences amongst data, information and knowledge, and the implications of these differences for professional education². Some of the knowledge management hype creates a distinct feeling of déjà-vu.

For the past four years, I have been involved in extensive international research examining the information technology infrastructure capabilities of organizations. A significant part of that research is now focusing on the nature of the capabilities required to provide a sound basis for successfully managing knowledge processes, professionals, and knowledge work. In the past two years, I have been a participant in the invitational symposia of several consulting firms in the United States and Australia as they shape their knowledge management practices.

I have multiple agendas in addressing library and information professionals on this topic:

- to provide a lens through which to view this emerging phenomenon
- to explain how other communities of interest are perceiving knowledge management
- to stimulate thinking and discussion about the role of library and information service

- professionals and the role of libraries in the management of knowledge
- to encourage library and information service directors to lead by example in managing the
- knowledge of their organizations, colleagues, and staff to challenge readers to tell us how they are managing knowledge now



My aim is not to engage in the esoterics of what knowledge management is and is not, but rather to inform and to prod with a pragmatic, selective, and eclectic review and examples from international firms.

As a well trained academic, I start with an explanation of what knowledge management is from the literature--but from the literature of management practice and consulting rather than academia. Examples of firms which (overtly) practice knowledge management are given. These are from a business and large firm perspective as they are amongst our international research sites. The nature of knowledge and knowledge work processes and their challenges is explored.

The role of organizational information politics provides a useful backdrop for understanding why some organizations will succeed and some will fail in their efforts to improve their management of knowledge. We conclude with some comments on which groups have claims on this emerging phenomenon.

Clarifying the Notion of Knowledge Management

Knowledge is increasingly seen as a primary business asset³ and knowledge management as a key differentiator between firms in the late 1990s⁴. Integral to the implementation of knowledge management is understanding the organization's information flows and implementing organizational learning practices which make explicit key aspects of its knowledge base. Knowledge management is not about managing or organizing books or journals, searching the Internet for clients or arranging for the circulation of materials. However, each of these activities can in some way be part of the knowledge management spectrum and processes.

Knowledge management is about enhancing the use of organizational knowledge through sound practices of information management and organizational learning. The purpose is to deliver value to the business. Figure 1 shows the relationship between these four components, indicating that knowledge management is more than managing information flows.

It rests on two foundations: utilizing and exploiting the organization's information (which needs to be managed for this to occur); and second, the application of peoples' competencies, skills, talents, thoughts, ideas, intuitions, commitments, motivations, and imaginations⁵.

To appreciate the challenges of knowledge management, we need to understand what knowledge is and how it gets transmitted. A useful way to think about knowledge is as enriched information with insights into its context⁶. We explain by example what this means to organizations.

A mid-sized manufacturing firm we call EstateCo knew that one of its products was not selling well and they did not understand why this was so. It had taken many years and dollars to develop. Their management information systems gave accurate information about how much of the product was selling and where it was selling, but no insights into the reasons why or what they could do about it--except where the firm was trialing a feedback approach with field staff.

This consisted of both face-to-face debriefings with sales executives and then an electronic discussion database involving the sales executives, field staff, marketers, and product developers. All field staff in the trial group had laptop computers and mobile phones and were able to readily dial in to the firm headquarters. Following the debriefings and further suggestions from the electronic discussions, some minor but important changes were made to the product. A renewed effort was made by the sales staff in that area and was successful. The turnaround time of six weeks was less than one third of the usual time it would have taken for this review process to be completed.

Capturing the insights of field staff about why the product was not attractive to customers, and making this accessible quickly to marketers and product developers, was an example of utilizing knowledge which might otherwise remain with the sales staff. It would remain in the minds of the field staff and not made explicit, captured and then factored into decision-making processes.

The fact that a sales person or reference librarian knows something about why products or services are not utilized the way the organization desires is not of itself organizational knowledge. It becomes organizational knowledge when there are management processes in place which capture that often personal, tacit, front-line information from which others in the organization learn and make decisions. This is the meaning of knowledge management--purposeful management processes which capture often personal and contextual information that can be used for the organization's benefit.

EstateCo's use of the field staff is just one component of the firm's integrated approach to knowledge management.

Expertise Centered Management for Business Benefit

Knowledge management represents a quantum shift for most organizations. It is a form of expertise-centered management focusing on using human expertise for business advantage.

When senior managers and consulting firms refer to the benefits of

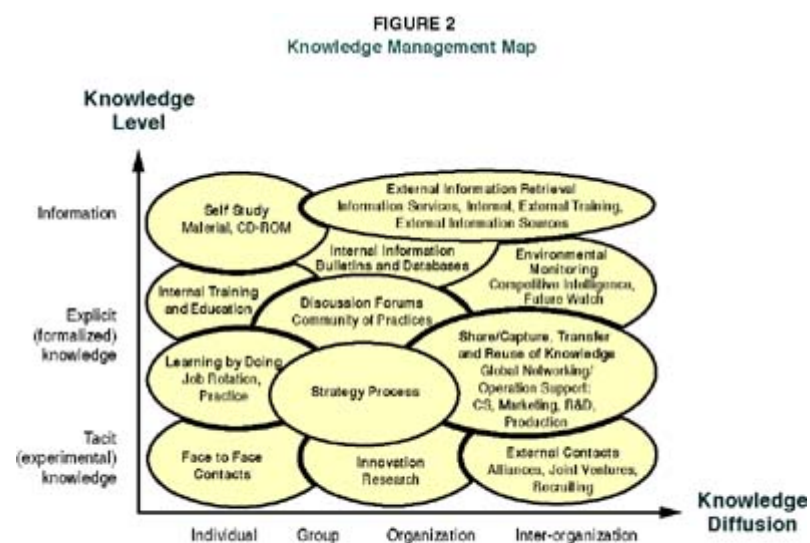
knowledge management, it is not from some altruistic perspective that people and organizations should have a better knowledge base. It is, to quote a recent symposium, about "leveraging knowledge for business impact" where considerable thought has gone into how good knowledge management practices can improve the competitiveness and financial performance of firms and ways in which this can be measured.

Knowledge management practices aim to draw out the tacit knowledge people have, what they carry around with them, what they observe and learn from experience, rather than what is usually explicitly stated. In firms that appreciate the importance of knowledge management, the organizational responsibilities of staff are not focused on the narrow confines of traditional job descriptions. Managing knowledge goes much further than capturing data and manipulating it to obtain information. The aim of knowledge management is for businesses to become more competitive through the capacities of their people to be more flexible and innovative⁷. These characteristics are organization-specific, the context is critical, and they are hard to imitate--attributes which deepen the sustainability of knowledge management as a competitive advantage.

Tacit and Explicit Knowledge

The distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge is critical in appreciating the scope of knowledge management and how it differs from information and data management. Nonaka⁸ refers to the spiral of knowledge where new knowledge always begins with the personal. For example, a researcher has insights that lead to a new patent. A manager's informed and intuitive sense of market trends becomes the catalyst for utilizing the patent in a new type of product. The factory supervisor draws on both experience and rethinking processes to develop a new process which brings the product to the market more quickly. In each case the tacit knowledge of an individual becomes explicit as part of the firm's management processes.

Nonaka identifies four basic patterns for creating knowledge in any organization:



From A. Boynton, 'Exploring Opportunities in Knowledge Management: How to Get Started', Knowledge Management Symposium, IBM Consulting Group, Sydney, 1996.

From Tacit to Tacit. When one individual shares tacit knowledge with another in face-to-face contact.

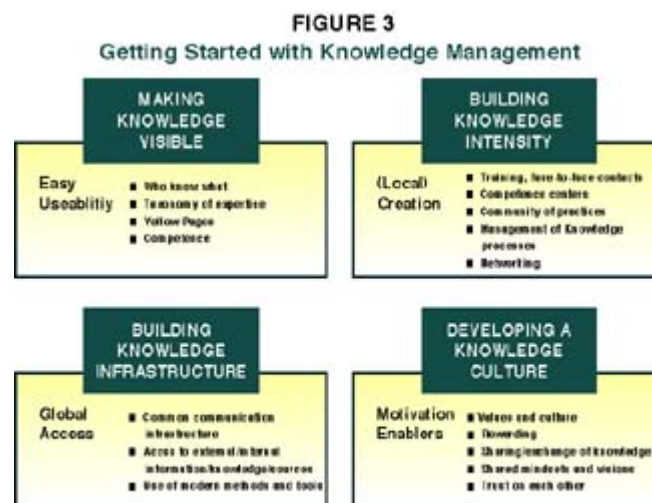
From Explicit to Explicit. When an individual combines discrete pieces of explicit knowledge into a new whole, such as a finance manager collecting and synthesizing information and opinions from different parts of the organization then putting this into a financial report..

From Tacit to Explicit. This extends the organization's knowledge base by codifying experience, insight, or judgement into a form which can be reused by others.

From Explicit to Tacit. When staff begin to internalize new or shared explicit knowledge and then use it to broaden, extend, and rethink their own tacit knowledge.

The real challenges in knowledge management occur in the last two patterns of knowledge creation: going from tacit to explicit and explicit to tacit. These patterns are often easier to recognize in everyday life, for example, in parenting, in relationships. It is worth reflecting, how often does this type of knowledge creation occurs in your organization? What conditions are conducive to encouraging such forms of managing knowledge?

Boynton has developed a useful schema of knowledge forms and presented these in the form a knowledge map depicted in Figure 29. The knowledge map has three knowledge domains or levels (tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge, and information) and four knowledge locations. These locations represent the extent of knowledge diffusion: individuals, groups, the organization as a whole, and inter-organizational locations. No organization can or should simultaneously attack all of the forms presented in Figure 2. The objective is to selectively address those areas on the map which would achieve the maximum benefit for the organization. This can take many forms, such as increasing the organization's competitiveness, client service levels, customer value, or other critical strategic objectives.



From A. Boynton, "Exploring Opportunities in Knowledge Management: How to Get Started", *Knowledge Management Symposium*, IBM Consulting Group, Sydney, 1996.

First Steps in Managing Knowledge

Four steps in getting started in knowledge management are described by Boynton¹⁰

- Making knowledge visible
- Building knowledge intensity
- Developing a knowledge culture
- Building knowledge infrastructure

These four steps are outlined in Figure 3. They are interdependent in that embarking on one without the others will hinder the acceptance and success of knowledge management as a major organizational focus.

Some well-run organizations have been doing these four steps for many years, while others are beginning to recognize their importance and the extent to which they need to be integrated with how work gets done. The need for this holistic approach is not dissimilar to many other management techniques¹¹.

Knowledge Management is Not New

To what extent does your organization already have one or more of the four steps in place? Libraries, as information-based services, should understand the importance of each of these steps and some are taking the lead in their organizations with the encouragement of senior management. Others wait to be asked, which I suggest has never been a wise tactic!

In delineating the four steps above, Boynton is clear that knowledge management is not new. It is something that good firms have been practicing for many years. But few have understood its importance or seen knowledge management as a purposeful management technique with multiple dimensions and impacts.

The firms which are currently being cited as leaders in knowledge management in the United States, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, and Australia have also been leaders in the careful application of other management techniques. Knowledge management is an evolution of their management practices, not something they have suddenly discovered which can be implemented in six months. Having recognized the importance of knowledge management and knowledge work processes, they find that they already have some of the foundations well implanted in their people and organization. They do not see knowledge management as a 'solution' but as a way to better use the expertise within and available to their organizations. These organizations span many areas: finance, pharmaceuticals, engineering, automotive manufacturing, service industries, consulting firms, healthcare, and public service organizations.

How Do You Recognize Knowledge Management

Organizations which understand--or at least where their senior management understands--the importance of knowledge management have the characteristics of learning organizations with well-managed information flows. In a major study of managing knowledge completed by the Economist Intelligence Unit and IBM Consulting Group¹², a composite set of characteristics of learning organizations was developed. These

characteristics focused on the organization's behavior in four areas: leadership, culture, managing people as assets, and structures and processes. The complete list reads like organizational nirvana, and discussion of the last two areas only is included here.

FIGURE 4
Managing People as Assets

- All employees understand short- and long-term business missions, which are a significant motivational factor in their day-to-day lives
- Non-financial measures of business performance include employee perceptions of work conditions, workforce diversity and other measures of human assets
- Management considers expenditures on individual skill development as an indispensable investment, not a luxury
- Self-knowledge and personal growth are formally recognized as important elements in the improvement of management skills and the success of the organization
- Training and development emphasize the responsibility of individuals for their own learning experiences. The company provides support for self-paced learning
- Human-resource professionals play an active role in developing business strategies with line managers
- The organization promotes periodic off-the-job learning experiences both outside and inside the organization

From *The Learning Organization*, The Economist Intelligence Unit
at IBM Consulting Group, 1995.

Managing People as Assets

An essential theme in managing knowledge effectively is the understanding the importance of people as organizational assets. While this might be slightly offensive to some, life is generally much better for employees when they are seen as assets than as items of expenditure--that goes for academics, librarians, clerks, couriers, mechanics, and senior executives.

Figures 4 and 5 list the characteristics of learning organizations gleaned from the Economist study. No firm with which I am familiar has all of these characteristics. However, the data gathered by the Economist Unit suggests that the greater the number of these elements an organization embraces, then the closer it will be to becoming a learning organization which "manages knowledge for business success."

Most senior library and information service staff will have no difficulty with this list at all--from an intellectual perspective. Librarians and library directors can be wonderfully analytical and enjoy the discussion of ideas and have warm feelings about how important people are in a people-intensive industry. The managerial and supervisory reality though is usually something quite different. Being able to practice effective people management is quite different from understanding how important it is. For example, ask yourself these questions:

How many of these characteristics are actually recognizable in your organization and/or in your library?

What parts of the budget disappear in tight times and who gets to participate in which professional development opportunities?

Where is money actually spent and what message does this convey to staff in tough times?

From whose perspective are you answering? If you are the library director, I suggest you delegate obtaining the answers to one of your staff--one who has security of employment, or is perhaps retiring soon. It is no use simply doing it with the senior management team. They will often have a very inflated idea of how well people are managed. But don't bother doing anything if you are not going to act on the results--no matter how pleasant or unpleasant they might be. It just raises expectations which, when they are not met, lead to greater cynicism and more jaded staff.

Structure and Processes in Place

Checking the extent to which your organization's structure and process characteristics match those of learning organizations is probably easier than assessing the nature of people management. Figure 5 lists the structures and processes that learning organizations tend to have in place.

In a large research project we recently completed on the role and payoff of investments in information technology infrastructure¹³, we found that several firms understood and practiced the notion of knowledge as a business asset. These tended to be large firms operating in multiple locations and often multiple countries and for whom rapid product development is a necessary core competence.

These firms understood the importance of the accessibility and sharing of business information, the rapid dissemination of knowledge, the role of communication and collaboration among employees, and designed both human and computer-based systems to achieve these goals. The Swiss-headquartered pharmaceutical firm Hoffmann-LaRoche (Roche) and the Tokyo-headquartered manufacturer, Honda, are two firms which exhibited characteristics integrating their leadership, culture, human resources approach, and structure and processes.

Mapping and Accessing Knowledge at Hoffman-LaRoche

Roche embarked on implementing knowledge management practices in early 1990 as part of its commitment to excellence and innovation in management¹⁴. Roche's business goals were defined as the first step and these were to get more drugs to market and to get them there as quickly as possible. Before the knowledge management program began, Roche was often the fastest to market, but was not consistently so.

FIGURE 5
Structure and Process in Place

- Investment patterns are consistent with corporate messages. If learning and knowledge transfer are high on a company's strategic list, the funding reflects these priorities.
- The organization has a process to archive and distill learning from past experiences and distinguish what works and what does not.
- The company conducts events frequently to share ideas, wisdom and experience.
- Business information on performance, current activities and best practices is widely accessible and shared.
- Information technology facilitates the rapid dissemination of knowledge and improves communication and collaboration among employees at all levels and at locations.
- Information technology systems are designed to increase the speed and precision with which tasks are completed.
- The organization encourages—and work routines allow—people to capitalize on opportunities for informal learning.
- Procedures exist to retain the business knowledge acquired by people who leave the organization.
- The company uses a variety of mechanisms to learn from external sources, industry, customers, suppliers, and competitors.

From *The Learning Organization*, The Economist Intelligence Unit at IBM Consulting Group, 1995.

Roche evaluated its explicit knowledge in key areas, particularly its product development plans and the implementation of those processes. The firm found that it did not always communicate consistent key messages and sometimes included contradictory, ambiguous, and inappropriate information. Roche concluded that its employees did not have access to the company's knowledge and were not adequately sharing knowledge or a vision of its products. As one effort to overcome this, Roche's knowledge management project team developed a corporate knowledge map to capture and enable access to the rich pool of knowledge that was buried within the company. The components of the knowledge map included:

Rewritten guidelines--outlining key customer or regulator requirements
 A question tree--charting the questions that customers want answered
 Contents--framing how a company should answer customer questions
 Knowledge links--mapping who should share what knowledge with whom, within the company
 "Yellow pages"--listing people who have knowledge and expertise

These components made explicit much of what was previously assumed--erroneously--to be more widely known. The map corrected inaccurate information which had been passed on, and identified tacit knowledge, such as knowledge links and yellow pages, which is often not in a form others can access or re-use. Roche uses the groupware product, Lotus Notes, as an enabler for facilitating knowledge management practices.

Leveraging Communication for Sharing Expertise at Honda

Honda is a large transnational firm with automotive design and manufacturing teams in multiple locations, trying to balance pressures of greater localization and globalization of its operations¹⁵. Honda provides an example of the linkages between many business processes and the recognition of the importance of human communication in managing

knowledge.

Honda has taken a two-pronged approach to increasing both its turnover and profitability: each region has clear strategies within a firm-wide context, and is heading towards self reliance in production capabilities; at the same time, Honda is improving its already strong research and development (R&D) capacity and implementing lower cost development strategies in its two major locations--Wako-shi (Tokyo) and Los Angeles--to enhance its competitiveness. Essential to Honda's approach has been the development of multi disciplinary redesign teams and the supporting infrastructure which enables those teams to quickly capture, convey and share their knowledge and development work utilizing sophisticated communications networks, particularly between Wako-shi and Los Angeles.

Honda's competes largely through product leadership. "We like to challenge the spirit with originality and creativity," stated the General Manager of Honda's worldwide Systems Division. "We are putting more emphasis on R&D in major locations around the world, but with strong links for checking and testing specification and mutual learning with our Japan-based R&D."

Increasingly, Honda has recognized the need for greater localization, particularly in styling, but in the context of sharing expertise and the learning in a firm committed to globalization of its operations. Honda has gone through several phases in its international business operations and refers to its current directions as glocalization. This refers to global operations which are increasingly self-reliant and able to source locally or from other regions, depending on the most efficient and effective arrangement.

Honda's long term strategies focus on innovation in automobile development and production technologies, exploiting new markets, expediting global operations and stabilizing the business against currency fluctuations. Honda's business maxims reflect these strategies and the commitment to glocalization and include:

Continuous innovation and originality in creating and developing new products

Rapid creation and adaptation of products for major regional markets

Expediting global operations through maximizing the synergies of production and operations in many countries

Continuing focus on reducing the cycle time from R&D through production and marketing

Staff of the highest caliber who excel in working together

Commitment to minimizing cost in all areas within the context and constraints of the above maxims

These business maxims, with their emphasis on product leadership, R&D, and cost minimization result in information and technology principles which stress information consistency, accessibility, and the importance of

communication networks. These principles include:

Information flow throughout Honda should allow all parts of the company to more easily and quickly spot trends and use these to Honda's advantage

Honda R&D staff in different parts of the world need ready access to each other to be able to communicate their ideas and output to their colleagues

Communication systems must facilitate high quality person-to-person interaction amongst R&D staff and between R&D, production, operations and marketing personnel

Communication systems must support the transfer of sophisticated design concepts, data, and documentation in a high quality and cost-efficient manner

This selection of Honda's business, information and technology objectives shows the links between the importance to Honda of managing its knowledge base and the expertise to speed development processes. Honda's infrastructure capability includes a full-service communication network and the management of selected databases (sales, finance, and part ordering) on a global basis. In each of these areas, there are considerable synergies and the systems are required for the effective sharing of information.

Honda's approach to infrastructure investments is highlighted in the efforts made to establish and then upgrade Honda's international network system (INS-III) in the past four years. The network, now named Pentaccord, was developed with three basic functions:

International telephone/fax communication between Japan and major overseas sites using an extension number

International high-speed LAN-to-LAN communication using standard international protocols (TCP/IP)

International high-speed HOST-to-HOST communications (IBM SNA)

Further functions were quickly added driven by strategic needs for enhanced interpersonal communications amongst R&D staff. These included an expanded international electronic mail facility and the commencement of multimedia communication. The network provides the capability for state-of-the-art design and styling work to be shared amongst major centers, particularly Los Angeles and Wako-shi. This has made a major difference to both the speed and type of design developments which can now take place. Photographic and digital images can be transferred with very high resolution. The styling changes suggested by say, Los Angeles R&D designers, can now be checked for specifications and feasibility in Wako-shi in a short time.

The System Division and R&D groups are now experimenting with further multimedia applications. "We know that person-to-person communication and informal communication, is critical in our business--both in the design and development area and amongst senior managers," explained the Systems Division's General Manager. "Our people get to know one another quite well

as many come to Japan or go on exchange to Los Angeles or Belgium for training. Some forms of communication need the richness of seeing the person and how they react to various suggestions. We see multi-media as an avenue for supporting high bandwidth technical information and human communication needs in the future." Honda increasingly sees its approach to information and communications systems supporting global shared values, flatter management structures and the transparency of information throughout the company.

Honda's sharing of expertise, rapid exchange of R&D knowledge, and technical and human communications capabilities reflects the structures and processes of a learning organization concerned with managing its knowledge and expertise base for competitive advantage. The successful implementation of such an approach assumes that the firm

actively encourages the free flow of relevant information between key individuals and groups. However, this is often not the case and in discussing knowledge management a caveat is essential: know the information politics of your organization before embarking on a knowledge management program. We traverse the important issue of information politics in the final part of this paper.

Knowledge Work, Libraries, and Librarians

The basis of how organizations compete--their core competencies--increasingly center around managing knowledge and knowledge workers. Where an organization's performance is heavily reliant on knowledge work then knowledge management is pivotal. Knowledge work emphasizes the use of professional intellect in activities which use individual and external knowledge to produce outputs characterized by information content¹⁶.

In a useful analysis of how to apply a process view and improvement objectives to knowledge work, Davenport, Jarvenpaa, and Beers¹⁷ explain that knowledge work is about the acquisition, creation, packaging or application or reuse of knowledge. Some examples of each of these types of knowledge work are:

Acquisition: Finding existing knowledge, understanding requirements, searching among multiple sources and conveying it in an appropriate form to a user, such as competitor intelligence;

Creating: Research activities in a pharmaceutical firm, creative processes in advertising, writing books or articles, making a movie;

Packaging: Publishing, editing, design work;

Applying or using existing knowledge: auditing, medical diagnosis;

Reuse of knowledge for new purposes: leveraging knowledge in product development processes, software development.

But to what extent do librarians and information specialists measure up as knowledge workers? Or is information just work?

FIGURE 6
Information Politics and Information Management Attributes



Adapted from Davenport, Eccles, and Prusak, "Information Politics" 1992.

Knowledge work is characterized by variety and exception rather than routine and is performed by professional or technical workers with a high level of skill and expertise. So do all library and information specialists qualify? Those who exercise their intellects in any of these types of activities are knowledge workers. If your work can be or is totally routinized, then you are an administrative worker, not a knowledge worker. If you describe what you do as organizing things for others to access, you come close to being an administrative worker rather than a knowledge worker.

Knowledge work is inherently hard to manage. Davenport summarizes the challenges in taking a process approach to knowledge work:

Variety and uncertainty in inputs and outputs

Unstructured and individualized work rules and routines

Lack of separation among process, outputs and inputs

Lack of measures

Worker autonomy

High variability in performance across individuals and time

Lack of information technology support

These challenges underlay the difficulty in managing knowledge itself. As work becomes more knowledge intensive, richer forms of communication become more important, as indicated in the experiences of Honda mentioned earlier. We need to know more about the people in our organizations, their expertise and the nature of their work. Groupware technologies, such as Lotus Notes, become critical to organizations where successful business or

service delivery rests on cooperation and coordination between knowledge workers. This is particularly the case where professionals in teams handle multiple clients and/or are geographically dispersed. As in Honda, technology can support knowledge work processes, but it must support and augment rather than replace human collaboration.

Information Politics and Knowledge Management

Organizations aspiring to manage their firm's knowledge base and develop the necessary information technology infrastructure capabilities need to understand their current approach to information politics. The politics of information in your organization (the library and information service and/or its host organization) might negate the value of attempting knowledge management practices and suggest a rethinking of the organization's approach to information management as a necessary first step.

Information politics is a natural aspect of organizational life. It needs to be recognized, and, if possible, consciously and constructively managed to achieve organizational goals. Initiatives such as knowledge management programs and the development of supporting capabilities usually rest on assumptions about how people in the organization generate information and their attitude to sharing information. These assumptions are often poorly based. In many firms, the reward systems, promotion patterns, and the behaviors modeled by executives, are quite inconsistent with learning organization characteristics and aspirations to be a "knowledge based" organization.

A useful diagnostic for reviewing the type and impact of information politics is the five model typology described by Davenport, Eccles, and Prusak¹⁸. These models outline different sets of circumstances and their impact on information access, efficiency, and quality. They are summarized in Figure 6. In medium and larger organizations, several models might co-exist in different parts of the firm.

Three of the models, technocratic utopianism, anarchy, and feudalism are less effective than the other two, monarchy and federalism, in the purposeful and constructive management of information and knowledge. It is difficult to see how the characteristics of learning organizations sit with, for example, the anarchy model of information politics. With no information management policy, individuals see the information they possess, both formal and informal, as theirs to own and manage. Even if the organization

decreed that information had to be shared, this would almost certainly be interpreted as explicit knowledge only, with no conduit or motivation to share tacit knowledge.

The nature of internal competitiveness and the level of internal political turbulence also plays a role here. Some organizations act as though their major competitors are other parts of their own organization rather external firms or agencies. This is often reinforced by reward systems that focus on individual performance only, despite the fact that the organization might espouse notions of "empowerment" and "team based work groups."

Organizations with a strongly feudal or anarchist approach to information

would find it difficult to gain value from investments in the infrastructure capabilities necessary to support knowledge management. Where the feudal model is prevalent, justification processes would not accommodate decisions about the needs of the whole organization, rather than that of its specific parts. Thus there is an iterative factor at work here: organizations with more extensive infrastructure capabilities would be more likely to be monarchist or federalist in their information politics. These are the same models of information politics which lend themselves more readily to the implementation of knowledge management.

An appreciation of the dynamics of information politics in your firm or host organization is most useful in planning how to achieve your goals--or in taking a pragmatic decision that your organization just would not be able to provide an appropriate foundation and environment for the practice of knowledge management. There are too many potentially rewarding areas on which to expend one's energies rather than those which are doomed to frustration. To paraphrase a famous quote: change what you can, then accept what you can't change, or leave the organization. Anything else is bad for your health and well being--and for those around you.

Concluding Comments

The impetus for expressing these thoughts on knowledge management and knowledge work came from two main sources:

Invitations to address library and information managers which forced me to articulate the relevance and application of my current research, executive education and consulting activities to library and information management

Discussions with and observations of librarians and information management colleagues who are struggling with the notion of knowledge management and trying to link it to what they thought they had been doing all these years.

These experiences reminded me of intense discussions with several MBA students with backgrounds as industrial engineers or systems analysts. Both groups thought they had been doing Business Process Redesign (or Design) for years. They had been tackling business processes, but from one perspective only. Similarly, librarians have excellent skills in organizing and codifying information sources and making these accessible to others. This represents the top layer of the knowledge map (information) rather than tacit and explicit knowledge.

Librarians are generally driven by a desire to provide access to information sources and match this desire with values that assume information sharing is a good thing. In a recent wide-ranging and stimulating address, Warren Horton¹⁹, Director-General of the National Library of Australia, and IFLA executive member, drew attention to these two facts about the library profession. Librarians are involved in a continuing search for excellence in organizing and codifying information sources. This is embodied in efforts to make access to electronic publications "intelligible and accessible." The second fact is that the library and information profession rests on "a bedrock of very solid and long term values." Both of these attributes are important for the practice of knowledge management. But they are not sufficient. They

need to be harnessed in two directions: towards specific organizational objectives that provide greater value to customers and clients; and, second, in the way in which library and information services are themselves managed.

Knowledge management is not owned by any one group in an organization, nor by any one profession or industry. But if librarians and information specialists want to be key players in the emerging knowledge management phenomenon, they need to understand the multiple perspectives of the other players. Some of the journal articles referenced at the end of this paper are useful starting points in coming to grips with the language and concepts behind knowledge management.

Knowledge management requires a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to management processes and an understanding of the dimensions of knowledge work. Knowledge management should be the evolution of good management practices sensibly and purposively applied.

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Dr. Marianne Broadbent is director of the IT Executive Program for Gartner Group Pacific. She was formerly a professor in the Management of Information Systems at the Melbourne Business School, University of Melbourne, Australia. She is co-author of the book,

Leveraging the New Infrastructure: How Market Leaders Capitalize on IT, to be released by Harvard Business School Press in July 1998. Broadbent may be reached via e-mail at: marianne.broadbent@gartner.com.

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