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Recommended Citation

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<http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2007/474>

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Knowledge Sharing as a Work of Self-Presentation: A Phenomenological Study in Knowledge Management Systems

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Abstract

Advocators of knowledge management (KM) have believed that through the power of information technology (IT), the success of KM would be automatic. Yet the investment in various KM systems in business has resulted in an “empty library” or an “expensive and useless information junkyard.” In exploring the insights of this phenomenon, we proffered that KS practice in respect to knowledge management systems (KMS) is a work of self-presentation regarding the issue of “face”. We explored the ambivalence of the self-presentation process undergone by 49 key informants in interactions and participation in web-based KMS through a six-month phenomenological interview. The “face” issue was commonly demonstrated in informants’ narrations of their knowledge sharing (KS) practices. Interpretive analysis of this phenomenon revealed three aspects of the “face” issue that were shaped by the professional and cultural norms while participants were participating in KS activities: (a) professional identification, (b) in-group/out-group, and (c) professional habit. These research results provide an answer to the “empty library” or “expensive and useless information junkyard” syndromes of KMS. In addition to the managerial implications, our study demonstrates the relevance of phenomenology for KM research and provides a new way of viewing KM problems in terms of human consciousness.

Key Words: *Phenomenological Interview, Knowledge Management System, Knowledge Sharing, Self-Presentation, Face*

The Syndromes of Knowledge Management Systems

Peter Drucker (1995, p.5) has stated that knowledge is “the key economic resource and the dominant – and perhaps even the only source of comparative advantage.” Viewed in this way, some theorists regard knowledge management (KM) as a matter of extracting the right knowledge from people’s memories and storing it in networked computers for later distribution (Tiwana, 2001). The emphasis is normative, mainly on codification and the discovery of a law-like relationship between knowledge parts. Yet the contribution of various codified knowledge management systems (KMSs) to business profitability has not lived up to expectations. For example, McDermott’s research indicates that many enterprises request their staff and professionals to share their “knowledge” by entering this codified “knowledge” into enterprises’ KMSs, believing that successful knowledge management will be the result. Yet, the enterprises’ KMSs always result either in being little used — “an empty library” or “an expensive and useless information junkyard” (McDermott, 2002, p.7; McDermott, 1999, p.104).

In Taiwan, the present authors have observed a similar phenomenon. The case for this study had been established for 7 years, with 90000 registered members, and was the biggest Internet-based KMS for the professional teacher community in Taiwan, the aim of which was the establishment of a smart, creative, teacher’s network (SCTNet). SCTNet (<http://SCTNet.edu.tw>) received government funding from the education administration department and the university professors’ leadership, and was endorsed by preliminary/junior school teachers. SCTNet provides several forums such as Discussion Board, Professional Workshop, Resource Sharing, and Coffee Shop for facilitating knowledge sharing (KS) among members. Teachers have to be registered to become SCTNet members in order to post work-related issues, participate in discussions, give critiques to postings from others, and to up-load and down-load instruction materials. The contents and activities of SCTNet are administered by knowledge managers to ensure that the database contains teaching-related knowledge.

Since SCTNet’s implementation, the corresponding parties have devoted considerable effort to promoting SCTNet via formal and informal channels. Yet, the actual number of KS participants on SCTNet is rather low. For example, according to observations from the official log maintained by the system administration, only 2% of the total registered members access SCTNet per day, and fewer than 5% of those who accessed SCTNet routinely contributed more than 80% of the overall knowledge posting.

Why does this phenomenon in KS practice exist? Ruggles (1998) indicates that effective KM depends more on people than on IT; and Husted and Michailova (2002, p.70) indicate that IT alone cannot solve the challenge of systematic KS. They go as far as to suggest that “knowledge sharing depends entirely on people.” However, many KM practitioners perceive people (subordinates, staff and professionals) as the objects and passively act upon managers’ or organizational demands in the knowledge management practices. This approach ignores the important issue that knowing is a human act and a residue of thinking (McDermott, 1999), and knowledge is “justified true belief” (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, p.58; Bruner, 1996, p.59).

In this research, we adopt a phenomenological philosophy and research methodology to seek what people, as the subjects of knowledge possessors and absorbers, perceive KS to be, and what their concerns are in their lived experience of KS from a contextual base. The

research findings can help IS managers to gain insight into the “empty library” and “expensive and useless information junkyard” syndromes of KMS.

Story Initiation

In the initial field notes following the beginning of the phenomenological interview of teachers who used SCTNet to share their knowledge, we wrote, “It is strange that the school is an obvious place for knowledge facilitating, but is not quite a knowledge facilitating place — teachers work there, but sharing rarely takes place there. Further, in terms of the SCTNet, a professional Internet-based KMS with anonymity protection, the teacher still tries hard to remain hidden.” This note was the first reference to the dialectic between the life of school and SCTNet that characterized the knowledge sharing behavior evident during the six-month period of the phenomenological interview. It was written after the first interview with a teacher who held back while sharing with colleagues in his school life and unknown others on SCTNet.

An Internet-based sharing forum, such as SCTNet, is a public platform which is a new form of social life (DeSanctis and Gallupe, 1987; Alavi and Keen, 1989). It is undeniable that both actors and audiences in the virtual society expect their presentations in virtual space to be proper because making errors is seriously detrimental to their ability to fulfill their teaching role (Johnson, 1997). Specifically, the society has a demanding and multi-faceted perception of teachers, in which the teacher is portrayed as a knowledge transmitter, cultural worker, technical expert, employee, intellectual worker, agent of ideological apparatus of the state, and care provider (Heck and Williams, 1984; Weems, 2003). In the context of Taiwan in particular, which is subject to strong Confucian influence, the title of teacher embraces the metaphors of “wisdom”, “excellence”, “knowledge” and “perfection”. For this reason, one’s behavior in the presence of others demands extreme caution. Accordingly, teachers conducting knowledge-sharing practice draw more attention from the public such as children’s parents, school superiors, colleagues, and unknown others in society. This social perception forces teachers to be extremely careful when behaving in public. In light of this, the best way to behave to satisfy the expectations of others becomes an important aspect of role-playing and self-presentation (Ben-peretz, 2001), both in the physical and Internet-based environments.

Face Concern in Knowledge Sharing Practices

The importance of “face” (*lien* or *mien-tzu*) has long been recognized as a prime determinant of Chinese behavioral patterns, whether those of an individual or of a group. Hu (1944, p.45) indicated that *mien-tzu* is a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation. It is prestige that is accumulated by means of personal effort or clever maneuvering. This kind of recognition ego is dependent at all times on external environment. *Lien* is the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation. It represents the confidence of society in the integrity of the ego’s moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for an individual to function properly within the community.

An individual’s face is relative to his social position, to the extent that he is able to

satisfy the minimum criteria that society has placed on him. Face in the social context is achieved when the evaluation of oneself by others is perceived to be important to the maintenance of one's position in society. Face is what others have recognized and extended to him (Ho, 1976). Moreover, Goffman (1995) depicts that "the person's face clearly is something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter and becomes manifest only when these events are read and interpreted for the appraisals expressed in them" (p.214). Ho (1976) indicates that "*the concern for face is indicative of other-directedness, that is, having a sensitivity to how one appears in the eyes of others, and attendance to act in ways which meet their approval. ... A person's face is assessed in terms of what others think of him; it includes what he thinks others think of him*" (pp.875-876).

For teachers in Taiwan, carrying the label of being knowledgeable is a form of face, making individuals ambivalent in their presentation in public settings. On the one hand, one's desire to gain face in the eyes of others drives an individual to grasp any opportunity from which he can learn. Yet, the risk of losing face causes him to fear other people's assessment of him. This is especially so in an unfamiliar, public setting like SCTNet where one's social position is well known and where there is a heavier burden from public expectation of how one should behave.

Phenomenological Interview and Data Analysis

The methodological perspective that underlies this study is based on the phenomenology research method, providing systematic exploration and description of the essence and meaning of lived-experience. Such a method is used in researching the world in which we live (Husserl, 1970; Schutz and Luckmann, 1973; Bergum, 1991), and addresses the question: "Why is a phenomenon like this?" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

We understand that people, things and objects that we experience cannot be separated from the culture in which we live and the language we speak. Hence, our actions, language, and concepts can embed shared meaning only within a social and linguistic frame of reference. It is asserted that nothing is ever experienced in isolation, but is experienced in the lived world (Pollio et al., 1997, pp. 8-15). For this reason, the social, cultural and historical tradition can help in capturing the whole sense of KS for a teacher (Van Manen, 1990, p.12). In light of this, the goal of our interview was to discover and interpret the shared meanings held by the teachers as they evolved through social interaction such as knowledge-sharing practice within the complex social setting of school life and Internet-based KMS. With this understanding, we are able to provide the answers to the SCTNet syndrome.

In this study, the mode of data collection during the 6-month period of field work was that of snowball and purposeful sampling. In phenomenological research, theoretically, the sample size is approximately 6 participants (Mores, 1986, 1991). However, in practice, the number of participants varies from 10 to 15 or more, depending on data saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In our study, a total of 49 participants were interviewed.

To permit participants to structure and sequence their accounts of events with minimal instruction from the interviewer (White, 1980), techniques described by Van Manen (1990) were used; interviews were designed to elicit narratives about the life histories and daily lives of the participants. Hence, each interview began with the question, "What is the

knowledge-sharing experience like in school life and on SCTNet?”

The age of the informants ranged from 25 to 55 years, with a mean of 35 years, consisting of 21 males and 28 females. Among these informants, 5 were school principals, 18 were school deans, and 26 were teachers. The length of time that informants had been using SCTNet for KS ranged from 1 to 5 years, with a mean length of 3 years.

Interviews took place from April 2004 to October 2004. All participants were given the research purpose and procedure of the interview prior to the start, and each signed the participation agreement describing both duties of the researcher with regard to research ethic and the informant's rights in the context of participation in the research. The length of the interview varied from two to three hours for each participant. Four participants required a second interview to clarify their narratives. The interviews were recorded by multifunction digital recorder and transcribed verbatim to maintain data integrity and to reduce perceptual bias. After the interview, the transcripts were given to the participants for their approval.

The transcripts of the interviews and field notes served as the basis for an interpretative analysis. The analysis procedures included horizontalization, delimiting to invariant horizons or meaning units, clustering the invariant constituents into themes, individual textual and individual structural descriptions, and synthesis of textual and structural meanings and essences (Sandelowski, 1994). For the horizontalizing process, we consider each statement in terms of significance for description of the experience and record all relevant statements. Then we list each nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statement to get invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience, and cluster them into themes. We further synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience. Through reflection on textual description and imaginative variation, we construct a description of the structures of the experience. At the final stage, we construct a textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience. These textual-structural descriptions from all researchers' experiences are constructed into a composite textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, and are integrated into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole.

During the data analysis process, three teachers who teach or had taught in elementary and junior high schools, and one SCTNet administrator joined the data category checking and validating process, in order to reduce investigator bias (Mitchell, 1986).

Findings

In the informants' narratives, "remaining error-free to save face," was frequently present in their depictions of their KS experience both in the school and SCTNet. The relevance of this simple expression must be considered in light of the importance of proverbs and aphorisms in the teaching community. The issue of face summarized informants' feelings and beliefs about their experience of self-presentation in terms of knowledge-sharing in school life and on SCTNet. Three different aspects of the face issue were apparent: (a) professional identification, (b) in-group/out-group, and (c) professional habits.

Professional Identification

As the teaching profession carries a high degree of respect within society, it expects such professionals to convey and embody wisdom, excellence, knowledge and perfection. Accordingly, remaining error-free symbolizes both informants' and society's belief in the sacred role of a teacher. In a typical statement, one very senior informant stated, "In my life as a teacher, I have been responsible for others' questions and respected by others. If I didn't keep gaining knowledge, people would look down on me!" He was both proud of his teaching profession and confident in that role. He reiterated this in the following words: "Throughout my life, I have had faith in myself, in the country, and in those students whom I have taught before." It is a great honor and duty to educate children, and being self-critical in learning is the best way to ensure a teacher's prestige. Thus, if a teacher failed to work towards self-development, he/she would not qualify as a teacher. For example, one informant stated,

If a teacher doesn't keep progressing, how can he/she be a teacher? If a little child asks a question and the teacher isn't able to provide him/her with the solution, then how can the teacher preserve his/her reputation?

Not only did the informants acknowledge that preservation of a teacher's status was crucial, they also realized that in another sense, they were perceived by the public as having the ability to achieve such status. It was their nature, and they took it for granted that they were competent enough to accomplish it, since they had undergone rigorous academic training. One informant elaborated on this:

In fact, a teacher possesses a strong sense of superiority. The feeling of incomparability is the result of the rigorous examination scheme in the country. To become a teacher, you must pass these exams, which have less than a two percent pass rate. As a result, all teachers are excellent.

"Remaining error-free", thus, reflected the informants' belief in their outstanding performance and professionalism, and was also a symbol of the sacred role as a teacher. Being aware of self as a teacher was so sacred, that the teacher acted cautiously not only when sharing knowledge in the school context, but also on SCTNet, particularly as SCTNet was specifically for the professional teaching community and provided a virtual forum for talented teachers from all over the country. Statements such as "it's a professional forum" and "there are plenty of grand masters on SCTNet" were common. Thus, to share knowledge on SCTNet and to remain error-free not only expressed a concern about professionalism, but also was an assertion of the sacred role of a teacher. One informant expanded on this:

I am a teacher now, and so I should think carefully before I post my thinking or make a response to an inquiry. "Does my posting inspire any one? Or is it helpful? And am I professional enough?" are always in my mind while I share on SCTNet.....because I am a teacher now...

In-group/Out-group

Being error-free also reflected the tendency of the informant to minimize the uncertainty of facing unknown others while presenting themselves in KS practice. Informants, although willing to speak in great detail about their inadequacies, particularly in regard to the

multiple roles demanded from being a teacher, tended to do so only amongst themselves and their best friends, in what they referred to as the “in-group”. The informants adopted a tone of voice that often accompanied the common phrase “it only happens in the private space” with a facial expression that communicated the sense of “having no way out of it”. This is described in the following:

I will ask my friends only about how to deal with the problem of children and their parents privately...

In the school life, colleagues without special connections were perceived as members of the “out-group” for the informants in terms of their thinking, beliefs, and feelings. In facing the “out-group” members, the best and safest way of face-saving was to keep silent. From the viewpoint of the informants, keeping silent meant two things in terms of KS. One was avoiding interfering with others’ professional territory, since everyone was excellent. The second was to save themselves from being embarrassed and losing face when making a mistake. A typical example of the way in which interfering with others’ professional boundaries could be avoided was given as follows:

In the case where we are familiar with each other, then I will share with you, otherwise I will keep quiet because I am afraid ... you may think I am stepping on your professional boundary!

Informant spoke about his decision to keep quiet when facing the “out-group” members to ensure one remained error-free:

If I don't know how unknown others perceive me, I would rather choose to remain quiet in front of them...

The need to remain quiet so as to guarantee remaining error-free and thus save face was reproduced in the Internet-based KMS environment while informants participated in KS. In light of the power of the Internet to draw together considerable numbers of unknown others and experts, to act properly required more cautious and rigorous vigilance on the part of informants when presenting themselves in such a forum. Informants talked about their anxieties when facing large numbers of “out-group”/unknown members in two ways. First, informants explained why invisible others made them uncomfortable when they presented themselves, since they had no way of measuring their performance. The following description by an informant was typical:

While writing in the Internet environment, I feel that ... it seems that I am naked and taking a shower over there... In my mind, I clearly know that many people are with me, yet I don't know what they think of me...

Second, informants explained vividly what they thought might expose them to dangers which could cause them to lose face. This statement was a typical example:

I have some concerns that if I express my viewpoints in detail, unknown others can easily recognize who I am via the traceable content and context that I provide. The teacher community is rigid and tight... Despite the anonymity protection via the information technology of SCTNet, it still is easy to recognize contributors.

“If I don't know how unfamiliar others perceive me, I remain silent...”, “On the

Internet, there are too many strangers...”, and “I am afraid when acting in front of strangers...” were common statements when reporting upon the experience of facing “out-group” members/unknown others in both school life and the SCTNet setting. Facing “out-group” members/unknown others was such a heavy burden for informants in their desire to remain error-free that “keeping quiet”, of course, had become the safest option in such a rigorous professional community. Interestingly, although to the informants we represented the “out-group” members/unknown others in terms of familiarity, they were willing to share with us their lived-experience, including both success and failure. This paradox showed that as we were effectively outsiders of the professional community, we were regarded as known others in comparison with the professional others of this society. We sensed that this community itself, with its error-free doctrine, made informants ambivalent about their interaction with others when involved in KS.

Professional Habits

“The force of habit is so strong”, reported informants when describing school life. Informants became accustomed to working alone, talking in secure settings, remaining quiet in public presentations, hiding personal inadequacy in the context of sharing practice, and ensuring consistency of personal actions with those of others. They believed that as long as they followed these shared habitual routines, then little effort would be required in the avoidance of mistakes. In particular, for KS activities, there were several pieces of evidence in support of this behavior pattern. First, informants indicated that in the education system, they were trained as good listeners rather than as good enquirers. Consequently, informants were not used to going through the dialectic process while involved in KS. A typical statement was:

In the teacher training process, we were instructed to focus on our professional ability...I have never heard that a teacher had to develop the skill of critique. We didn't have the opportunity to move toward the dialectic process, since few discussions happened in the class. As a result, we never questioned, “Why this but not that?”...

Second, informants reported that in the rigid hierarchical structure of the teaching system, they were educated to respect seniority, and encouraged their classmates to maintain harmonious relations. It was apparent that informants had inherited this habitual pattern when participating in KS activities, as illustrated in the following statement:

I am enthusiastic about helping others by giving my opinion, yet it is always rejected. Other teachers tell me that as a novice, I should not rush to present myself. I should do this and do that..... I think the suggestion is sensible and take it as my guiding rule for behavior.

Third, keeping self-actions consistent with others is an inherent habit shown in the informants' depictions of their experience of KS. One typical example revealed the situation in which informants who act inconsistently with others feel a heavy pressure:

I keep wondering whether I should give my class design to others. I had an experience in which people blamed me for doing too much. They said “You did

so much; so, what should we do?"

Informants were aware that giving up the habitual rules constructed by the professional society could create anxiety, stemming from the fear of falling foul of the behavioral guidelines. Relinquishing of such rules also brought the risk of informants making mistakes and losing face, both of which were strongly taboo in the teaching context. Consequently, inheriting social habits would guarantee the individual immunity from error when involved in KS with other professionals.

Accordingly, as the informants shared their life experiences on SCTNet, the salient belief outlined above framed informants' actions in that context. For instance, senior status influenced an informant's decision with regard to reproducing statements on the Internet-based KMS, as illustrated in the following statement made by a junior teacher:

When I am on SCTNet, I can post nothing but sit in front of the computer reading the discourse...In fact, I would like to participate, but I am a novice... I am really concerned that my status is not high enough to make any statement. People may laugh at my opinion... it bothers me a lot...

Another informant explained that as a senior teacher, she should be able to provide qualified suggestions in KS. She said when responding to an inquiry, she asked herself:

Is my posting helpful to others or can I impart rudimentary knowledge to beginners?" I have to think more before responding to the question...I am no longer a novice...

To remain consistent with others could be interpreted as humility, an important aspect of the nature of a teacher, while to proceed differently was read as showing off in the teaching community. In particular, teachers who had little self-confidence would choose to follow the habitual routine of being a good listener when sharing knowledge. This might obstruct an informant's personal ambition, but could protect him from making an error, as illustrated in the following statement:

"Is my statement right or does my statement arouse the anger of others?"... Instead of worrying about it, I would choose to listen...

Implications and Conclusions

In this research, informants perceived KS as the transit power in transforming oneself from working alone to belonging to the teacher's professional community, and as a means through which they could expand their experience from a limited to a broader horizon. They recognized the ambiguity of the "others" in the SCTNet as both an opportunity and an impediment in participating in KS practice. On the one hand, the "others" provided the opportunity to help teachers to transform and broaden their lived-experience. This allowed teachers who wanted to retain the sacred role of a teacher to expand their network with others beyond the confines of the classroom, to strive to break habits and to pursue recognition and acceptance as a professional by means of KS activities. On the other hand, the "others" were the root of the pressure derived from informants' fear of losing "face" as the consequence of

making mistakes. The “face” issue summarized informants’ feelings and beliefs about their experience of KS in terms of self-presentation in school life and on SCTNet. Elaborated from informants’ lived-experience were four different aspects of the “face” issue: professional identification, in-group/out-group, and professional habits. Our research findings have important methodological and managerial implications.

Methodologically, our research takes phenomenology as the paradigm for studying teacher KS experience. The phenomenological methodology offered an approach to research the complex world of human experience, and accommodated non-empirical data such as values, beliefs, and feelings. The intent was a contextually based, holistic psychology that viewed human beings (teachers) in non-dualistic terms, and sought to attain a first-person (teachers as the subjects) description of lived-experience (KS practice) (Giorgi, 1983). From this perspective, the meaning of KS was situated in a current experiential context and was coherently related to the KS participants’ lived-word (Sartre, 1962). Our study provides an original utilization of phenomenological philosophy and research method for putting back people’s KS experience into knowledge management research.

Managerially, our research explores whether KS practice on KMS is a work of self-presentation regarding the issue of “face” relating to individual social image or professional identity. The need to create a favorable social identification or professional identity could lead an individual to make self-protective or self-disclosing presentations. Whether an individual chooses to be self-protective or self-disclosing frequently depends on the social context, such as: a) knowledge perception; b) the type of group membership; and c) the tightness of the community.

First, with regard to knowledge perception, where knowledge is interpreted as “wisdom”, “excellence”, and “perfection”, then participating in KS practice could expose one’s inadequacies in front of others, thus putting the individual at risk of “losing face”. In this case, the individual adopts a self-protection strategy when participating in KS activities. On the other hand, where knowledge is understood as the sediment of success and failed lived-experiences, the KS practices become the means of learning and growing that help individuals retain their social position and save “face” in the society. Thus, for managers who wish to carry out KM projects, to understand the perception of knowledge in a specific context is fundamental, and critically important for KM success.

Second, the nature of group membership, such as the in-group and out-group focused culture, can affect a person's actions in KS practices. The distinction of in- and out- group is based on whether or not the group members have shared common interests and concern for each other’s welfare (Triandis, 1988; Tajfel, 1982). In- and out- group membership shapes a repertoire of strategies of action favouring or discouraging certain patterns of action (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1989). People would disclose themselves more in front of “in-group” members in comparison with those classed as members of the “out-group”. Thus, with regard to the presentation of self vis-à-vis others in terms of the issue of “face”, “in-group” sharing is less face-oriented than sharing among “out-group” members. Important to note is that in- and out- group membership is culturally determined (Triandis, 1988), where people in different cultures have strikingly different constructs of self, of others, and of the interdependence of the two in forming the boundary of in- and out- group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hence, KM managers need to understand the way in which group membership influences the processes of KS in different cultural and institutional environments for KM to be successful.

Third, the tightness of the community influences the degree to which information on the subjects who share their knowledge is accessible to the audience. In our case, the teaching community was a large family rooted in the few colleges specializing in teacher education. Teachers got to know each other through schoolmates, colleagues, and apprenticeship. This teaching family system forms a tight community, which means that when individuals present

their ideas, their identities can be traced by the audience. Even for teachers sharing knowledge in the anonymous protection settings such as SCTNet, the individuals' teaching community network can penetrate information technology (IT) anonymity protection and render teachers' identities transparent. In fact, sharing on the Internet/Web based systems means presenting self in public where a huge amount of "unknown others" and "out-group" members are gathered, watching you, yet, without being seen. In particular, while individuals' identities in the KM system are transparent, the presenters are present themselves before much larger audiences than they would be in physical settings. This results in more issues of "face" for KS participants in their public presentations. In respect of this issue, KM managers need to be aware of the way in which the tightness of the community affects the audience's accessibility to presenters' information, an issue that should be included for consideration in the design of an enterprise's KMS.

Overall, our research findings indicate that one has to be aware that knowledge and the social system from which it derives meaning are inextricably linked. Knowledge is what is shared with discourse, within a "textual" social system (Bruner, 1996, p. 57). To understand the meanings of KS practice, researchers need to know the lived-experience of practitioners as they participate in KS practice, particularly, through the lens of self-presentation in terms of the issue of "face". The presentation of self vis-à-vis others is a basic problem that no-one in any society can avoid. Though the notion of what constitutes "face" and the system governing "face" behaviors vary considerable across cultures, the concern for "face" is invariant (Ho, 1976). This is important as worldwide enterprises continue to devote huge investment into knowledge management activities (Babcock, 2004). Our research findings provide an answer to the issue of "face" for the KMS managerial syndromes such as an "empty library" or an "expensive and useless information junkyard". Furthermore, our study demonstrates the relevance of phenomenology for KM research and provides a new way of viewing KM problems in terms of human consciousness.

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