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Susan A. Brown
Indiana University, suebrown@indiana.edu

Anne P. Massey
Indiana University, amassey@indiana.edu

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Susan A. Brown, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, suebrown@indiana.edu
Anne P. Massey, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, amassey@indiana.edu

Abstract

This paper provides an introduction to the knowledge management and organizational learning mini track. We begin with a discussion of how the mini track has evolved over time, which is followed by an overview of knowledge management and organizational learning. This is followed by a discussion of some of the pressing research issues in the area. This overview concludes with a discussion of the journals and conferences associated with knowledge management and organizational learning.

Introduction

The knowledge management and organizational learning mini track has been a part of AMCIS since 1997. Originally posed as an organizational learning mini track, it has evolved to include both organizational learning and knowledge management. The inclusion of knowledge management resulted in a significant increase in the number of submissions to the track.

Since 1998, the majority of papers submitted to and accepted for the mini track have had a knowledge management focus. We view knowledge management as the broader, more encompassing term, while organizational learning can be viewed as the bridge between individual learning and the processes that comprise knowledge management (Brown and Massey 1997).

Knowledge Management

Knowledge management focuses on the creation of *explicit processes* that increase knowledge and learning throughout the organization (Alavi and Leidner, 1999). Knowledge management requires systematic attention to learning processes, culture, technology infrastructure and measurement. The process of knowledge management involves generating, capturing and organizing, accessing and sharing, and applying knowledge. Thus, knowledge management encompasses and is intended to support individual and organizational learning.

Today, increasingly interest is on the development of information systems designed specifically to facilitate the sharing and integration of knowledge. Such systems are referred to as Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) (Alavi and Leidner, 1999). Computer and communication technologies are enabling unprecedented access, integration, and movement of knowledge resources across geographically dispersed organizations. Technologies such as the Internet, Intranets, and Groupware are increasingly being used to enable access to and the sharing of information and knowledge. However, the technologies are embedded within organizational practices and cultures that may or may not foster the behavior needed to encourage organizational learning, or to facilitate knowledge management.

Organizational Learning

Organizational learning focuses on the ability of organizations to adapt to changing conditions (Huber 1991) and improve actions (Fiol and Lyles 1985). A number of perspectives for organizational learning have been proposed. They can be classified as the summative, interactive, and role-related views.

The first view (summative) suggests that individuals learn and this can be aggregated into an organizational level of analysis (Simon, 1991). This perspective is inherently linked to knowledge management. Here, an organization can provide learning experiences to employees or hire new employees possessing knowledge beyond that of current employees (Epple, Argote, and Devadas, 1991; Huber, 1991).

The second perspective (interactive) suggests that aggregating the learning of individuals is not, by itself, organizational learning (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Rather, this perspective argues that before learning can occur, there must be a process of knowledge exchange between individuals (Cohen and Levinthal 1991). Through exchange, new knowledge is created for use by the organization.

Finally, a third perspective focuses on roles (Simon, 1991). Here, learning is determined by the role an individual occupies in the organization. In this vein, organizational learning is a function of role-related

learning behavior, and is, thus, distinct from the individual occupying the role.

The key question is "Does the entity – here, the organization – acquire data, information, and knowledge in such a way to adapt to changing conditions?" As such, learning is inherently linked to the management of knowledge. And, importantly, learning is directly linked to the KMS intended to support it.

Issues Addressed in this Minitrack

The focus of this mini track is the linkage between knowledge management and organizational learning and the organizational processes that foster (or inhibit) information technology as an enabler of knowledge capture, sharing, and creation. We are interested in a variety of topics and research approaches, particularly those that are likely to promote discussion. Of greatest interest are field studies that not only discuss how organizations are managing knowledge but also how the process might be improved. Other research approaches, including (but not limited to) conceptual/theory development, surveys, and laboratory experiments, are also welcome.

Figure 1 presents a view of key topics of interest. At the core is the knowledge learned and possessed by individuals, groups, and the organization. These require the capability to access, acquire, assemble, adapt and apply knowledge in pursuit of organizational objectives and goals. Enables of this include knowledge management systems, culture, and leadership roles. Finally, measurement and the use of existing or new metrics are also relevant.
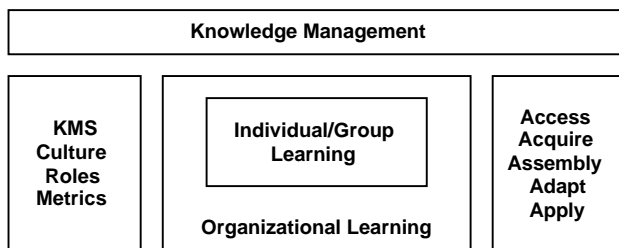
Example questions of interest include:

- What data, information and knowledge should be collected and shared?
- How can an organization collect, filter, and disseminate knowledge?
- How can a knowledge sharing culture be created and sustained?
- What incentives engender sharing?

- What technical infrastructure and systems enable learning, sharing, and knowledge creation?
- What metrics are appropriate or inappropriate to assess organizational value?
- What roles emerge in the successful practice of knowledge management in support of organizational learning?

The Future of this Mini track

A number of questions still remain in terms of our understanding of knowledge management, organizational learning, and their interaction. As research continues to evolve, we anticipate that existing questions will become clearer and new questions and challenges will emerge.

Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning Resources

The traditional publishing outlets for Information Systems (IS) and Management research are the best sources for research in this area. These include the *Communications of the Association for Information Systems, Information Systems Research*, *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, and *Organization Science,* among others. Likewise, the conferences of the Association for Information Systems and the Academy of Management, as well as the International Conference on Information Systems are appropriate venues for this line of inquiry.

Conclusion

This overview was intended to provide a broad perspective of knowledge management, organizational learning, and their interaction, as addressed in this mini track. We hope that the discussion provided a foundation for those unfamiliar with the area. Likewise, we hope that the discussion of potential research avenues engenders some excitement about the unexplored research potential in this area. We do not claim to have presented a comprehensive view of all research in knowledge management and organizational learning. Rather, we hope to have presented just enough of an overview to encourage more inquiry in this area.

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