Preface

Imagine Measure & Co, a two-person company creating optical measurement instruments for the graphical industry. Mark, the owner and founder of Measure & Co has a thorough background in measurement technology and has worked for years on his own. Lately, he has found a partner, Susan, who is experienced in commercial and marketing activities and takes care of customer relations and sales.

Although Mark and Susan together possess much of the knowledge that is needed to run their company, it is by far not sufficient. They need to stay informed about new measurement technologies, changing customer demands, changes in the printing industry, and so on, and so on. Moreover, they have to make sure that this knowledge is kept within their company and that they can apply it as well; a job that is extremely challenging in their dynamic industry. Thus, for Mark and Susan, it is important to manage their knowledge.

As this example shows, knowledge management (KM) is relevant for even an extremely small company like Measure & Co. Equally, or perhaps even more so, KM is relevant for thousands and thousands of other small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) all around the globe. In particular, SMEs in high-tech areas, characterized by complex and dynamic environments, are affected. However, if we look around us in the literature on KM, we see that most of it has a strong focus on large or even very large multi-national companies. Much has been written on, for example, knowledge strategies, intra- and interdepartmental knowledge sharing, KM information systems, and on KM in dispersed organizations. To what extent does this apply to Measure & Co?

We see the bias towards large firms also in the development of commercial KM solutions. How should Measure & Co make use of, for example, groupware, intranets, data mining, semantic networks, knowledge maps, and content management systems? Yet, for Mark and Susan there remains knowledge to manage.

This book addresses the challenges of managing knowledge in SMEs and in particularly those SMEs that operate in high-tech sectors. As illustrated in the example of Measure & Co, these challenges are different than those for large companies, not the least because SMEs are much more dependent on their environment than many large companies. Therefore, this book introduces the concept of *knowledge integration* (KI), which consists of the identification, acquisition, and utilization of external knowledge. KI is different from KM in that it places much more emphasis on external knowledge than KM does.

As good KM and KI ensure that high-quality knowledge is applied successfully, this book aims to provide knowledge that is both of high quality and applicable. To this end, it provides many examples and cases from practice, but always with a thorough foundation in the literature.

The book is not exclusively written for academics, nor is it exclusively written for practitioners. It rather aims at integrating both views. It is written by academics and practitioners together who attempted to learn from each other. As editors, we have extensively and successfully cooperated with the authors of the chapters in this book during a 3-year project 'Knowledge Integration and Network eXpertise' (KINX). This project was supported by the European Community under the "Competitive and Sustainable Growth" Programme.

In an attempt to impart our experiences to a wider audience we decided to publish our findings in this book. Drawing on a theoretical basis, it presents concepts and instruments that are designed to help SMEs to cope with their problems in identifying, acquiring and using external knowledge. We hope that it contributes to fill the current gap in useful books for KM in SMEs.

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