HKLA 30 March 2006

Summary of notes and quotes

- The perception of KM in Hong Kong
- The knowledge technology trap
- Can information professionals come to rescue?

Samples of terminology used to describe KM (from university course outlines)

"The KM standard specifies the requirements of a management system of knowledge resources and knowledge flows within an organisation in order to improve business performance and results"

"KM processes and techniques for the creation, collection, indexing, organization, distribution, and evaluation of institutional knowledge for re-use"

90 % of activities, programmes, curricula, and projects under the label of "knowledge management" are dealing with information management issues only.

'Knowledge' is defined as what we know: knowledge involves the mental processes of comprehension, understanding and learning that go on in the mind and only in the mind, however much they involve interaction with the world outside the mind, and interaction with others. Whenever we wish to express what we know, we can only do so by uttering messages of one kind or another - oral, written, graphic, gestural or even through 'body language'. Such messages do not carry 'knowledge', they constitute 'information', which a knowing mind may assimilate, understand, comprehend and incorporate into its own knowledge structures. These structures are not identical for the person uttering the message and the receiver, because each person's knowledge structures are, as Schutz (1967) puts it, 'biographically determined'. Therefore, the knowledge built from the messages can never be exactly the same as the knowledge base from which the messages were uttered.

Tom Wilson (2002)

http://informationr.net/ir/8-1/paper144.htm

Does it matter that that there is no distinction made between information and knowledge in the discourse in HK?

Yes, all 11 "sins" described by Fahey/Prusak in their famous article are committed in HK!

Fahey, L. and Prusak, L. The eleven deadliest sins of knowledge management. California Management Review, 40 (3), Spring 1998, 265-275.

1. Not developing a working definition of knowledge

2. Emphasizing knowledge stock to the detriment of knowledge flow

3. Viewing knowledge as existing predominantly outside the heads of individuals4. Not understanding that a fundamental intermediate purpose of managing knowledge is to create shared context

5. Paying little heed to the role and importance of tacit knowledge

6. Disentangling knowledge from its uses

7. Downplaying thinking and reasoning

8. Focusing on the past and the present and not on the future

9. Failing to recognise the importance of experimentation

10. Substituting technological contact for human interface

11. Seeking to develop direct measures of knowledge

Cultural issues seldom address in KM projects:

- Predominant social norm of hoarding knowledge in (Asian) cultures

- Deep-seated beliefs that sharing one's knowledge leads to loss of personal advantage in the organisation

- Low level of trust at all levels ("An outstanding apprentice will leave the master starving")

- Boundaries and attitudes of in-groups and out-groups

- Hierarchies

For a recent case study on cultural problems in KM projects see:

Lu Lin; Leung Kwok. "Challenges to KM at Hewlett Packard China". Knowledge Management Review 2006, Melcrum

The Role of information professionals:

- Human intermediary between the world of information and the information-seeking person much more important than all the emphasis on taxonomies and search engines and traditional library skills
- Human-centred approaches to understanding the relationship between people information and knowledge

“If we try something like forecasting the 21st century one of the basic problems would be that we do not really know what we mean when we talk about „information". Of, course, everybody knows what „information" is, but everybody understands something different by it. So we all are talking about „information" without understanding each other. We only believe that we understand each other.” (Wersig)

Information professionals tend to be more aware of complexity of information and communication professionals.

Not on the curriculum in Hong Kong:

Sociology of knowledge, which studies the social sources and social consequences of Knowledge Enterprises

Sociology of scientific knowledge, which addresses the effects of scientific research on human life and social relations, the effects of social relations and values on scientific research, and the social aspects of inquiry itself.

Epistemology, which analyzes the standards of justification for knowledge claims, that is the grounds on which one can claim to know a particular fact. It addresses the question "how do you know what you know?"

"Epistemology has never developed in Chinese philosophy. Whether the table that I see before me is real or illusory, and whether it is only an idea in my mind or is occupying objective space, was never seriously considered by Chinese philosophers. No such epistemological problems are to be found in Chinese philosophy (…), since epistemological problems arise only when a demarcation between the subject and the object is emphasized. And in the aesthetic continuum, there is no such demarcation. In it the knower and the known is one whole.“

> Yu-Lan, Fung (1948). A short history of Chinese philosophy: A Systematic account of Chinese thought from its origins to present day.

Knowledge in Chinese philosophy:

Confucius answered:

> “knowledge is in understanding man”

Knowledge in Chinese is connected with morality, ‘Understanding man’, not defined as knowledge of external matters, must connect with moral to bring about good (according to Lee Cher Leng, School of Chinese Studies, NUS Singapore March 2006)

Problems related to cultural issues arising in KM projects:

- Influence of culture on business culture, work dynamism and behaviour
- Respect for authority
- Harmony (oneness between heaven and men)
- Conflict avoidance
- Risk aversion

Challenge:

Rediscover wealth of insights from information science, sociology, communication studies, anthropology enrich the current discourse and practice on KM.

References:

Gernot Wersig: Information Science: The Study of Postmodern Knowledge Usage. Inf. Process. Manage. 29(2): 229-240 (1993)

The Information Service of the 21st Century

Gernot Wersig, Paper presented at SungKyunKwan University, Seoul, Korea, Sept.10,1996 http://www.kommwiss.fu-berlin.de/439.html

Waltraut Ritter March 2006

waltraut@gmail.com

but: Knowledge cannot be codified, re-used or standardized, or put into any form “system”