Book Reviews
Ellen Ernst Kossek, Ph.D., Editor

WORKING KNOWLEDGE: HOW ORGANIZATIONS MANAGE WHAT THEY KNOW

by Davenport and Prusak
Publisher: Harvard Business Press
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Reviewer: Paul R. Carlile, Sloan/MIT School of Management

When I first received this book for review, I had a curious but skeptical stance toward it. My curiosity came from the title of the book: *Working Knowledge*. To me, the phrase working knowledge suggests an understanding of knowledge as a dynamic, localized, and pragmatic phenomenon — in other words, a treatment of knowledge that is not too abstract or hidden behind words such as "transfer," "tacit," or "explicit." But at the same time I was skeptical. I wondered if the authors had just lifted this rather authentic title from some "off the beaten path" anthropologically based work (i.e., Kusterer, 1978; Harper, 1987) and would proceed to discuss knowledge as though it was simply something that could be dealt with using the proper information technology strategy. This skepticism of mine is fueled by the rapidly growing field that we now call "knowledge management," which merely treats knowledge as if it were information that, if properly stored and then retrieved, will be at the beck and call of any key decision maker or team facing a demanding task.

How do I feel now that I have read the book? My curiosity has faded, as has much of my skepticism — although not all. For those of us who take seriously the human side of the enterprise — as well as the non-human infrastructures that hopefully support it — this book makes progress toward moving the information technology-dominated view of knowledge (a.k.a., the storage and retrieval of knowledge) out of its technologically chunked treatment. The authors are clear about the challenging nature of managing knowledge; they admit to the many forms of knowledge that remain hard to access, and that knowledge must be absorbed and used if we are to call its transfer a success.

The authors fall short in that they only frame the task of knowledge management as a process of transfer. They fail to recognize that much of the task of managing knowledge in an organization is not only the creation and movement of knowledge to the right place, but the institution of processes through which knowledge can be altered, negotiated, and transformed as it moves among groups that have different specializations, metrics, or interests, but that are nevertheless interdependent. And it is this social and political task — that of facilitating the application and, hopefully, the transformation of knowledge across different functions or knowledge boundaries within the firm — that is of the utmost importance in clarifying the knowledge management task from the perspective of a human resource manager. Despite this primary concern, the book is full of examples, step-by-step suggestions, and overall strategies that will help to enable us, as teachers and practitioners of human resource management, to begin to fill in what is missing in terms of developing human resource practices that support more directly the transformation of knowledge within the firm, rather than simply the more straightforward task of transfer.

The overall strength of the book is that it not only provides an overview of the field that we call knowledge management, but also goes into depth on several key issues so as to not just be a synopsis. Chapter 1 begins with a "working" defin-

ition of knowledge and the various forms that knowledge takes. It also puts into perspective why knowledge is currently being framed as both a corporate and competitive asset. Chapter 2 follows this discussion of the overall market of knowledge — where knowledge comes from, both internally and externally, and how it exists formally and informally.

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss where and how knowledge is generated within an organization, as well as the current strategies for codifying and coordinating that knowledge. They also discuss the trade-offs in expense, as well as what is lost in moving from the dimensions of tacit, rich, or complex knowledge to explicit, schematic, and simple forms of knowledge. The end of Chapter 4 offers the examples of Microsoft's Knowledge Map and Monsanto's Knowledge Management Architecture, which are particularly helpful as examples of how these companies have chosen to codify and then coordinate their knowledge.

Chapters 5 and 6 outline the core of the authors' knowledge management strategy — that is, their strategies for knowledge transfer and the roles and skills that knowledge managers must play in implementing those strategies. The authors touch on the importance of trust, the creation of common language, and a knowledge-sharing culture (they provide a strong 3M example to illustrate this) as key issues that undergird any knowledge transfer effort. As I mentioned above, the major oversight here is that organizations naturally have knowledge barriers and a lack of a shared language due to different specializations and interests. The importance of this shared language is emphasized, rather than any critical understanding of the source of barriers to its implementation. Chapter 6 is full of what is perhaps most unique about this book: a detailed outline of the role and

skills of knowledge workers and knowledge managers in the firm. The skills that are recognized are focused on getting work done and showing practical results.

Chapters 7 and 8 describe and provide examples of the primary knowledge management technologies, such as Web technologies and databases; more formal technologies, such as Notes, case-based reasoning, and formalized expert systems; and more long-term technologies, such as neural nets and artificial intelligence tools. Chapter 8 outlines the issues that must be dealt with in implementing various knowledge management technologies and in successfully developing a knowledge management project. The discussion of the factors that lead to successful projects stresses the cultural, economic, technological, and leadership issues involved.

Chapter 9 provides a strong summary chapter that delivers practical advice, discusses common pitfalls, and offers a warning about over-reliance on technology ("If we build it . . . knowledge will flow"), rather than a conclusion with lots of promises. In this way, the authors' honest summary is in sync with the book's title, *Working Knowledge*, by providing workable advice about managing knowledge in a firm.

INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Richard Jeanneret and Rob Silzer (Eds.)
Publisher: Jossey-Bass, San Francisco
ISBN: 0787908614

Reviewer: Dr. Neal Schmitt,
Dept. of Psychology, Michigan State University

Both editors of the book *Individual Psychological Assessment* are founders and managers of human resource consulting firms and have done assessment work for a wide variety of organizations. Jeanneret's contributions to psychological practice have been recognized with the Distinguished Professional Contributions Award

presented by the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Both editors have been active leaders in professional organizations. All of the contributing authors are also assessment professionals. Two (Ryan and Sackett) are important contributors to the research literature on psychological assessment.

What the Book Addresses

Individual Psychological Assessment describes psychological assessment for the purpose of selection and promotion as well as development of senior-level organizational members. The chapters are consistent in the manner in which they recommend that assessments be conducted. All authors recommend that these assessments begin with an understanding of the organizational context (i.e., strategy, goals, challenges, assets, etc.) and the roles and job the incumbent will be expected to perform. Several chapters contain descriptions of the competency models that have proven to be useful frameworks by which to describe the strengths and weaknesses of assessees. Also described in several chapters are the various instruments used to collect information about assessees' competencies, along with descriptions of the manner in which the instruments ought to be used and the research literature supporting their use as assessment tools. Each author espouses the use of multiple sources of information, including resume data, interviews, simulations, standardized psychological instruments, survey feedback from individuals who have previously worked with the assessee, and even, in some instances, information from family members and friends. All chapters express an awareness of the fact that the assessor is serving two clients — the organization and the persons assessed. Several authors discuss the need to provide feedback to both clients as well as the nature of the feedback that should be provided. Most authors prescribe a model of assessment similar to selection and validation research conducted in situations with many more applicants — that is, job

analysis; criterion development; predictor development or selection based on the job analyses and information about desired incumbent performance; collection and analysis of predictor and criterion data; and a determination of the validity of the assessment. However, chapters by Levinson, Kaplan, and Meyer are much more clinical in their approach. Fulkerson describes the special assessment problems that occur when people from different cultures are assessed. Davis and Silzer discuss the relationship between assessment and organizational strategy. Hogan and Hogan point to the utility of a theory of human behavior as a guide for those doing psychological assessments.

Who Should Read the Book

I think this book can be of significant benefit to several audiences. First, the CEO or senior human resource professional interested in securing the services of an assessment professional can learn what he or she should expect from the consultant, how the consultant should approach the assessment, what the CEO must contribute to make assessment a successful organizational intervention, and what outcomes can be expected. The book is written with a minimum of jargon and technical information; a person with no psychological background would find this book informative and easy to read. This book should make the CEO an intelligent consumer of psychological assessment consultants.

Second, psychologists engaged in assessment have the opportunity to learn about approaches other than their own, which should enrich their own practice. Graduate students or others interested in learning about and doing assessment can learn a great deal from this book, although I suspect that many of the issues described must be experienced to be fully appreciated. Finally, researchers who may be interested in achieving a greater understanding of the assessment process and the degree to which it achieves desired results should read this book before they begin such research efforts.