Chapter 1.10

From Knowledge to Personal Knowledge Management

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INTRODUCTION

Personal knowledge management (PKM) is a conceptual framework applicable to personal knowledge. It is about taking an individual responsibility towards one's competencies in the community where one belongs, be it an enterprise, a professional group, an institution, a class, and so forth. PKM implies developing methods and skills in using software and hardware technologies specifically applied to knowledge. These ideas are capturing much attention and analysis, but there are no books about PKM. PKM is an emerging discipline that sometimes challenges the principles of KM (Knowledge Management), from which it descends.

To understand PKM we need to consider first the concepts of *knowledge* and *knowledge management*. Some widely shared beliefs are the following:

*   Knowledge is so valued today that our society defines itself as a " knowledge society";
*   Knowledge management is not a technology or a software solution, it is a discipline;
*   We are able to make distinctions among different forms of knowledge, that is, *explicit*, *tacit* and *implicit* knowledge, and see their transformations.

Even though we may share a global understanding, knowledge appears to be an unstable concept, continuously generating new waves of reflections as well as controversy (for an outstanding example

of dissent see: "The Nonsense of Knowledge Management" by University of Sheffield Professor Emeritus T. D. Wilson (2002). One cause of change is the powerful effect that the *new* technologies (advanced ICTs, digital technologies, the Web, etc.) have induced in every domain where we apply cognition. Under the effect of technology, knowledge acquires a dynamic property and we can interpret it as a communicating system, a *knowledge ecosystem* (Community Intelligence Labs, 2000; WC3, 2006).

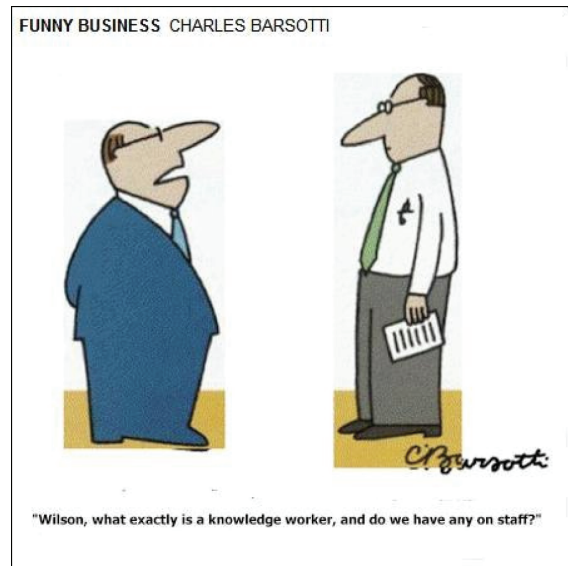## Knowledge Management vs. Personal Knowledge Management

To define KM let us look at the following two citations: the first, originally formulated in 1988, is by the renowned Karl Wiig, one of the founders of KM; the second is taken from a 1999 U.S. Army report:

The purpose of KM is the systematic, explicit, and deliberate building, renewal, and application of IC [Intellectual Capital] assets to maximize the enterprise's knowledge-related effectiveness and the returns from these assets. (Wiig, 2004, p. 48)

Knowledge Management is an integrated, systematic approach to identifying, managing, and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets, including databases, documents, policies, and procedures, as well as previously unarticulated expertise and experience held by individual workers. (EI.pub, 2002)

These two statements well characterize what was, at the end of the past century, the prevailing interpretation of KM. At that time, the so-called "knowledge worker" existed only *inside* the enterprise (as in the ironic cartoon by Barsotti, Figure 1). KM was a corporate affair related to being competitive in business and was implemented as a set of practices with a top-down approach that

Figure 1. Cartoon by Charles Barsotti, image courtesy of the author (http://www.barsotti. com)

exclusively favored corporate priorities. *Personal Knowledge Management*, instead, takes a different route.

The Motivation for PKM

PKM is a concept with depth and complexity, but its rationale is clear and simple: if knowledge is power, a precious asset for attaining leadership and self-realization, why should it not be at the center of an individual's *personal* aspirations and efforts? Why should it not be the object of a specific skill development effort?

Managing Knowledge means Managing Oneself, is Peter Drucker's title of an illuminating essay (Drucker, 2000). Therefore, the concept of knowledge as a fundamental *personal* asset of the knowledge worker, and not just a corporate asset, was already very clear to the best minds at the start of the century. However, when Drucker was speaking in 2000, not all the elements needed to trigger a change and start PKM as a new strand of KM were yet available.

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