

Chapter 7.1

A Communications Model for Knowledge Sharing

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ABSTRACT

An integrative, systems-based model of knowledge sharing can provide a way of visualizing the interrelated elements that comprise a knowledge management system. This original model, building on a rhetorical process model of communication, includes both the objective and subjective elements within the human cognition. In addition, it clarifies the purpose and method elements at the center for any effective knowledge system. The model centers on the purpose elements of intentions and audience, and the method elements of technical tools and human processes. The output of knowledge sharing includes objective products and subjective interpretations. Feedback verifies the timeliness and efficiency in the process of building both information and knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past quarter century, the theme of knowledge management (KM) has appeared among the top five influences in changing how organizations work (Abell, 2000). Various thinkers, however, focus on different concepts under the heading of knowledge. Idealistically considered, knowledge consists of information in use, and wisdom combines knowledge with values (Lloyd, 2000). As a practical aspect of business, successful companies recognize intellectual assets as having an equal significance with the tangible assets. With today's economy driven by connectivity, a fundamental shift in business models is occurring, whereby information, knowledge, and relationships underpin competitive advantage (Braun, 2002), especially information built on new technologies (Orr, 2004).

This chapter paper proposes a *systems model of knowledge sharing* as a way to create knowl-

edge-friendly workplaces. After briefly discussing existing models, the chapter elaborates the communication model that underlies underlying communication. The proposed model begins by clarifying the communication model that underlies both explicit and tacit knowledge. It then elaborates the systems elements of the knowledge sharing model: the input status and assumptions; the purpose elements of intention and audiences; the method elements of technical tools and human processes; the chaos creativity that integrates these elements; the output products and interpretations; and system feedback.

BACKGROUND: PRIOR MODELS AND HEURISTIC BASIS

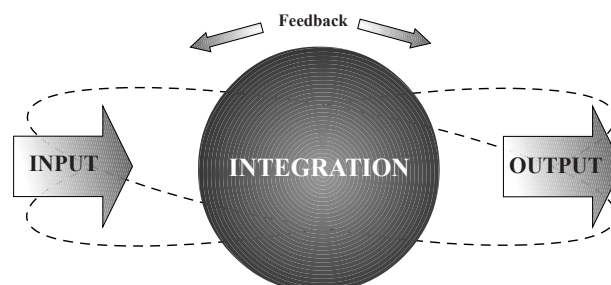
In general, models help organize information. According to Vail (2000), “Models efficiently capture, store, and help communicate enterprise knowledge in many forms, ranging from stories (verbal models) to diagrams (pictorial models) to spreadsheets (quantitative models)” (p. 10). Among the limited existing models for this new field, Leonard (1999) focuses on the individual consultant in the knowledge industry; however, this comprehensive approach results in a complex and somewhat unwieldy model. Luan and Serban (2002) propose a tiered knowledge management

model, capturing tacit knowledge within an organization. Malhotra (2004) provides two models, differing by routine or structured information and nonstructured/routine; however, the models focus more on technology than on the human element. The proposed model of knowledge sharing attempts to overcome and provide a comprehensive but simplified model, capturing key relationships in a manageable, visual format (Beck & Schornack, 2005). The proposed model expands on a systems-based model of communication to identify the elements involved in a knowledge sharing system. The model builds on the underlying systems model (Figure 1).

The rhetorical process model expands this simple system in two dimensions. The horizontal division separates the objective in the subjective parts of the process. Additionally, the integration section is further divided in half, creating four elements within the central integration (see Figure 2).

- The inputs to this process include the objective status and the subjective assumptions. The integration begins at the top center of the model, with the purpose elements of intentions and audiences.
- The integration continues at the lower half of the model with the method elements of genre and process. Rather than following a linear process, these four elements of integration interact, labeled here as embodiment.

Figure 1. Basic systems model



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