Knowledge Management, Organizational Memory and Organizational Learning

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We began the Organizational Memory (OM) mini-track at HICSS-27. The purpose was to “provide a forum for information systems and other related researchers and practitioners to share ideas and theories about organizational memory and organizational memory systems.” This forum proved highly successful generating more than 30 papers over a 5-year period, including some that were later revised and published as part of a special issue of the Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce. While interest in the concept of OM has increased over the decade, its manifestation as Knowledge Management (KM) in the practitioner domain limited the types of research that were submitted to the mini-track. In response to this trend, we renamed the mini-track as Organizational Memory and Knowledge Management.

Based on feedback from last year’s session participants, we have further expanded our scope this year to include Organizational Learning (OL). It is evident that OL can not be easily separated from the concepts of OM and KM. However, the nature of submissions to this year’s mini-track made it clear that KM and KM systems are the key focus items within this research domain.

As was the case last year, we received fourteen paper submissions, and accepted nine papers for presentation in three sessions. The first session includes three papers that focus on defining knowledge and knowledge management and on testing the concept in a variety of ways: by observing use of a prototype KM system, by designing an architecture for a KM system, and by observing KM in organizations. The first paper, “Turning Tacit Knowledge Tangible,” by Dick Stenmark, argues that structures can be developed to tap into an individual’s tacit knowledge – knowledge that we know but cannot explain. Stenmark reports the results of a study that examined how individuals used a prototype “recommender” system to capture and visualize professional interests within an organization. The second paper, “Multi-Perspective Enterprise Models as a Conceptual Foundation for Knowledge Management Systems,” by Ulrich Frank, takes a pragmatic view of knowledge. It defines a set of requirements for a system that manages knowledge. These requirements then are used to describe an architecture for a KM system. The third paper in this group, “Knowledge Management: A Review of Theoretical Frameworks and Industrial Cases,” by Hsiangchu Lai and Tasi-hsing Chu, develops a comprehensive theoretical framework for knowledge management by integrating previous frameworks. The authors use the framework to analyze eight KM cases.

The second session includes papers that reveal insights from a variety of industries where KM and OM systems are being used. The first paper, “Knowledge is Acknowledged: Towards an IT-based Knowledge Management Process in a Health Care Quality Support Group,” by Ulrika Snis, describes a field study of an IT-based KM system used by a quality support group in a pharmaceutical company. The system managed explicit knowledge (knowledge that has been documented) through a knowledge-mediating system, which transfers and customizes knowledge among a dispersed group of co-workers. The second paper, “Knowledge Management in the Professions: The Case of It Support in Law Firms” by Petter Gottschalk, uses law firms as a representative industry well-suited for KM systems. Gottschalk finds that the extent to which Norwegian law firms use IT-supported KM is influenced by their use of IT. The third paper, “Barriers to Actualizing Organizational Memories: Lessons from Industry” by Karma Sherif and Munir Mandviwalla, explores data collected from four organizations that created an OM system. They discovered barriers to developing and maintaining memory/knowledge repositories, and use these barriers to identify success factors for adopting OM systems.

The third session includes papers that challenge some of the basic tenets that have generally been applied to the creation of KM and OM systems. The first paper, “Knowledge Management – When Will People Management Enter the Debate?” by Jacky Swan, Maxine Robertson, and Sue Newell, argues that the focus of KM research on hard information has created a gap in terms of understanding how people can be managed to utilize this knowledge. The authors report the results of a survey of KM practice in the UK to support their assertions. The second paper, “Knowledge Management Systems: If You Build it Will They Come?” by J. Edial Pinker and R. Lawrence VanHorn, presents a model of how KM systems can benefit an organization by developing human capital.
Their conceptual model is turned into a mathematical model of a patient referral process. The mathematical model is used to draw conclusions about the management of the organization’s human resources. The third and final paper is by a former mini-track best paper nominee, John R. Landry. His paper, “Playing at Learning: Why Knowledge Creation Needs Fun”, examines the theory of knowledge creation and shows that this theory is limited without including “play” as an enabler of the knowledge creation process.

We appreciate the efforts of all our colleagues who submitted papers for publication, served as referees for the submitted papers, and attended (or will attend) the conference sessions. Through their efforts, we continue to have interesting discussions and fruitful exchanges of ideas on organizational memory, knowledge management, organizational learning, and the intersection of these domains.