Philosophical Foundations of KM Research

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This mini-track builds on last year’s Foundations mini-track that attracted a large and enthusiastic audience. The mini-track looks at the theoretical foundations of knowledge management, organizational memory and organizational learning. Of particular concern is how to use information systems to convert tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge to create an organizational memory, and how to effectively organize, store, extract, and manage this knowledge to facilitate organizational learning.

The cluster seeks to integrate researchers working on theoretical and practical solutions in the areas of knowledge management (KM), organizational memory (OM), and organizational learning (OL). KM and OM address the process of acquiring, creating, distributing and using knowledge in organizations. OL is the development of shared meanings and interpretations.

This year a smaller number of papers were submitted but these were of higher quality than previous years. Six papers submitted to this years mini-track. These were subject to 26 reviews. Each paper received a minimum of four reviews. Unfortunately because of the large number of papers submitted to HICSS39 and the fixed supply of time slots the mini-track was limited to a single session. Only three papers could be accepted. The mini-track chairs offer their sincere condolences to those whose papers could not be accepted due to space limitations.

All accepted papers focus on the philosophical and theoretical foundations of knowledge management research.

Judith Carlisle investigates conceptual issues about wisdom and organizations. She extends the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer to provide a surprisingly appropriate conceptual framework for escaping deception (“The Veil of Maya”) and creating wisdom in organizations. To investigate how wisdom may be exploited in organizations she addresses the following questions: “What is wisdom? Can organizations possess wisdom? If so, where does it reside and how can it be found, cultivated or “discovered? Finally, can the data-information-knowledge-wisdom hierarchy account for the creation of wisdom within the boundaries of the organization?”

Brian Keane and Robert Mason investigate conceptual issues about the nature of knowledge. The paper provides empirical data demonstrating that most KM research treats tacit and explicit as two different types of knowledge; and that it is important to differentiate between knowledge and information. The paper challenges these two popular assumptions. It argues that tacit is an integral aspect or dimension of knowledge and that knowing involves recursive relationships among information and human interpretation. It thus provides alternate viewpoints that may improve our philosophical foundation for the study of knowledge management systems.

Zining Guo and James Sheffield investigate the conceptual issues surrounding a long-standing and well-recognized problem in KM research, namely the lack of conceptual integration and a cumulative tradition. They argue that knowledge management needs an overarching framework to unify and direct research. Such a framework is developed by synthesizing concepts from Churchman’s inquiring systems and Habermas’ critical social theory. The result is a philosophically grounded, universally pragmatic framework that may be useful in managing the complexity, and conceptualizing the richness, of knowledge phenomena.

Summary

The chairs of this mini-track acknowledge the support received from many people. We offer our thanks to our authors. All of the papers submitted were interesting and were well-focused on the Foundations of Knowledge Management. We offer our thanks to our reviewers. All reviews were thoughtful and knowledgeable. We give thanks to those who will attend our session. The three papers accepted promise to continue the tradition of playing to a large and enthusiastic house.