Organizational Memory and Knowledge Management

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Organizational Memory (OM) can be defined as the way an organization applies past knowledge to present activities. Knowledge Management (KM) addresses the process of acquiring, creating, distributing and using knowledge in organizations. While both concepts date back several decades and span many disciplines, a current resurgence of interest is occurring as researchers and practitioners are exploring how OM can be realized using information technology. KM is a growing facet of the IT industry, and represents an important aspect of OM and has many overlapping interests. For the past five years, this minitrack, previously known as the Organizational Memory mini-track, has evolved into a key international forum for OM researchers and practitioners. By extending the minitrack’s scope, we have effectively extended this research community and hope the resulting discussions and interactions will further research and development in both areas.

This year we received fourteen paper submissions, and accepted nine papers for presentation in three sessions. The first paper, "Considering Organizational Memory: Processes, Boundary Objects, and Trajectories" by Mark Ackerman and Christine Halverson, seeks to expand and extend the use of the term organizational memory through an analysis of two hotline calls using distributed cognition theory. The second paper, "Description and Analysis of Existing Knowledge Management Frameworks" by J. Martin Corbett, Manuela Faia-Correia, and Gerardo Patriotta, analyzes an organizational memory information system within a Portuguese bank. It shows that formal and informal backup mechanisms were required to alleviate problems with the system. The final paper of the first session, "Forgetful or Bad Memory?" by John R. Landry, was nominated for the minitrack’s best paper award, and explores the role of organizational and individual forgetting within organizational contexts. The author argues that forgetting is actually the most important aspect of a good organizational memory information system.

The second session opens with "Integrating Spatial, Semantic, and Social Structures for Knowledge Management,” by Chaomei Chen and John Davies. This paper describes virtual-reality enabled multi-user virtual environments with spatialized semantic structures. These are a unique type of knowledge management system for exploiting emerging knowledge structures and enabling a group of users to carry out social interactions in a virtual world. The second paper is "Data is More Than Knowledge: Implications of the Reversed Knowledge Hierarchy for Knowledge Management and Organizational Memory,” by Ilkka Tuomi. It explores the conceptual hierarchy of data, information, and knowledge showing that information emerges only after we have knowledge. This leads to a description of a different approach in developing organizational memory and knowledge management systems. The third paper, "Description and Analysis of Existing Knowledge Management Frameworks," by C.W. Holsapple and K.D. Joshi, analyzes and compares existing KM frameworks, models, and perspectives for the purpose of aiding systematic research into the nature and possibilities of KM, as well as for easing the emergence of KM into practice.

The final session opens with "Annotate! A Web-based Knowledge Management Support System for Document Collections,” by Mark Ginsburg and Ajit Kambil. It reviews approaches for developing knowledge management support systems (KMSS), and illustrates a KMSS that supports management of document collections in organizations that lack common vocabularies and centralized authority. The next paper, “Groupware Architecture for Requirements Processes in New Product Development,” by Ahti Salo and Timo Käkölä, addresses issues in the design and implementation of groupware-supported requirements processes through description of a case study. The final paper, “Understanding and Supporting Knowledge Management and Organizational Memory in a City Council,” is a study of an OM/KM system by Gerhard Schwabe. It first develops a generic framework for analyzing knowledge management in formal decision groups, and then applies it to a system developed to support the city council in Stuttgart, Germany.

As always, 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, and the intersection of these two domains.