CSS3133 Knowledge Management

Unit 05: Knowledge Sharing and Communities of Practice

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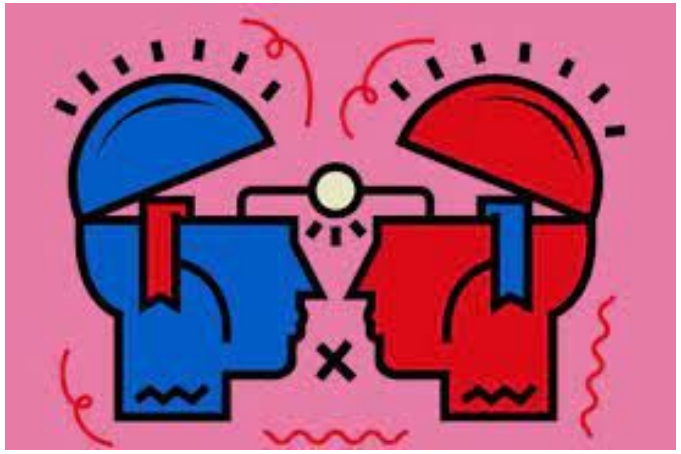
Learning outcomes

- Describe the key components of, life-cycle phases to, and major roles and responsibilities in a community of practice
- Correlate knowledge sharing channels to social presence and media richness
- Analyse the flow of knowledge in a community of practice using appropriate tools and techniques

Introduction

- Once knowledge has been captured and disseminated throughout the organization.
- However, although 80 to 85% of a company's information is hard-to-access tacit knowledge, it does not appear that explicit knowledge is any easier to find and use. In fact, 90% of a company's accessible information is used only once.
- It is estimated that knowledge workers spend from 15 to 35% of their time searching for information. These workers typically succeed in finding what they seek less than 50% of the time.
- The amount of time spent reworking or re-creating information because it has not been found or, worse, going ahead and making decisions based on incomplete information is increasing at an alarming rate.



Human – conduits of knowledge (channel)

- People are the most critical conduits of information and knowledge.
- Knowledge workers typically spend a third of their time looking for information and helping their colleagues do the same.
- Only one in five knowledge workers consistently finds the information needed to do their jobs, and spend more time re-creating existing information they were unaware of than creating original material.
- A knowledge worker is five times more likely to turn to another person rather than an impersonal source such as a database or knowledge management systems.
- Not only did these workers prefer to contact other people in order to find, retrieve, and make use of information, but this also turned out to be a more successful strategy to use.

Humans – source of information

- Other people are the preferred source of information for a number of reasons.
  - It is often faster means of finding that information.
  - When we turn to another person, we not only end up with the information we were looking for but we also learn where it is to be found, how to reformulate our question or query, whether we were on the right track, and where we strayed.
  - Last but not least, the information is coming to us from a known and usually trusted, credible source.
- In other words, people are the best means of getting not only a direct answer but "meta-knowledge" about our search target and our search capabilities.
- Talking to other people provides a highly valuable learning activity that is primarily a tacit–tacit knowledge transfer, for this type of knowledge is seldom rendered explicit, nor is it captured in any form of document.
- It points to one key dimension, and that is learning is a predominantly social event.

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Sharing knowledge as a social event

- Present-day organizations have difficulty providing opportunities for such social one-to-one knowledge exchanges to continue to exist in their traditional form, i.e. informal hallway, water cooler, coffee machine, or even designated smoking area chats
- This is due to the large number of employees and/or the fact that they may not all be in close proximity to one another.
- However, technology offers a new medium through which employees who share similar professional interests, problems, and responsibilities can share knowledge.
- This is typically through e-mail groups, discussion groups, and other interactions in some sort of virtual shared workspace that is typically hosted by the organization's intranet.
- These groups are often referred to as communities of practice (CoPs).

Communities of practice (CoPs)

- Refers to “a group of people having common identity, professional interests and that undertake to share, participate and establish a fellowship”.
- It can also be defined as a group of people, along with their shared resources and dynamic relationships, who assemble to make use of shared knowledge, in order to enhance learning and create a shared value for the group.
- The term community suggests that these groups are not constrained by typical geographic, business unit, or functional boundaries but rather by common tasks, contexts, and interests.
- The word “practice” implies knowledge in action – how individuals actually perform their jobs on a day-to-day basis as opposed to more formal policies and procedures that reflect how work should be performed.
- Many organizations have implemented communities of practice.

Knoco stories: 13 things we can learn from communities of practice at Ericsson (nickmilton.com)

Example of CoPs - ERICSSON

- Jumping straight into deploying knowledge management technology was a temptation for telecommunications supplier Ericsson Canada Inc.
- “We have a tendency to grab technology first,” says Anders Hemre, director of enterprise performance at the company’s Montreal research unit.
- But before doing so, Ericsson officials wisely took a step back to look at the company’s culture, values, and people.
- Through surveys, Hemre found that the research group’s growth-doubling to 1700 workers in four years by 1999 had undercut the sense of community.
- So Ericsson identified informal groups that had formed around work-related topics, such as Java programming or the mobile Internet, and worked to help those cliques expand and form new groups to further disseminate ideas and information.
- People gather informally to discuss work outside their cubicles every day, but to capture that and put a little bit of structure to it to help it along, without over-engineering or over-managing it, is the trick.
- Once the groups were identified by talking to employees in the various research divisions, Ericsson appointed a community leader for each group and gave workers time to meet on a regular basis.
- There was no agenda for these meetings, which still take place.

KM approaches and CoPs

- 2 basic orientations to KM:
  - Information-based (codifying and storing content):
    - This approach tends to emphasize explicit knowledge rather than tacit and favors the externalization objective.
    - This narrow focus, or “tunnel vision,” neglects context, background, history, common knowledge, and social resources.
    - This over-simplifies knowledge and, in particular, ignores the social context of knowledge.
  - People or interaction-based (connecting knowers):
    - People or interaction-based approach, on the other hand, place a great deal of emphasis on knowledge-sharing interactions, which in today’s organizations tend to be associated with communities of practice
    - This approach to learning and knowledge transfer seems to be much better suited to the discipline of knowledge management.

The social nature of knowledge

- Knowledge management needs to view knowledge as something that is actively constructed in a social setting.
- Group members produce knowledge by their interactions, and a group memory is created.
- This perspective views knowledge as context dependent and thus as something that cannot be completely separated from “knowers”.
  - Context helps distinguish between knowledge management and document management:
    - document management can be carried out in a more or less automated manner
    - knowledge management cannot be accomplished without involving people as well as tangible content.

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(3) ETEC510:Organizational Knowledge Sharing Practices - YouTube

Value of shared knowledge

- A collective acceptance of shared knowledge is the key method of generating value to the organization.
  - Until knowledge is collectively accepted and institutionalized across the organization, organizational-level learning cannot occur and organizational memory cannot be developed.
- As the community grows and its knowledge base is more broadly shared across the organization, the community's practices become regularly, widely, and sufficiently adopted so as to be described as institutionalized knowledge.
  - This institutionalized knowledge then becomes an organizational legacy that remains in the corporate memory for subsequent generations.
  - Since individual memory is limited, we need to embed this knowledge in useful, more permanent forms such as documents and e-mails.
- It is critical to remember that the context of each item of knowledge must also be captured:
  - when it occurred
  - who is knowledgeable about it
  - who submitted it, and so on.
- Without this context, the knowledge product is not complete and cannot be successfully used, applied, or even understood.

Social network analysis (SNA) - to understand knowledge flows

- SNA is the mapping and measuring of relationships and flows between people, groups, organizations, computers, or other information/knowledge processing entities.
  - The nodes in the network are the people and groups
  - The links show relationships or flows between the nodes
- SNA provides both a visual and a mathematical analysis of complex human systems to identify patterns of interaction such as average number of links between people in an organization or community, number of subgroups, information bottlenecks, knowledge brokers, and knowledge hoarders.
- Once social relationships and knowledge flows can be seen, they can be evaluated and measured.

(3) Social Network Analysis for Knowledge Management - YouTube

The process of SNA

- The process of social network analysis typically involves the use of questionnaires and/or interviews to gather information about the relationships between a defined group or network of people.
- The responses gathered are then mapped using a software tool specifically designed for the purpose.
- Key stages of the process will typically include:
  - Identifying the network of people to be analyzed (e.g., team, workgroup, department).
  - Clarifying objectives and formulating hypotheses and questions.
  - Developing the survey methodology and designing the questionnaire.
  - Surveying the individuals in the network to identify the relationships and knowledge flows between them.
  - Using a software mapping tool to visually map out the network.
  - Analyzing the map and the problems and opportunities highlighted using interviews and/or workshops.
  - Designing and implementing actions to bring about desired changes.
  - Mapping the network again after a suitable period of time.

Information gathering in SNA

- In order for SNA maps to be meaningful, it is important to know what information you need to gather in order to build a relevant picture of your group or network.
  - Good survey design and questionnaire design are therefore key considerations.
  - Questions will be typically based on factors such as:
    - Who knows who and how well?
    - How well do people know each other's knowledge and skills?
    - Who or what gives people information about xyz?
    - What resources do people use to find information or feedback or ideas or advice about xyz?
    - What resources do people use to share information about xyz?

SNA tools

- Although there are quite a number of different SNA tools, there is a need for a user-friendly end-to-end solution that can be applied in a variety of business settings.
- Existing tools have little support, are usually proprietary, have little track record, and tend to be heavily weighted toward the statistical analysis of data once it has been gathered, with little support for the initial data collection activities.
- One tool that has found acceptance is the Community Yellow Pages.

Corporate Yellow Pages | Corporate memory retention (wordpress.com)

Community yellow pages

- All communities are about connections between people, and these connections are often used to develop corporate yellow pages or an expertise location system.
- Though initially community based, such expertise locators can eventually be integrated to form a corporate-wide yellow pages.
- Their contribution to organizational learning initiatives include:
  - Facilitating mentoring programs
  - Identifying knowledge gaps
  - Providing both performance support and follow-up to formal training activities.
- A wide range of software exists for the development of corporate yellow pages.
  - Most create an initial profile of an individual's expertise based on an analysis of published documents, questionnaires, or interviews
  - Others focus on e-mails.
- Yellow pages, or expertise location systems, were among the earliest KM applications, and they remain one of the best ways to initiate wider-scale knowledge sharing in organizations.

Knowledge-sharing communities on the Internet

- The first virtual communities emerged about a decade after the establishment of the Internet.
- In the early 1980s, a network called USENET was set up to link university computing centers that used the UNIX operating system.
  - One function of USENET was to distribute “news” on various topics throughout the network.
  - Initially, all of the newsgroups focused on technical or scholarly subjects but so-called alt and rec groups that focused on non-technical topics such as food, drugs, and music began to appear, which constituted the first evidence of people organizing themselves into virtual networks.
  - Before long, the number of newsgroups started to grow exponentially.
  - Today there are more than 25,000 different newsgroups in existence.
- These virtual communities are based on the affinity among their participants that encourages them to participate in ongoing dialog with each other.
- Knowledge sharing between these participants can generate “webs of personal communication” that reinforce a sense of identification with the community.
- The community-forming character of the Internet is by now quite well known.

CoPs and technologies

- Although technology is a feature of some communities, technology as a means of interacting are not a necessary component of communities.
- Technology comes into play when members are more dispersed and when they have fewer occasions to meet face to face.
- The critical components of a community lie in the sharing of common work problems between members, where they see the clear benefits of sharing knowledge among themselves, and has developed norms of trust, reciprocity, and cooperation.

Basic characteristics of CoPs

- All communities share some basic characteristics, regardless of the type of community, these are:
  - **Joint enterprise:**
    - Refers to the glue that binds members together, i.e. why they want to interact with one another.
    - Reasons for interacting with one another will typically be a personal goal and contribution toward the community's goal.
  - **Mutual engagement:**
    - Refers to how members become part of the community.
    - Membership is not automatic, and no formal leader is in charge.
    - There are membership rules, whereby each member agrees to carry out certain roles and responsibilities in order to help achieve the goals of the CoP.
  - **A shared repertoire:**
    - Refers to the shared workspace in which members can communicate with one another, and store and share knowledge products, their profiles, and so on.
      - The shared repertoire is typically space on a server; it may be an intranet within an organization or on the Internet.
    - What is important is that there is a place for real-time exchanges and asynchronous discussions, and that these interactions leave behind tangible archives—the social capital and intellectual capital created by the community.
    - All communities thus need shared cultural objects, a means of sharing them and a means of storing them.

Types of CoPs

- There are many types of CoPs, and they are typically defined as a function of some common focal points such as:
  - A profession such as engineering, law, or medicine.
  - A work-related function or process such as production, distribution, marketing, sales, and customer service.
  - A recurring, nagging problem situated in a process or function.
  - A topic such as technology, knowledge retention, or innovation.
  - An industry such as automotive, banking, or healthcare.
- A CoP may also be described in terms of its goals, such as the development of best practices or benchmarking.
- A CoP may be self-organizing or sponsored by the organization.
- It may also be distinguished on the basis of the type of recognition (or lack thereof) it has from the host organization: unrecognized, bootlegged, legitimized, supported, and institutionalized.
  - These categories often reflect the maturity level of a community, but not all communities will necessarily aspire to become institutionalized

CoPs and other types of groups

- It is important to distinguish a community of practice f… other groups such as work teams or project groups.
- A community of practice is more like a professional organization.
  - CoPs have a business case, a code of ethics, a mission statement, and so forth.
  - They are there for a reason, and they produce results that are of value to the profession.
  - Typically, a CoP goal would have something to do with the improvement of the common profession or professional theme of interest to members.
- However, the manner in which they are formed is quite unlike a professional organization, as CoPs tend to self-organize and emerge in a bottom-up manner.

Types of members in CoPs

- Communities consist of people, not technology.
- Community members may take an active role by contributing to discussions or providing assistance to other members.
  - This is referred to as “participation.”
- Other members may simply read what others have posted without taking an active role themselves.
- In almost every case, the more participation that occurs in the community, the greater the value created for both community members and community creators.
- However, it is important to keep in mind that in most communities, readers outnumber posters by 10:1 or more.
  - People who visit a community regularly but who do not post anything typically represent 90% or more of the total community participation.
- Passive members are not really passive in most cases, for they may be actively using and applying the content they have accessed online.

Roles and Responsibilities in CoPs

- Communities of practice require a number of key roles to be filled.
- These need not necessarily be a single individual working full-time.
- More often, they are revolving roles much like everyone taking a turn at being a scribe at business meetings today.
- However, real work remains to be done in order for the community to succeed, and this translates into real time.
- Depending on the type of organization, the number of members, and other scope variables, a good rule of thumb is to budget 10 to 20% of a knowledge worker's time as being devoted to CoP work.

Key roles in CoPs

- **Visitors:**
  - They may visit once or twice and may or may not join. At this point, they are merely curious and are seeking to find out what the community is all about.
- **Novices:**
  - They are new members, who typically keep to themselves at first until they have learned enough about the community and the other members. At this point, they become regulars.
- **Regulars:**
  - They are members who provide regular contributions and who interact with other members on a sustained basis.
- **Leaders:**
  - They are members who have the time and energy to take on more official roles such as helping with the operation of the community.
- **Elders:**
  - They are akin to subject matter experts.
  - They are familiar with the professional theme and the community
  - They have become respected sources of both subject matter knowledge and cultural knowledge.
  - They maintain the community history and agree to be consulted from time to time by other community members.

Another perpective of CoP roles (1)

- **The champion:**
  - This role ensures support at the highest possible level, communicates the purpose, promotes the community, and ensures impact.
- **The sponsor:**
  - This role serves as the bridge between the CoP and the rest of the formal organization, communicates the company's support for a CoP, and may remove barriers such as time, funding, and other resources.
  - The sponsor is instrumental in establishing the mission and expected outcomes for the community.]
  - They are recruited for their expertise relevant to the practice or strategic services, and are there to better share knowledge, know-how, and best practices that will benefit the business through active participation.
  - They participate in discussions, raising issues and concerns regarding common needs and requirements, alert other members to any changes in conditions and requirements, are on the lookout for ways to enhance CoP effectiveness (e.g., by recruiting high-value members), and, above all, they learn.

Another perpective of CoP roles (2)

- **The facilitators:**
  - This role have perhaps the most demanding role.
  - They are responsible for clarifying communications and for making sure that everyone participates and that dissident views are heard and understood.
  - They are the chief organizers of events such as meetings (face-to-face as well as virtual meetings).
  - They administrate all communications by drawing out reticent members, reconciling opposing points of view, posing questions to further discussion, and keeping discussions on topic.
- **The practice leader:**
  - This role is the acknowledged leader of the CoP “themes.”
  - The leader provides thought leadership for the practice or strategic service, validates innovations and best practices, and promotes adherence to them.
  - He or she identifies emerging patterns and trends in CoP activities and knowledge base as well as in other areas that may impact the practice.
  - Leaders resolve conflicts, evaluate CoP performance with respect to expectations, approve memberships, and lead the way in prioritizing issues and improvements to be tackled.
  - CoP practice leaders serve as models to coach other members, or they arrange to provide coaching, and they are always alert to the potential need for CoP changes (e.g., more members, different members, and different member composition).

Another perpective of CoP roles (3)

- **CoP knowledge services:**
  - These are information/knowledge integrators who serve to interface with all CoPs to ensure clarity and lack of duplication of the information disseminated within and from the CoPs.
  - They maintain information-sharing relationships with all CoPs, inform CoP members about relevant activities elsewhere, and inform others about relevant CoP activities.
  - The knowledge center coordinates information from CoP members to avoid duplication, redundancies, and poor quality (e.g., in postings to CoP websites and forums), and they filter knowledge and requests for help (e.g., yellow pages).
- **Members of the CoP:**
  - They share responsibility for marketing and promoting the CoP, generating interest in it, promoting enthusiasm among current members, and demonstrating its value.
  - Everyone must ensure continued support and resources from sponsor(s), recruit high-potential prospective members, and invite them to special CoP events.
  - Members are expected to better leverage the knowledge created and learning generated by the CoP, to write and publish articles or results descriptions in company publications, and to publish articles in external journals or magazines and then distribute them internally.

New CoP roles

- **The CoP membership manager:**
  - This role has to deal with the registration and ongoing membership directory work.
- **The CoP moderator:**
  - This role is much like a radio/TV show host, serving as a conversation manager who helps keep discussions focused, injects new topics and provocative points of view when discussion lags, and seeds discussion with appropriate content.
  - Moderators must often be critical in order to ensure value generation.
- **The knowledge editor:**
  - This role collects, sanitizes, and synthesizes content created, and provides a value-added link for the content produced.
- **The knowledge librarian or community taxonomist:**
  - This role is responsible for organizing and managing the collection of knowledge objects generated by the community.
- **The knowledge archivist:**
  - This role maintains and organizes content generated by participants over time.
- **The CoP usage analyst**
  - This role studies data on participants' behaviors within the community and makes recommendations to the moderator.
- **The knowledge broker:**
  - This is someone who can join up with a number of different communities in order to identify commonalities and redundancies, create synergy, form alliances, and feed in to organizational

Knowledge sharing in virtual CoPs

- The establishment of a community identity depends heavily on knowledge sharing.
- Even something as simple as an online or paper newsletter will provide the backbone for a community to develop.
- A sense of community arises from reading the same text, the same article, and the same announcement as discussions can grow around this kernel.
- Therefore, it is important to choose the appropriate mix of channels in order to optimize knowledge sharing.
  - SNA is one technique that can help identify such knowledge hoarding or knowledge "black holes," where content is received but nothing is ever sent out.
  - Reuse is also an excellent measure of the success of the knowledge sharing, and it can be thought of as being analogous to a citation index.
    - In some organizations, this knowledge is used to evaluate how good a knowledge sharer a given employee is.
- Knowledge-sharing communities are not just about providing access to data and documents: they are about interconnecting the social network of people who produced the knowledge.
- One way to facilitate knowledge sharing is by making the knowledge visible.
- Visible interactions help create a mutual awareness, mutual accountability, and mutual engagement to knit group members more closely together.

Making CoPs more visible

- A CoP can be rendered more visible using social computing systems such as the Babble system.
  - Babble was designed as an online multiuser environment to support the creation, explanation, and sharing of knowledge through text-based conversations.
- Social computing refers to digital systems that draw upon social information and context to enhance the activity and performance of people, organizations, and systems.
  - Examples include recommender systems such as those that advise you on which books you would enjoy, which music you would like to hear, and which movies you would like to see.
- The use of buddy lists is another example of establishing social presence.
  - This feature lets you know who else is currently online when you log on to a virtual space.

Obstacles to knowledge sharing

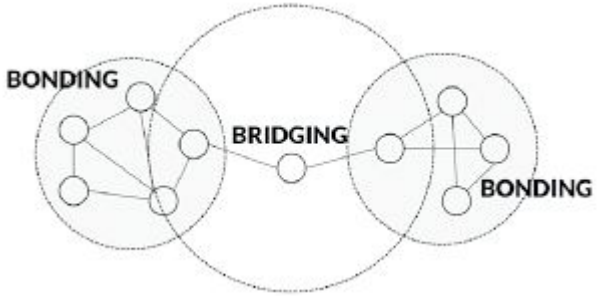
- A number of obstacles can hinder knowledge sharing within organizations.
- Chief among these obstacles is the notion that knowledge is property and ownership is very important.
  - One of the best ways to counteract this notion is to reassure individuals that authorship and attribution will be maintained.
- Another prevalent notion is that knowledge is power. The more that information is shared between individuals, the more opportunities for knowledge creation occur.
- The best way to address concerns is to adapt the rewards and censure systems that exist in the organization.
- Another common reason given for not sharing knowledge is that either
  - The provider is unsure that the receiver will understand and correctly use the knowledge, and/or
  - The recipient is unsure about the truth or credibility of the knowledge in question.
- Both issues disappear in the context of a community, as it is a self-regulating system that continually vets and validates both content and membership.
- Finally, the organizational culture and climate may either help or hinder knowledge sharing
  - An organizational culture that encourages discovery and innovation will help, whereas one that nurtures individual genius will hinder.
  - An organization that rewards collective work will help create a climate of trust, whereas a culture that is based on social status will hinder knowledge sharing.

The undernet

- Organizations often conclude that knowledge sharing does not occur because no one is using the organizational knowledge repository.
- Knowledge sharing may in fact be occurring.
- Often employees simply create their own networks instead of going through an official or formal organization-wide network.
- These networks are known as the undernet.
  - The undernet is defined as the intranets that escape the official gaze of the organization.
  - They represent how people really share knowledge, and they constitute the skeleton of the communities of practice that have emerged.
  - They are considered the “lifeblood” of the organization.
- Formal, top-down KM systems tend to encapsulate more formal, explicit knowledge, whereas community networks tend to be less formal and more tacit and to have more “work in progress” content.

Organizational learning and social capital

- Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of an organization's social interactions.
- Social capital is not just the sum of the individuals that comprise an organization; it is the glue that holds them together.
- While the concept is still evolving, there have been increasing calls for expanded "investment" on the part of business, government, and other organizations to promote the development and maintenance of social capital.
- Social capital facilitates the creation of new intellectual capital.
- Knowledge-sharing communities are the primary producers of social capital, as they provide the opportunity for individuals to develop a network with members who share similar professional interests.
- Thus, social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation.
- At the same time, social capital has an important "downside":
  - It may create communities, groups, or networks that are isolated, parochial, or working at cross-purposes to the organization's collective interests.



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Measuring the value of social capital (1)

- Organizations have begun to implement a large number of communities of practice in hopes of achieving such benefits as:
  - Building loyalty and commitment among stakeholders.
  - Promoting innovation through better sharing of best practices.
  - Improving efficiency of processes.
  - Generating greater revenue and revenue growth.
  - Decreasing employee turnover and attrition.
- It remains a challenge to be able to evaluate whether these objectives are in fact achieved by CoPs, or even to measure whether progress has been made toward such goals.
- One way of measuring value is to calculate the additional value that a community member represents in comparison to the average site visitor.
  - It appears that communities that are actively managed have higher participation rates and consequently bring greater value to the organization.
- Community development costs may be based on
  - hardware and software costs (one-time and ongoing)
  - community strategy development costs (one-time), and
  - ongoing community management costs.
- Benefits other than usage are much more difficult to assess.

Measuring the value of social capital (2)

- Another approach is to attempt to measure the value of the social capital that has been produced as a result of the knowledge sharing.
- Social capital has been measured in a number of innovative ways, though for a number of reasons obtaining a single “true” measure is probably not possible, or perhaps even desirable.
- Measuring social capital may be difficult, but it is not impossible, using different types and combinations of qualitative, comparative, and quantitative research methodologies.
- Measurement is especially challenging because social capital is comprised of concepts such as trust, community, and networks, which are difficult to quantify.
- The challenge is increased when one considers that the quest is to measure not just the quantity but also the quality of social capital on a variety of scales.
- A useful form is that of a story or vignette of success due to the existence of a knowledge-sharing community.
- It may also be possible to adapt methods used in measuring the social capital of countries or societies.

Strategic implications of knowledge sharing

- Some of the strategically important benefits of knowledge sharing include:
  - Connecting professionals across platforms, across distances.
  - Standardizing professional practices.
  - Avoiding mistakes.
  - Leveraging best practices.
  - Reducing time to talent.
  - Building reputation.
  - Taking on stewardship for strategic capabilities.
- The key is often connecting people to solve problems, to develop new capabilities (learn), to improve work practices, and to share what is new in the field.
  - The type of knowledge that is transferred is shared expertise.
- CoPs provide apprenticing situations over long periods of time.
  - These need a shared background (context) and shared language in order to share expertise and will also need to be technology-mediated using e-mail, the telephone, groupware, videoconferencing, and intranets or websites.
- One of the biggest benefits of CoPs is that they help retain employees.
  - If a knowledge worker is working at an organization where he or she is able to be an active member of one or more communities of practice, this will be a significant incentive to stay with that organization.
- The community also serves as a powerful tool to welcome new members into the organization.
  - New employees can quickly "plug in" to the network, connect, get help, pick up the organizational culture, and develop a sense of identity and belonging.
- Another key benefit of communities lies in the notion where every person can be linked to another.
  - Networks are powerful conduits for the sharing of knowledge—powerful in terms of the reach of the network and the speed with which knowledge can be exchanged, but also powerful in that content is not merely conveyed but explicitly or implicitly "vouched for" because it is being sent from a trusted, credible source.

Practical implications of knowledge sharing

- Whereas communities of practice do emerge and run on their own, a minimal level of investment and support is crucial.
  - Senior management should ensure that the organizational climate or culture is one that encourages networking.
  - In addition to financial support, it is important that employees are given the time they need to fulfill their knowledge-sharing roles and responsibilities.
  - They will need a physical place to meet for the face-to-face meetings, which should occur at least once a year.
  - They should receive a travel budget if one is required.
  - Their group membership should be recognized and evaluated as part of the performance review.
  - Additional resources such as community moderators, journalists, librarians, taxonomists, and archivists should be facilitated as well.
- A conversation is more than an intellectual endeavor: it is a fundamentally social process, as is learning.
  - People need to connect; they need to speak to an audience and note how they are being received and adjust accordingly.
  - People portray themselves through conversations reflecting their personal agendas, personal style, and ability to take credit and share blame.
  - In a virtual world, it is important to realize that all such connections and conversations are public and that, once digitized, conversations can persist.
  - This means that anyone can access them at some time in the future.
- It is important that knowledge-sharing interactions be maintained at a professional level at all times and that all members of a virtual network be aware of and agree to adhere to a professional code of ethics, both online and offline.

Summary

- The cost of not finding information is extremely high for both individuals and the organization as a whole.
- It is not always about knowing what but “knowing who knows what,” which can take the form of a corporate yellow pages or expertise location system.
- Learning is primarily a social activity.
- Knowledge sharing occurs quite efficiently and effectively in communities of practice where members share a professional interest and goal.
- In order for effective knowledge sharing to occur in CoPs, a number of key roles need to be in place such as knowledge sponsor, champion, facilitator, practice leader, knowledge support office, membership managers, discussion moderators, knowledge editors, librarians, archivists, usage analysts, and knowledge brokers.
- Virtual communities are the primary sources of social capital produced that are of value to the organization.
- Social network analysis can be used to visualize the people and their connections in virtual communities.
- Some of the key obstacles to knowledge sharing are notions such as knowledge is property, knowledge is power, credibility of the content and the source, organizational culture, and the presence of undernets.

Unit checkpoint:

1. What are the major distinguishing characteristics of a community of practice that a community of interest would not possess?
2. Compare and contrast some different types of communities of practice. Describe how they would differ with respect to their goals.
3. What are the key differences between the functionalist and the social constructivist perspectives on knowledge? Why is the social constructivist perspective better suited to knowledge management?
4. Describe the roles and responsibilities of a knowledge broker in a virtual community. Provide examples of how they could help promote knowledge sharing and increase the value of the social capital of the firm.
5. What is the difference between human and social capital?
6. What are some of the key deterrents to knowledge sharing and knowledge flow within an organization? How could you help overcome them?
7. List some of the ways in which social network analysis techniques can be used to better understand how knowledge is circulated within an organization.
8. What lesson can be learned from the tragedy of the commons? Provide some modern-day examples and discuss how you would ensure that effective knowledge sharing will take place.
9. What are some popular technologies used to develop corporate yellow pages? How do they compare?
10. What are some of the key steps you would need to carry out in order to conduct a social network analysis of an organization? What would you need to know before you could start? What sorts of questions could the SNA answer?