

Editorial

Introduction

First, some Editorial news. I have established a discussion list for *Information Research*, which I hope authors, readers and members of the Editorial Board will make use of. If it fails to attract much discussion over the course of Volume 8, I shall discontinue it. However, I'll be using it for announcements about the journal, so if you are interested, do join. The list is "IR-DISCUSS@jiscmail.ac.uk" and you can join by following the instructions at the Web page:

<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/IR-DISCUSS.html>

The second Editorial matter is to announce some changes to the Editorial structure of the journal. Originally, I anticipated that mirror sites might be needed to speed access, but this does not seem to have been necessary. Consequently, those who had previously been designated as 'Regional Editors', will simply become members of the Editorial Board, with the exception of Prof. Jose Vicente Rodriguez, who remains responsible for the Luso-Hispanic area, as we gradually build up a corpus of papers from that region, and of Dr. Elena Maceviciute whose role in supporting the Book Review section is recognized. As a result of swelling the Board's numbers by recruiting former members of the Board of the Journal of Documentation, we are also thanking some members who have served their three years (probably temporarily!)

This issue

This issue is intentionally provocative. We called for papers that took a critical view of 'knowledge management', in the personal belief that it is a conceptually empty buzz word. Naturally, not all of the authors agree completely with this proposition. One or two believe that, although 'knowledge' cannot be managed, the concept is of practical value in organizations when applied to the management of people or work processes, so as to encourage information sharing. Others, like myself, believe that for academics to embrace the concept and seek to give it some kind of credibility in scientific discourse, is to deny the scholarly aim of critical analysis.

We begin the issue with an invited paper: I came across Frank Miller's Web site for his company, Fernstar, when I was exploring the concept of 'knowledge management' some two or three years ago, and when I invited him to update one of the documents on his site, I'm glad to say that he accepted. Frank takes the view that if we talked about 'meaning' and 'message' the notion that 'knowledge' could be managed would disappear - I'm not sure that would be true, but 'I=0 (information has no intrinsic meaning) presents an interesting argument.

France Bouthillier and Kathleen Shearer ask whether 'knowledge management' is an emerging discipline or a new label for 'information management' noting the lack of clear distinction between the two. They conclude that, '...although the concepts of tacit and explicit knowledge, knowledge sharing and knowledge technologies are often used, they are not clearly defined', but, 'Dismissing KM as simply a management fad could be a missed opportunity to understand how knowledge is developed, gained and used in organizations, and ultimately in society.'

Next, Paul Hildreth and Chris Kimble suggest that '...the term knowledge suffers from a high degree of what might be called "terminological ambiguity" and often requires a host of adjectives to make clear exactly in what sense it is being used.' They suggest that knowledge cannot be captured, codified or stored and that the only way forward is to acknowledge that knowledge resides in people. They offer the idea of 'communities of practice' as one that could genuinely help in the more effective utilization of personal knowledge in organizations.

Suliman Al-Hawamdeh, one of the two editors of this issue, identifies the concept of 'tacit knowledge' as the main challenge for any idea of 'knowledge management', which should focus on people, as the repositories of knowledge, and the bearers of 'intellectual capital'.

The title of my own paper, 'The nonsense of "knowledge management"', presents my views in a rather obvious

fashion. However, after analysing a cross-section of the literature, consultancy Web sites, and the sites of MBA programmes, I can find little to support the notion that anyone is doing anything that amounts to managing 'knowledge'. Managing information, yes; managing work practices, yes; but managing knowledge - no. And using the term simply as a label does not make the mish-mash of subjects covered by the label anything like a discipline.

Finally, we have a Working Paper from Len Ponzi and Michael Koenig, which reports on the first author's work towards the Ph.D. The work is partly quantitative, exploring the literature of 'knowledge management' and describing it in terms of prior work on management fads and fashions. The authors conclude that, '...a more detailed analysis, which the authors look forward to conducting, needs to be undertaken to determine whether knowledge management is more than an unusually broad-shouldered fad.' We shall look forward to reading about that more detailed analysis in *Information Research*.

In reviewing many papers for my own article, I came to the conclusion that the root of the difficulty over 'knowledge management' is semantic. This is why I sought to define 'information' and 'knowledge' in such a way that they can be seen to be related, but separate. Many writers fail completely to define what they mean by 'knowledge' and how it differs from 'information', and, indeed, many define 'knowledge' in terms of 'information' – a number of examples of this are given in my paper. The result is semantic and conceptual confusion: not least for the practising manager seeking to make sense of the research that is filtered into the business magazines.

What, then, to do about it? At the very least those in the academic community and those in consultancy companies, who are concerned about the vacuous nature of much of the so-called research output, could band together in common agreement on terminology. Frank Miller has suggested that we should talk about 'message' and 'meaning' instead of about 'information' and 'knowledge', but that may be a little too radical for some. Equally radical is my suggestion that we ought to drop the word 'knowledge' from all work in this area and talk about 'information management' or 'information resource management' or 'information technology management' when that is what we mean, and use 'intellectual capital', 'intangible assets', 'organizational change', 'human resources management', etc., when we are using 'knowledge management' as a synonym for any of those things. The truly useless thing is that different writers are using the same term, 'knowledge management', to talk about *all* of these matters.

Finally

It's curious (or perhaps not) and certainly frustrating for the Editor, that so many people appear appear not to read the simple instructions on preparing bibliographical references. If you are contemplating submitting a paper to *Information Research*, please read the [instructions to authors](#), especially section 3.2

I shall be augmenting these instructions to include how to give references for Web pages and other electronic documents, when time allows. The absolutely essential point here is to check that the page exists at the time you submit the paper - they have a tendency to disappear at [a quite amazing rate](#).

Another reminder for those contemplating a submission: the [evaluation form](#) is available on the site.

'Best sellers': an update on the most 'hit' papers on the site (as of the morning of 12th October 2002), expanded backwards in time to Volume 3 no. 4 (as far back as the counters go) - there have been one or two changes since the last issue. And no-one has answered my question - does the use of an issue of an electronic journal decline less rapidly than a print journal?

- Vol. 3 No. 4 - [Business use of the World Wide Web: a report on further investigations](#), by Hooi-Im Ng, Ying Jie Pan, and T.D. Wilson, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield, U.K. - **6,833 hits**.
- Vol. 4 No. 1 - [The Internet as a learning tool: a preliminary study](#), by Kate Garland, S.J. Anderson, and J.M. Noyes, University of Bristol - **5,896 hits**
- Vol. 4 No. 2 - [Student attitudes towards electronic information resources](#), by Kathryn Ray & Joan Day, Department of Information and Library Management, University of Northumbria at Newcastle, UK - **8,631 hits**
- Vol. 4 No. 3 - [Information in organisations: directions for information management](#), by Joyce Kirk, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia - **10,853 hits**
- Vol. 4 No. 4 - [Digital libraries and World Wide Web sites and page persistence, by Wallace Koehler, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Oklahoma](#) - **7,168 hits**

- Vol. 5 No. 1 - [Experiencing information seeking and learning: a study of the interaction between two phenomena](#), by Louise Limberg, Högskolan i Borås Borås, Sweden - **4,747 hits**
- Vol. 5 No. 2 - [Textual and chemical information processing: different domains but similar algorithms](#), by Peter Willett, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield, UK. - **3,202 hits**
- Vol. 5 No. 3 - [Recent trends in user studies: action research and qualitative methods](#), T.D. Wilson, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK - **7,696 hits**
- Vol. 5 No. 4 - [Information exchange in virtual communities: a typology](#), by Gary Burnett, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, USA - **3,912 hits**
- Vol. 6 No. 1 - [Designing internet research assignments: building a framework for instructor collaboration.](#), by David Ward and Sarah Reisinger, University of Illinois, USA - **7,446 hits**
- Vol. 6 No. 2 - [National Information Infrastructure and the realization of Singapore IT2000 initiative.](#), by Cheryl Marie Cordeiro and Suliman Al-Hawamdeh, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore - **2,714 hits**
- Vol. 6 No. 3 - [Determining organizational information needs: the Critical Success Factors approach](#), by Maija-Leena Huotari, University of Tampere, Finland and T.D. Wilson, University of Sheffield, U.K. - **5,261 hits**
- Vol. 6 No. 4 - [Scholarly communication, scholarly publication and the status of emerging formats](#), by Leah Halliday, Department of Information Science, Loughborough University, UK - **1,128 hits**
- Vol. 7 No. 1 - [Environmental scanning as information seeking and organizational learning.](#), by Chun Wei Choo, Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada - **4,524 hits**
- Vol 7 No. 2 - [Critical realism and information systems research: why bother with philosophy?](#), by Philip J. Dobson, School of Management Information Systems, Edith Cowan University, Churchlands, Western Australia - **1,241 hits**
- Vol 7 No. 3 - [The role of motivation and risk behaviour in software development success](#), by Kenneth R. Walsh and Helmut Schneider, Information Systems and Decision Sciences Department, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA - **969 hits**
- Vol 7 No. 4 - [The Semantic Web: opportunities and challenges for next-generation Web applications](#), by Shiyong Lu, Ming Dong and Farshad Fotouhi, Department of Computer Science, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA - **692 hits**

Professor Tom Wilson Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

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