



## *Mapping Knowledge*

## *Management's DNA*

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The peaceful renaissance knowledge management (KM) has been quietly enjoying over the past few years may be about to end.

Having barely survived the train smash hype of its software driven "killer app" incarnation and the "slash and burn" approach to innovation seemingly favoured by a majority of Australian CFO's, knowledge management is facing up to its own devil's alternative.

Arrayed on one side are KM's sorcerer's apprentices. Like Micky Mouse's character in the Disney classic Fantasia, our contemporary sorcerer's apprentices firmly believe that if only they codify and systematise enough knowledge - KM's version of Mickey's magic spell, they could save themselves from the daily grind of building value through people, process and content.

Our sorcerer's apprentices are supported by the massed legions of consultants, textbook publishers, software vendors, conference organisers and academia that fervently adhere to a common vision based on "productising" knowledge work.

They see knowledge management transformed into a fully fledged science based discipline with its own independent infrastructure - all of which can naturally be consulted on, conferenced over, systematised and lectured on at length.

Interestingly, they are usually a little vague on the detail of organisational design required to deliver this bright new function and prefer not to dwell on the potential structural cost implications of their "scientific" approach for organisations.

On the opposing side are an eclectic group of practitioners who see KM

evolving into a core management competency. In their future, knowledge management will be an integral part of an organisation's DNA. Their priority is not an inward looking conceptual debate on gripping subjects such as tacit and implicit knowledge but the mapping of grass roots knowledge flows and impact points.

Working within a loose conceptual framework rather than a rigid doctrine, this group is actively learning by doing - by exploring, experimenting and simply seeing what works within the specific situation faced by their organisation.

Their initiatives are sympathetic to their organisation's strategy and driven by its priorities. Similarly, they facilitate teams in delivering the desired business outcomes. KM in these environments is not seen as an owner or manager of assets or programs but as a facilitator for the broader organisation.

Just as sequencing the human genome paved the way for new developments in gene therapy, so we can increasingly explore the basic building blocks of individual and organisational knowledge to

find new ways of meeting organisational or commercial challenges.

Indeed, KM reflects in miniature Australia's broader economic and social environment. If we are to make the transition from the "clever country" to a "smart society" we will need to leverage our intellectual property wherever we happen to find it.

One of the most interesting trends in KM is the shift in focus from transactionally oriented issues such as productivity and resource efficiency towards more strategic challenges typified by leveraging intellectual property, product commercialisation and relationship management.

KM is now being recognised as having the potential to identify opportunities and more effectively operationalise the innovation and transformational change initiatives needed to survive the impact of forces such as globalisation and generational change.

This has profound implications for how and where KM practitioners allocate knowledge resources within an enterprise or group. Quick wins often flow from

delivering transactional efficiencies yet potentially far greater value can be unlocked by tackling more intransigent and complex strategic challenges. This will be a true test of KM's influencing competencies!

Australian KM is compiling an impressive body of experience in taking local

organisations and helping them evolve into effective players in our regional economy.

While knowledge management is still a comparatively young field, it is already developing its own orthodoxy. What remains to be seen is whether this doctrine becomes a framework or a dogma and whether it chooses to go down the systems or human factor paths.

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