ODKM 725 Strategic Knowledge Management: fall 2017
Draft requirements and outline for this course. Content, including dates, may be revised.

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Consultation times:
- I am available before class on the Friday afternoons when a class is scheduled. Please contact me ahead of time, by email, to schedule an appointment.
- To meet at other times, please email me to make an appointment.

The ODKM 725 SharePoint site contains detailed information about assignments (including due dates) and week-by-week reading preparation. It also has a link to an online ‘virtual library’ of articles for the course and discussion spaces for posting material online.

PLEASE READ THIS DOCUMENT CAREFULLY, IN ITS ENTIRETY BEFORE THE FIRST CLASS

PART A: COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class dates and times

Either on Friday nights (5:00 to 10:00 PM) or Saturdays (9:00 AM to 6:00 PM), as scheduled.

For fall 2017, all classes are in FH 121.

Please note: I have scheduled a class for the evening of Monday, December 11 (6:00 to 9:00 FH 113) for possible group project presentations. Please hold this date.

Texts

The following three books are required reading


Students are also required to read additional articles during the course. These are posted online, in the Virtual Library, for downloading. You will be sent links ahead of time.

NOTE: ‘Required reading’ means students are expected to read the material as scheduled and to come to class prepared to discuss and answer questions on the material.

**Outline of topics for each class session**

Class 1: Knowledge, collaboration, and work

Class 2: Getting to grips with knowledge (epistemologies!)

Class 3: The ‘ba’: strategy and knowledge management

Class 4: Putting KM into practice.

Class 5: Technologies and KM

Class 6: Wrap-up

**Basic course objectives**

- Understanding what knowledge management is, why organizations are doing it, and what they are doing.

- Recognizing that there are two distinct strands in KM (Km and kM) and that KM practices typically emphasize one (kM) and overlook the other. Typically, it is more difficult for management both to understand that (Km) more important for knowledge workers and more difficult to implement.

- Understanding different concepts of knowledge (e.g. tacit vs explicit, knowledge vs knowing) and recognizing the difference between information/data and knowledge/knowing (meaning making)

- Recognizing that many, if not most, organizational problems can only be tackled by people sharing knowledge and that the work of organizing, which everyone does, depends on people
sharing knowledge.

- Seeing (i) that the knowledge/knowing people need to do their work is closely tied to their experience, or practice and that much of this is tacit knowledge and (ii) knowledge sharing is a social activity in which people, drawing on their experiences, make meaning together.

- Understanding how important social spaces (‘ba’) are to sharing knowledge, how communities of practice contribute to organizing knowledge-work and why communities of practice make for ‘good ba’.

- Understanding that KM practices that rely on tools don’t get at the thing many organizations want – people sharing knowledge (talk)

- Appreciating the kinds of challenges high-control organizations have in ‘doing’ KM. This includes recognizing that traditional management practices prevent people from sharing knowledge and that good knowledge sharing requires a fundamental change in culture/attitudes/values that involves adaptive work, not technical solutions.

- The main object of the course is to develop ideas about work practices that support knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and learning and to be able to frame approaches that will help organizations to see the importance of these practices and to adopt them.

**Objectives of the group project**

- Observe/study how and how well people share knowledge
- Learn consulting skills through practice
- Apply qualitative action research methods (interviewing, ethnography)
- Assess the role of technology in knowledge sharing
- Reflect on team work and knowledge sharing

**Outline of submitted work for ODKM 725**

*This is a summary of the various items of submitted work (and presentations) on which your grade will be based. Please read this carefully.* More information will be found on the class SharePoint site and links to discussion spaces for posting your work are given below.
Written contributions

1) **Introductory case study.** For class discussion. As a jumping on point for the KM class, we revisit the case study of a neighborhood nursing organization, “Buurtzorg,” which we used in ODKM 700. This time we’ll be looking at the issues from the standpoint of KM. It provides a window onto a number of issues that are central to the course. In particular it enables us to discuss the difference between KM as knowledge sharing and KM as information management. **Students must form groups of 4 or 5** to prepare the case study for discussion in class on September 23. You will receive a list of questions from me before the start of class and must submit written notes as answers to specific questions by September 16.

The case study is in the Virtual Library: [http://tinyurl.com/jrdxfmj](http://tinyurl.com/jrdxfmj)

2) **Position papers.** At every class, starting in Class 2, pairs of students will be doing presentations on case studies in *Performance Through Learning* that they have been assigned. Each pair will write a short position paper on the chapter(s) or article that they are working on for the presentation.

Each position paper should be no more than three typed single-spaced pages or six double-spaced pages or per reading or chapter.

**A position paper should cover:**
- a brief statement of the highlights of the chapter: i.e. the main issues or the main learning points that the author intends to convey in the chapter/article. (33 percent)
- a longer evaluation/assessment/comment on the arguments, highlighting the strengths and also the limitations of the chapter. (66 percent) OR
- a summary of additional material that you’ve found on the web which extends the content of the chapter/article.

Each pair of students must post their contributions on the website (by attaching or pasting the document) prior to the session in which the case is going to be discussed.

3) **Presentations.** Each pair will do a presentation (a maximum of 25 minutes), with participation from the class, based on the material submitted. *Approach the presentation creatively: ‘how can we best convey our views/learning and engage people in the class?’* See notes below on preparing presentations on cases from *Performance Through Learning.*

4) **A contribution to the discussion space on knowledge management**  **Topic:** ‘My ah-ha moment: ideas and questions about KM practices’

A least once during the semester and before November 18, write a short, reflective piece about some aspect of KM – theory or practices – that you’ve been thinking about. This should be between 300 to 500 words in length (longer is okay too).
5) **Comments on at least three postings** to the discussion space ‘My ah-ha moment’. **Due date December 2.**

6) **The KM Group Project: “Organizing so that sharing knowledge matters”**

Your project report is due by **Tuesday December 12 at the latest.**

There are three objectives of this project. To

a) Gain a deeper understanding of the need for and challenges involved in sharing knowledge at work.

b) Learn consulting skills through practice.

c) Reflect on how effectively you share knowledge in a group and work on improving your group KM practices.

Below is a brief description of the group project. **A full explanation and description starts on page 9.**

**Please note:**

1) **As you’ll be doing the projects for the KM and collaborative technologies classes in the same organization, at the beginning of the semester Anne and I will clarify the requirements for your separate final group presentations for each course.**

2) **It is important that everyone has a ‘home’ in one of the project groups. We don’t want anyone excluded. If you feel uncertain about whether or not you are part of a project group, please contact me.**

*This group project is the major component of the submitted work for the KM course.* Your brief for this project is to observe/study people at work ‘sharing knowledge’. It is up to you decide what work, what people, what knowledge, and so on. You might be studying people working in a call center who get regular updates from supervisors on what to tell customers. You might be working with the executive committee or management team of a small organization or a division and observing how they do or do not share knowledge. You could be looking at how an organization is implementing technology to ‘create, store, and share knowledge’ or at how people preparing a training program or coming on duty for their shift share knowledge. Or, you might be looking at how an organization (or department or group) might make use of technology to help them share knowledge.

The project is the backbone of the KM course. It is a hands-on, action-learning exercise in exploring how, why, and where people ‘share’, ‘use’, and ‘create’ knowledge at work, or need to do so. **The purpose of the project is to help you learn about knowledge management in practice.** What is it? What does it take for organizations to ‘do’ it? How well do they do it? Do they realize they need to do it? What gets in the way of their doing
it? What does it take to do it more effectively? How do you go about advising people and making recommendations?

There are two things to bear in mind about this project.
- As it is the main component of the course, please ensure that you give it the necessary attention, time, and effort throughout the course.
- It is a knowledge management project, not a collaborative technology project. While collaborative technology may form part of it, the bulk of your focus needs to be people, their knowledge and knowledge-sharing practices.

7) **Grading group members’ contributions to the KM project:** Due date: Tuesday, December 12,

You must submit confidential grades on the contributions of each group member (including your own) to your project. There is a form for confidential grades on the SharePoint site. It contains a blank table and instructions for the confidential assessment of your colleagues’ work.

Detach this form, complete it according to the instructions, then save it by adding your own name to the file name (e.g. Sarah Taylor—form for confidential grading) and then email it back to me as an attachment at maddeson@gmu.edu.

8) **Class participation.** Because of the emphasis on collaboration and discussion, participation by way of attendance and discussion (including ‘on-line discussion’) is crucial in this course. The instructor reserves the right to adjust a student’s overall grade based on the quality of her or his contribution in class.

**Preparing presentations on cases in Performance Through Learning**

*When preparing the cases (presentations), depending on the material in the case, consider and prepare to address the following:*

1) In the context of the case, how do people conceive, or view, knowledge management? What does it mean to them? (They may be consultants, people in the organization in KM-related positions, and/or others who are ‘part of’ the case).

2) What are the ‘drivers’ of KM in this organization/case? What is behind the KM initiative outlined in the case?

3) What is the context of the KM initiative? E.g. group(s) or the whole organization?
4) To what extent does the KM initiative rely on technology, what kinds of technology/technologies, and what do the initiators/implementers expect of the technology?

5) What are the goals, or what are people hoping to accomplish with the KM initiative?

6) How have the initiators/implementers approached the implementation of the KM initiative? Does the approach seem sensible to you? What is your assessment of the initiative?

7) What insights have you gained from the case?

8) What questions do you have about the initiative? E.g. questions like: what more would you like to know? What isn’t clear? What doesn’t add up? Are expectations for the technology realistic?

**Grading**

The percentage of the overall grade assigned to components of the course will be calculated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main group project: based on the written project and group presentation</td>
<td>60 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual grade for contribution to group project -- based on peer assessment</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Buurtzorg’ case notes, Ah-ha reflection, comments,</td>
<td>20 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations in pairs</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Letter grades for the course are awarded as follows:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade letter</th>
<th>Points range</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95--100 points</td>
<td>Outstanding. Exceptional quality work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A--</td>
<td>90--94 points</td>
<td>Excellent. A solid effort all round.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>85--89 points</td>
<td>Generally good. Sound, although the work has weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B--</td>
<td>80--84 points</td>
<td>Adequate. Meets the minimum standard for a graduate course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>75--79 points</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory. Below standard for a graduate course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Less than 75 points</td>
<td>Well below minimum requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Late submissions — generally not permitted — should be negotiated before due dates.*

Note that students choosing to take an incomplete may be penalized by at least a grade letter.
SPP Policy on Plagiarism: The following statement is included in all syllabi

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the School of Public Policy. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one’s professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the School of Public Policy takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of “F.” This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student’s transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (eg. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the SPP policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student’s work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The SPP policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it.

Mark Rozell, Dean, Schar School of Policy and Government

Additional from Mark Addleson: The Instructor reserves the right to use ‘SafeAssign’ in ‘Blackboard,’ a plagiarism detection and education tool used at Mason, as a way of assessing whether portions of submitted written materials are not the author’s but have not been attributed to other sources.
The KM Group Project: “Organizing so that sharing knowledge matters”

Observing knowledge sharing

This group project is the backbone of the KM course and is the major component of the submitted work for this course.

Today, getting anything done is a cooperative or participative process in the course of which people continually share knowledge.

Think about increasing an organization’s resilience to cyber-attacks, improving the onboarding process, or reorganizing a department. In each case, people at different levels, with various responsibilities — senior and middle management, IT professionals, point of sale employees, HR specialists and others will interact and ‘communicate’. They’ll send memos and emails, call meetings, speak on the phone, even travel across town or across the country; all in order to share knowledge and inform others about what they are doing.

Everyone has to share knowledge and everyone does so, but not always properly or well. Besides the fact that people don’t understand that sharing knowledge is a central part of doing their work, if you asked them whether and how they share knowledge, they probably wouldn’t be clear about what ‘sharing knowledge’ means. Are you talking about ‘communication’? Do you mean having access to a shared drive? In many organizations, the culture, incentives, rules, and organizational structures are obstacles to sharing knowledge that actually prevent or discourage people from doing so.

For this project, your task is to observe/study people ‘sharing knowledge at work (or in their work)’. It is up to you to decide what work, what people, what knowledge, and so on. You might study people working in a call center who get regular updates from supervisors on what to tell customers. You might be working with the executive committee or management team of a small organization or a division and observing when, where and how they do or do not share knowledge. You could be looking at how an organization is implementing technology to ‘create, store, and share knowledge’ (in the process of acquiring and implementing the technology people have share knowledge).

Illustrative questions you might ask include:
• Are people aware that their work is sharing knowledge?
• What knowledge do they need to share to get things done?
• What knowledge do they actually share and what don’t they share? (Perhaps they share ‘technical information’ but don’t talk about how committed individuals are to the work.)
• How do they share knowledge and when and where do they do so? (Do they have productive meetings where they share knowledge freely?)
• Who participates in the process of sharing knowledge? Are some people who should participate excluded?
The object of this action-learning project is threefold:

1) To help you learn about knowledge management in practice. What is it? What does it take for organizations to ‘do’ it? How well do they do it? Do they realize they need to do it? What gets in the way of their doing it? What would it take to do it more effectively? Think of the project as a means of learning to practice dialogical OD.

2) To help an organization (i.e. a group of people who work to accomplish something together) share knowledge more effectively. You will advise them on the importance of sharing knowledge and to offer guidelines for how they can do so more effectively, improving their ability to share knowledge.

3) The project is a context for group members to share knowledge in practice and one of your tasks is to reflect how and how well you do this.

Think of the project as mini-consulting activity with a narrow scope and four deliverables:

1) A presentation and/or report to people in the organization. Address issues/problems/breakdowns around knowledge sharing and/or make recommendations on what they could do to share (and perhaps create and capture) knowledge more effectively.
2) A presentation to the rest of the class on what you did, how you did it and what you found.
3) A report on the project for the instructor to grade.
4) A ‘personal journal’ that you keep in which you reflect on your work and the work of the group, highlighting the role that knowledge sharing plays in organizing and completing your project and how well you shared knowledge.

Organizing the project

Groups: You will organize into groups of no fewer than five and, to make the groups manageable, not more than seven.

Organizations: You may do the projects in organizations where one of the group members works (with that person serving as the liaison) but it is practical to choose an organization that someone knows about, that would like some help, and that might benefit from the work that the group will do: for example, a community-based organization, or some other non-profit.

It is important that you get started on the projects right away at the beginning of that semester. By September 23, you should have approval from an organization in which you’ll do your project and have begun to map out the scope of the project. You will then have five or six weeks to observe what is going on, gather data, do interviews, and so on. After this you will have three or four weeks to finish putting together your ideas and findings and complete your write-up before the presentation in December.

The important consideration is that you limit the scope of your assignment to what you can manage in say a total of 8 weeks (and therefore about 180 to 200 hours of combined time if it is group of six or seven). This is enough time to do something interesting but not enough time to do something very ambitious. The person who is your ‘gateway’ to the organization must
appreciate that the primary reason why you are doing the work is to complete a group project/assignment for the KM course.

It must be a project that you (not the organization) own as a group. While it will make a contribution to the organization – it will certainly prove to be useful to them – when you are talking to anyone in an organization you need to be clear that it is first and foremost a Master’s program project. Although they may identify a problem area for you to focus on, you will give them a proposal in which you outline the scope and intended outcomes of your work and you will do the work provided they accept this.

At this point what you need is an organization and a group. Please think (and talk about) where you might do the projects; share your ideas, form groups and identify organizations. Things work well when students take the lead in finding organizations because this means there is a relationship of some sort to start with and the students may have an idea of what issues would be good ones to look at. Any organization will be suitable because all of them organize and everyone has to share knowledge. You will refine the problem area/topic as you get into it. If you need to an online space to discuss possible organizations and form groups, I’ll add a folder to the KM SharePoint site for this purpose.

Your task objectives

Gain an understanding of how things work – how people organize – in a particular area of an organization. See the practices and processes of organizing through the lens of sharing knowledge (making meaning, sharing ideas, ....), What are people doing. What are they trying to do? What is actually happening?

Guide people in an (area of the) organization in developing a knowledge orientation. Provide people or groups or both with ways of understanding how a focus on knowledge can be useful to them and help them develop practices for sharing knowledge and for using knowledge more effectively.

Your learning objectives

- Learn about knowledge management. Understand the complexities of, and opportunities for, sharing/using knowledge.
- Listen and learn to what is happening when people are organizing — to the issues that set the context for knowledge management.
- Learn about your own knowledge sharing.
- Learn from practical experience
  - Practicing consulting in a ‘safe’ environment.
  - Developing a basic familiarity with the use/application knowledge management concepts and tools in applications like project design and management, team building, administration, organizational development, the implementation of technology, training, and so on.
• Learn to connect theory with practice. Applying ideas from the class to people’s work/organizing activities.

**Developing good knowledge-sharing practices**

The project has a dual purpose. Each group is a knowledge-creating-and-sharing ‘lab’ and you have an opportunity to learn about knowledge-sharing practices while you are doing the project. I want you to pay particular attention to this, to your processes of self-organization or self-management and your own ways of aligning to get the work done.

*A group constitution*

*By September 24,* I want each project group to submit a ‘constitution’ for the group, outlining how you intend to work together. Remember that a constitution is not just a wish list. It is a statement of principles, values and practices that you intend to follow and uphold. You can frame this any way you choose and it can be as long as short as you wish to make it, but it is important to draw it up collaboratively.

You might outline your expectations for meetings, including when (and where) you will meet, what you expect in terms of attendance and participation, how long you will meet for, and how you will organize the meetings – including such considerations as leadership and facilitation. How are you going to organize your work? Do you expect each member to outline his or her commitments and will you, as a group, review the status of your work at meetings? You should also think about whether you expect to hold individuals to account for their commitments to the group’s work. If so, how will you do this? If you are going to use an online tool (such as SharePoint or Google Docs) for organizing and for sharing information, what are your expectations about people’s online contributions? Is someone going to be a facilitator (organizer?) of the online work. Your constitution might include a statement about what you expect to gain from the project, what kind of ‘space’ you want to create and hold for your work together (encouraging debate, experimentation, sticking strictly to an agenda and time frame…..?).

One theme of the KM course is that it is vital for knowledge workers to collaborate. It is vital for our wellbeing (sanity?) and for the quality of the work. Another theme is that, while sharing knowledge is essential for getting work done, we have not learned to work/organize to share knowledge and societal life today makes knowledge sharing difficult. We have different commitments and responsibilities, different interests, different approaches and attitudes to our work.
Keeping your own journal

Each student must keep a journal in which you write about your work and organizing as a group and, if there are breakdowns, identify the context and reasons for the breakdowns, what you did to deal with them, and what happened.

When there are breakdowns in group projects, it is usually because group members aren’t working well together and aren’t doing good work. When you participate in this KM course project you make a commitment to help everyone make the group project work and are willing to put in the time, as needed, to maintain an agreed standard of work.

You have had experience of group projects in the OD and KM program and probably at work too. Try to use that experience. All group work has both its light and shadow. The light is a creative, synergistic process that gets the work done. The shadow is encountering and having to deal with the ‘dark side’ of human relations when people are bossy, egotistical, uncaring, unhelpful, thoughtless, distracted, self-obsessed, short-sighted, prejudiced, and so on. As these are characteristics and attitudes we all reveal, the object, first, is to exercise self-control, then work together to get to the bottom of problems and deal with them.

As an individual:
• Practice mindfulness. Think careful about your attitudes and role in the group and about what you say and do. Remember that you are jointly responsible for doing the project and that when you are working on it, alone or together, your role is to do the best you can to move things forward and do a good job.
• When you are feeling overloaded, or you can’t meet a commitment, or your contribution and effort isn’t being acknowledged, discuss your situation and what it would take to resolve it.

As a group:
• Talk about both openness and for accountability as you get started.
• Talk together about what you would like to accomplish (realistically) and what kind of effort you are willing to make, what may limit your contribution to the project, what you expect from each other (conversations about possibilities, outcomes, and commitments) and talk about how you will try to hold each other accountable and make your own offers to each other (i.e. give permission to each other) to hold you accountable.
• If you succeed in having those conversations of accountability, then I expect you to have more conversations as you move along with the project in which you review your progress and people’s contributions and you actually hold people to the commitments.
• If you don’t succeed, you need to talk about why you are not having the conversations, knowing that they important if you are going to work effectively as a group.

The four stages of the project

A) Planning a client engagement
Identify the focus and scope of the work you group will do then share this information with the client and obtain the clients’ approval.

B) Undertaking appropriate research
Conduct the necessary research, including reading, participant observation, and interviews, to gain insights into the client organization, work and problems.
This includes: preparing group members and all participants for interviews, surveys, and providing them with appropriate material, background information.

C) Distilling working knowledge
Shift through your material to frame problems or issues that have emerged from your research. Clarify why these are important (why and how they matter). Produce sensible recommendations to address the issues problem(s) that are clearly tied to the information gathered (grounded by your research).

D) Sharing results with client.
Discuss your findings. If you provide a report, clearly and concisely communicate the approach and methods used, the nature of the problems, and recommendations to guide the client in addressing these problems.

The report for this project
Each group must write a report for the instructor, which should include a description of how you went about all four stages and, as appropriate, what happened or what you found including problems you encountered.

Your report should be in the form of a wiki, using any of the wiki tools you have access to, including, if you wish, a wiki in SharePoint. The report must be properly formatted and should have both internal links (for cross-linking within the document) and links to any external sources that are relevant to your project including, for example, relevant material the organization’s website and sources you have drawn from.

It must include, in appendices or wherever is appropriate, the data you have collected. If you have the data in online documents then you should include links to these documents.

I will also want access to any work you do online for the project, so I can ‘participate’ in your project. E.g. if you use Google Docs, please provide me with access to your folder(s).
PART B: A GUIDE TO THE APPROACH AND ISSUES IN THE COURSE.

In a knowledge-oriented organization, people organize work from the standpoint that knowledge matters. They think about what knowledge is (where it ‘comes from’, who has it, who needs it, how to share it), and they organize so that people participate in sharing knowledge.

This course builds on frameworks, distinctions, and perspectives on management, organizations, work, and organizing outlined in the introductory courses. In contrast to conventional management practices, where the emphasis is on data and information management, we highlight the importance of knowing as meaning-making in creating and sharing knowledge.

A knowledge-oriented organization

People’s actions are shaped by their understanding. What they do and how they do things (i.e. their ‘practice’) is intertwined with how they ‘see’ or understand (i.e. with ‘theory’). How they practice knowledge management depends on the theory of knowledge people have (what they understand by knowledge) and what theories of organizing they believe in (e.g. whether you should run things from the top and whether you only make investments if you can measure the costs and returns). We’ve already paid quite a bit of attention to management (organizing) practices in ODKM 700. We still need to look at theories of knowledge/knowing.

If the theory of organizing (i.e. management) that is in use does not treat knowledge/knowing as an integral part of working and organizing, then people have no need to pay attention to knowledge in their day-to-day activities. This is the state of affairs with conventional management practices.

In organizations, knowledge has not been a consideration until quite recently and management practices, typically, don’t pay attention to knowledge. Usually if management gets the message about knowledge management, in a ‘managerial culture’, knowledge and knowledge management become a kind of ‘add on’ to conventional management practices. This is almost inevitable because the ‘view from the top’ treats knowledge as a ‘thing’ that exists in the world, which is separate from people and their actions.

My approach (shared by writers like Verna Allee) is recognizing that knowledge matters is deeply challenging to traditional organization theory and conventional management practices. This understanding comes from the ‘view from practice’, the view we have when we look at work practices (what it takes for people to organize and do their work) and appreciate people’s involvement or interaction with other people. Viewed from practice, sharing knowledge is what knowledge workers do: it is their work.

In a knowledge-oriented organization working, organizing and knowledge-sharing are treated as interconnected in the work of groups, teams, or communities. Everyone is ‘interested in
knowledge’ and in what it takes to share knowledge. They are concerned with fostering interactions which are good for sharing knowledge and also with identifying and resolving situations where this is not happening.

Realizing a “knowledge orientation” involves a participative environment. People’s decisions and actions (their practices) are geared towards doing things with other people. They are mindful of their relationships with others and of the contributions that others make to getting things done. Organizations with a knowledge orientation, encourage openness, recognize the value of a variety of voices and of multiple ways of knowing.

Knowledge/knowing

As we approach it, knowledge is not something that you simply discover or find. It is the result of participating in activities (‘practices’) with other people. Knowledge comes into being in people’s interactions (it is always tied to a specific time, place, and set of issues) and is influenced by their relationships with one another.

Knowing is sense-making.

• Sense-making is always social. It always has as its context or ground our involvement (relationships) with other people. We cannot really think of a non-social existence and sense-making is about making our way in a social world.
• Sense-making is always oriented towards others. It includes: reflecting, inquiring, and conversing.
  It involves
  thinking, listening, speaking, and doing/acting (‘how can I know what I think till I see what I say’).

People ‘use knowledge’ in order to make their way in the world. In every situation, making one’s way is a social activity that has to with getting things done (playing, cooking, shopping, praying, reading, gardening, working, mending) with and/or for other people.

The knowledge that enables you to make your way in the world is:
1. learned through your involvement with others (in your relationships with people) - teachers, friends, family, colleagues, even ‘strangers’ whom you do not know. The constructionist view is that how you know and what you know reflects the worldviews - beliefs, stories, ‘theories’ - of the people with whom you ‘interact’.
2. acquired in particular contexts - that is, it is situated. Knowledge is not abstract. It is concrete and contextual. Knowledge ‘comes from’ being in particular situations (for example coping with a flat tire). Knowledge is also ‘expressed’ through practice. You only know what you know as you try to ‘use’ your knowledge in order to make your way in a work project or in learning to play a guitar, or in watching television. This might involve giving someone directions, reflecting on what you’ve read or heard, talking about what to do at the next meeting.
3. Inseparable from what you believe, think, feel, and value. You can’t take ‘knowledge out of the person’. Knowledge is personal. While personal views, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings are acquired in a social (cultural) context, there is a sense in which these are also idiosyncratically personal - tied to an individual’s particular feelings or values.

People

- “Learn-to-learn” differently. They ‘acquire’ different paradigms and with these different theories in use or ‘mental models’ they know (about the world) differently. They ‘possess’ different ways of knowing.
- Learn in different situational contexts. They have had different experiences and thus they know about different things.
- Hold different values and have different feelings about things. Some are spiritual; some feel deeply about things others disregard; some are open, others are controlling.

Developing a Knowledge Orientation

‘Doing’ knowledge management, organizing with a ‘knowledge orientation’ – sharing and ‘creating’ knowledge at work – involves practices that bring knowledge (in)to work, principally connecting people (and their knowledge) with other people (and their knowledge); organizing to know and to learn.

If knowing is making one’s way in life and getting things done, then knowledge management is about facilitating that process in organizations - helping people to organize more effectively and more appropriately, to do better what they seek to do in their work.

Organizations serve a variety of different purposes and people participate in organizing for different reasons. If that purpose is to make profits then knowledge management aims to improve profitability by enabling circumstances in which people can work together more effectively. If an organization serves communities in some sort of welfare role, then the object of knowledge management is to enable it to fulfill that function more effectively.

In organizing with a ‘knowledge orientation’, people
- are aware of meaning-making or sense-making in organizational life
- value opportunities to engage in meaning-making
- appreciate different ways in which people make sense and the value of different ways of knowing
- are encouraged to identify ‘meaning-making cross-roads’: opportunities for learning, where time and discussions will probably make a difference to what they do and how they do it; to their decisions and actions
- use the means at their disposal, including a variety of technologies, to enable people to engage each other and to interact to share knowledge.
Views of knowledge management

Knowledge management is still a hot topic. Is it just another fad or is there something more fundamental at work? We can see it both ways and depending on the ‘response’ by people in organizations there are two possible reasons why knowledge management will disappear from the lexicon of organization/management theory.

• Knowledge management is treated as a fad and doesn’t catch on or it is replaced by some other fad.
• Knowledge management comes to be recognized as the reformation of management/organization theory, not an extension. Any time you do work you organize and this involves ‘managing knowledge’. When knowledge management becomes an integral part of what do when they work and organize there will no need to talk about ‘knowledge management’; it will just be ‘work’.

One of the confusing aspects of the literature on knowledge management is that you’ll find different concepts of knowledge management in books and articles, without any warning about which one you’re dealing with. It is as if the writers don’t know that there are different concepts of knowledge management. For example, one approach to KM focuses on Information Technology, work flows, and data management. Another, found in Allee’s, Prusak’s and Brown and Duguid’s writings (amongst others), looks at knowledge in the context of activities/practices and highlights the social nature of people’s activities, hence of knowledge management.

We want to be able to make sense of what organizations are trying to accomplish with their knowledge management efforts and whether they are like to be successful or what is happening inside those organizations. And, to do this, we need to be able to separate out different approaches to knowledge management and see which ones the organizations have bought into. So, part of our task in this course is to recognize the different approaches knowledge management, understand why there are different views, see what the differences mean, and assess whether each has a place.

KM is about ‘better’ control

Some people see knowledge management is as a means of improving bottom-line performance and get the organization ‘under control’. “If we have access to right data we can control the organization more effectively and more efficiently”. This way of regarding knowledge management does not pay much attention to knowledge itself, to what knowledge is and how people learn. It is largely assumed that we know what knowledge is. Getting knowledge is like getting energy (power) or raw materials. The main goal is to acquire (i.e. to possess) the “right” knowledge. Knowledge management does not change what organizations are or how they do things. It only requires that they add knowledge to things they have to control and coordinate. (Intellectual capital). This view of knowledge management tends to be heavily IT-oriented: building portals and large-scale ERP initiatives.
KM (knowledge sharing) is a necessary part of organizing and getting work done

To other people knowledge management deepens our need for a non-conventional, approach to organizing. The more we get into KM from perspective of the role of knowledge in organizing work, the more we have to ask searching questions about what knowledge is and we recognize the interpretive, social nature of ‘knowledge’. Knowledge management is about developing a ‘knowledge orientation’ in organizations. Exploring knowledge management helps to clarify the social foundations of organizing.

As we examine and discuss knowledge management, I want you think about why we have different approaches to KM (i.e. where they come from) and what your and other organization are doing: what KM practices they adopt, why they do so – what they are trying to accomplish by focusing on KM – and what the impact is of the KM initiatives

How thinking about knowledge management evolved


- The globalization of the economy - firms must increase adaptability, innovation, and process speed
- The awareness of the value of specialized knowledge in coping with these pressures.
- Awareness of knowledge as a distinct factor of production (derived from the economics literature: knowledge as a resource or factor of production).
- Cheap networked computing [information technologies and collaborative technologies] providing us with means of moving knowledge and tools to work and learn with each other.

When knowledge management first appeared on the scene about 20 years ago it had a very strong, almost exclusive technology-IT orientation. Building knowledge management tools using the technology (portals, search engines, data mining, enterprise integration tools) was the thing to do. That orientation reflected some or all of the following.

- The consideration that (since the Enlightenment and the growth of empirical science) Western society has privileged knowledge as ‘facts’ over knowing as belief, attitudes, ideas.
- A belief in the power of facts and reason to put right what is wrong with the world. People with the right knowledge (facts/data generated by scientific observation) would able to solve the problems and put everything right.
- Rational choice models associated with business theory and economics identify (i) business/managers as problem solvers and (ii) knowledge as the key to problem solving.
- Knowledge (which takes particular forms) is regarded as a sort of ‘philosopher’s stone’. From the standpoint of social science people strive to regulate or tame the world – eradicating disease, eliminating poverty, improving standards of living, stimulating development, increasing longevity. Possessing knowledge is the means to do these things.
• This notion that the fate of the world is in the hands of people who possess appropriate knowledge is linked to the growth of professionalism. In this century models of organization were built on the assumption that the requisite knowledge was possessed by an elite few – ‘properly qualified’ professionals.

• The management of (organizations and) society is in the hands of the privileged few who tell everyone else what to do and how to do it. Hierarchy, authoritarianism, and control is tied to conventional ideas about professionalism and knowledge. It is this kind of thinking leads to the creation of ‘Chief Knowledge Officers’.

• With the advent of computers the ability to sort through and to access ‘information’ (believed to be the factual basis for organizing and problem solving) has increased enormously and in recent years the cost of storing bit and bytes as fallen dramatically. Hence the idea that the knowledge of the world is now potentially at everyone’s fingertips.

• Companies made huge ‘investments’ in IT but believed that they had not earned the expected returns from IT (as least they couldn’t ‘see’ those returns) so when knowledge management came along it was offered, and ‘bought’ as the justification for the IT investment. The investment would eventually pay off in terms of the return on knowledge assets. Computers (IT) would serve as the means of harnessing organizations knowledge assets and knowledge.

• In earlier decades the value of machines – the single most important item on a balance sheet – played a major role in how organizations were run. Now machinery has all but disappeared. So what do organizations do? They organize people. People are not there to mind machines. They are there for their knowledge. So management is about ‘managing knowledge’.

• From one perspective the same principles of management that were applied to machine assets now have be applied to knowledge assets.

The paradigm that shaped these views however is falling apart:

For example:

Postmodernism has deconstructed modernist beliefs in science. Science does not provide ‘absolute knowledge’ or ‘the truth’ about the world. Science offers a perspective, it provides one of many ‘stories’ (‘narratives) about ‘how things work’ and ‘why things happen’ and it seems to be the case that people are also interested in the things that science does not talk about: care, responsibility, accountability, organizing, beliefs, love, values. In addition, even the ‘story’ that science tells about the world (i.e. what the world is like and how it ‘works’) has changed radically from say Newton to quantum physics.

Contemporary information technology, instead of being a source of centralized power and control is undermining privilege and the centralization of power and authority in organizations. In the past a few people owned or controlled the machines which dominated the economy. The centralization of power and control, underpinned by control of technology, was epitomized in the formation of command economies like that of the Soviet Union.
Contemporary technology is proving to be ‘wicked’, rather than ‘tame’. Instead of providing a means to control, there is a fear that technology is ‘out of control’ (nuclear weapons, cloning, even intelligent machines). The big question is, do we have the intelligence/knowledge/capacity to use the technology wisely. What is the future of humankind with this sort of technology? Those are not questions you associate with tame problems. They are questions that link knowledge/knowing to morality, uncertainty, even spirituality.

The promise, that you ceded sovereignty to the professionals for a secure existence, has not been kept. The idea was that if you put your life in the hands of professional experts it would be a secure life (life-long employment, welfare state). The welfare state is being abolished, life long employment is a thing of the past. Social engineering is a thing of the past.

A formal education was advertised as the only way to get your knowledge - credentials would ensure success. As people have always done, generation “X”ers are making it without formal education. That is not to say a formal education is unimportant but knowledge gained in other ways - especially in practice - is just as important.