

COST Exploratory Workshop

Knowledge Management in Contemporary Europe

Brussels May 30 – June 1, 2010
COST Office, Avenue Louise 149, B-1050 Brussels

1. Context

At the Lisbon meeting in March 2000, the European Council expressed its wish for the European Union to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world by the year 2010. Lifelong learning (LLL) was identified as one of the key ways through which such a goal could be achieved. There was widespread consensus that ensuring easy access to good quality information and to learning is central to constructing a competitive, knowledge-based economy. In the last decade Europe has shown an increasing interest to take advantage of the powerful engine which is the knowledge produced in its societies and to entrust the future of its prosperity to the knowledge itself. Here, knowledge production alone offers a too narrow perspective. The challenge is defined by the entire field of knowledge management, comprising at the same time the production, dissemination and consumption of knowledge, ranging from preschool to the population at large.

2. Aims of the workshop

The strategic workshop aims to advance our understanding of how our societies can manage at best knowledge by reviewing ideas, framework, problems and proposals regarding the field of knowledge management. Our purpose is to set up an agenda of the current issues and strategic perspectives in the field of knowledge management by formulating a limited set of key questions that enable us to unify the various conflicting aspects of knowledge management pertaining to its various functional levels. This workshop will facilitate a fundamental discussion both in four panels and in four working groups focusing on the following four areas, each of which encompasses all the dimensions of knowledge management: 1) the role of knowledge creation in a networked society; 2) knowledge infrastructures; 3) knowledge dissemination and transfer; 4) the future of higher education institutions.

3. Description of the Working Groups and Structure of the Workshop

In order to reach the objectives listed above, the Workshop will be carried out by mixing plenary and working group sessions. The experts attending the workshop will be invited to send two pages of their main ideas two weeks before the workshop, then to present them shortly in one of the four panels and to give their contribution to the discussion following each panel and in one of the four working groups. All working groups will be focused on a limited set of basic questions. Speakers will be invited to suggest proposals, answers or new pertinent problems according to their expertise and based on either examples of best developing practice or on exemplary shortcomings to be learned from.

WG1. The role of knowledge creation in a networked society

The development of digital technologies and media, along with the increase of the education level of populations, the transformations undertaken by contemporary economies and implying the growth of the advanced services sector and thus the increasing need of immaterial labour, have contributed dramatically to change the way in which knowledge is produced, disseminated and consumed. The changes expand to all levels of knowledge management from pre-school to doctoral education, from education and research to application of knowledge in the business community and among the third age population. In the last decades the information society has facilitated the process of production of content, on the contrary the process of reading has been only very limitedly improved by technologies, with a consequent, different development of the activity of reading and writing. The traditional boundaries between information, knowledge and science have been blurred as well as the traditional boundaries between those who create knowledge and those who consume it. This has implications for knowledge production not just in terms of easier collaboration across time and space, but also in terms of co-production of knowledge between professional knowledge workers and other community members, including 'amateurs'. The public availability of specialized knowledge which was previously limited to formally trained experts (such as in the case of medicine) has started to challenge traditional professional and academic expertise (see the raise of online communities of practices). Moreover, the constantly growing overload of information and the near impossibility of establishing permanent methods and procedures that allow the users to transform it to relevant knowledge is becoming a further obstacle. With the rapidly growing development of interactive Web 2.0 media, digitalized communication has become important both inside and outside institutions of education and research and ILEs (interactive learning environments) may set a new agenda for knowledge management in society at large, both on the level of technology, didactic and communicative practices. Information systems and information science scholars have begun to think in a new way about representation and organization, metadata, and ontologies, and they are probably able now to offer a good "hook" for understanding where KM is today and its influence, for example, on developments on the semantic web.

This situation leads to a number of basic questions and problems both in a European and a global context:

Writing and reading: How can we develop new skills in writing and reading that enable people to assess and master knowledge in a constantly changing media landscape, inside and outside the educational systems? Which types of e-learning, mobile learning, ILEs and other contexts can be used for the population at large to ensure the level of general education? How can the binomial writing and reading be re-harmonized?

Overload of information: How can we establish procedures that enable users of knowledge to select and transform the information flow to relevant knowledge?

Equalities and inequalities: Will access to digital technology and to digital skills broaden or bridge the gaps between elites and populations at large, between generations, between educational systems and the larger social sphere, between rich and poor parts of Europe and the world? Which strategies can be developed to use the new devices to bridge such differences?

WG2. Knowledge infrastructures

A knowledge infrastructure is a system that affords the production, storage, and communication of knowledge by means of a rational system of ordering and accessing data or documents. The means used by this system for organizing the access to data and documents define how knowledge emerges and spreads. Knowledge infrastructures are based on classification schemes, which influence the institutions that hold and use them. In their turn institutions such as higher education institutions, research institutions, all sort of knowledge brokers, as well as the common scientific language, English as lingua franca, the degree of information literacy, publishers, scientific journals etc., determine and facilitate the production and diffusion of knowledge. The institutionalization of knowledge shapes the manner by which knowledge is expressed; the training, education, and institutional affiliation of scholars (as well as their class structure, political inscriptions, etc.) also shape their powers of expression.

Cultural memory and repositories: how can the cultural memory and cultural heritage be ensured in a rapidly changing digitalized knowledge management? How can established knowledge and emerging knowledge be ensured in a rapidly changing digitalized knowledge management? How can archives, libraries and other institutions across Europe cooperate to ensure the dialogue between established and new knowledge? How can public access be secured?

Academic criteria and practices: Will the growing impact of bibliometric criteria and methods of measurement, standardized peer review processes, and open access, to a large degree made possible or at least determined by the digital media, foster or impede the creation of new knowledge in the field of fundamental research?

Scientific fora: To what extent are the current organizational infrastructures and associations (meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops...) effective in improving knowledge? What is the use and benefit of new networking tools such as instant messaging, forums, social networks, mailing lists?

Funding: Funding flows are able to influence the direction of knowledge produced. How and on the basis of which criteria can this flow be regulated?

E-publications: At what point is the competition between print books and the internet, and what is the impact of electronic publishing on the academic community?

WG3. Knowledge dissemination and transfer

Transfer of new knowledge runs in three directions: 1) From R&D and the academic world to policy makers, decisional and regulatory bodies, mass media; 2) From the academic world to the educational systems in terms of didactic methods, text books and other materials, technology; 3) From users producing and disseminating online information and knowledge to policy makers, mass media and larger audiences. In each case future oriented knowledge management not only requires improvements, but improvements based on dialogues: between research and the world of applied knowledge and users' knowledge and political and economical decisions, and between research and the experiences and also experiments in general education. It is necessary to set up channels of communication, develop didactic practices in the educational systems and establish procedures of evaluations that must be followed. At the same time it is necessary to

design new professions and positions capable to cope with the transfer of knowledge and to ensure its dissemination to both decision makers and the educational systems. The capacity to involve the whole media system is increasingly necessary. Intellectuals and academics must be able to involve also TV, radio and the press as mediators of the transfer of knowledge to larger audiences.

Validation: Will the use of net based search engines and databases enlarge or limit the access to relevant knowledge? How processes of validation of the information and knowledge produced and diffused can be develop?

New teaching and learning tools: how do we evaluate and handle all types of e-learning, mobile learning, TV learning, as well as the e-teaching, the mobile teaching and the TV teaching?

Didactics: How can didactic research be a part of all knowledge communities from research institutions to preschool? In what directions will it take pedagogy and didactics?

Politics and business: How can relevant fora, channels of communication and procedures between education and research on all levels and between knowledge practitioners and decision makers be established? How can we ensure that such new relations and professional positions also improve social and democratic development of knowledge management?

WG4. The future of higher education institutions

Higher education is the pivotal process – and its institutions the primary instruments – for knowledge creation, development, and dissemination in the knowledge management of a modern society. However, the social prestige of the academic work is declining, while the administration and organization part of the academic labour is growing to the detriment of the research work. Current models of higher education are unsustainable in the 21st-century context of an increasingly globalized economy and culture driven by an information and communication revolution. Both the concept and the role of the university are changing, and for three principal reasons: 1) in the face of the sharply changing labor market, owing to both the technological as well as the globalized market revolutions, student career opportunities and choices, state policies, and institutional orientations have been shifting dramatically; 2) the practice of research, both in objectives and methods, as well as the practice of didactics (more interactive, etc) are changing rapidly; 3) the role of R&D itself has altered so much in the “knowledge-based” contemporary economy and society as to have brought about a qualitative change in how the economy and society work.

Goals and Perspectives. What are the goals and purposes of higher education for general knowledge management in the 21st century? How should these be incorporated into the primary institution for higher education (i.e., the university) in its structure and function?

Excellence. How do we define “excellence” in higher education under the new circumstances? Since the role of university-generated knowledge is expanding dramatically in modern society in the contexts of individual, corporate, and policy decisions, do we need to introduce a variety of new criteria for excellence at universities and other research institutions? Given the more extensive and diverse relationship between such institutions on the one hand, and between corporations and the state on the other, universities now offer a far wider variety of products and services than before, requiring varying levels of expertise, effort, and

creativity. Since the university's survival depends on successfully managing relations with the state and corporations, the university is forced to respond to client needs and preferences, and cannot, unilaterally, declare its own criteria for excellence. Politically and financially, how are such criteria for excellence to be negotiated with the university's clientele, and how instituted?

Governance. How are universities to be organized and governed both to negotiate R&D preferences for particular institutions, as well as instituting and managing a complex set of criteria for excellence? On what bases and through what procedures are administrators and governing bodies of universities to be chosen? What is the nature of knowledge work and knowledge workers today, whether within the universities or outside, including the vast numbers of casual and contract researchers within them? Is the rise in administrative work largely about establishing metrics for knowledge production or is it more than this?

Pedagogy. The most important clientele for the university is internal: its students. The primary responsibility of the institution is the guidance, training, and education of students, who depend on the institution and its influence for making their career choices. At this time, the university can offer little guidance because highly specialized faculty are unable to offer any advice except attempting to sell their own narrow subspecialty. What the student is exposed to depends on the idiosyncratic collection of faculty and departments available in a particular institution. This situation is a consequence of leaving decisions on what is taught either to a faculty committee (with their specialist professional preferences) or to administrators unfamiliar with specific areas of academic inquiry. Our need is for a more coherent and thoughtful approach to determining what is to be taught and how – with the students' possible futures in mind, instead of idiosyncratic faculty preferences.

4. Expected outcomes

The workshop will attempt to set up an agenda of inspiring new ideas and proposals in the field of knowledge management. It will suggest insights and solutions aimed to facilitate the analysis of this field of research, to advance the debate among experts, stakeholders and decision makers. The outcomes are expected to affect positively the policy development on knowledge at European, national and local level and to achieve conclusions and recommendations for action of use for policymakers as well as for researchers and the management and leadership of universities and in the educational policy for the population at large.

5. Steering Committee

Leopoldina Fortunati, University of Udine, Member DC-ISCH, IT;

Svend Erik Larsen, Danish Research Council for Culture and Communication, Member DC-ISCH, DK; *Julia Stamm*, COST – European Cooperation in Science and Technology, BE, SO ISCH