

**Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Knowledge Management** edited by David J. Pauleen. Westport, CT and London: Libraries Unlimited, 2007. 259 pp. ISBN 1-59158-331-4.

Knowledge management (KM), an emerging field of research garnering significant attention both within and outside of Information Studies (IS), is a disciplinary borderland. KM draws upon understandings of information structures and information seeking culled from IS research in the name of business management. The field focuses on solutions for understanding, controlling, and preserving that elusive business asset: knowledge. Because knowledge is a theoretical good with complicated practical implications, understanding knowledge management requires mixing concepts of cultural and social theory with practice-oriented approaches. David Pauleen has compiled a book of essays which successfully navigates this mixed territory, integrating theory and practice while drawing attention to overlooked issues of cultural diversity in knowledge management. *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Knowledge Management* is an engaging blend of theories of culture and its relationship to knowledge, analyses of cultural barriers to successful knowledge management in business and research environments, and case studies in knowledge management across cultural borders.

The volume's convincing argument is that knowledge production, dissemination, transfer, and organization are all reliant upon socially-constructed cultures: local, organizational, and national. Therefore, managers who wish to foster successful knowledge management projects—whether cross-disciplinary research or improved business practices in a multi-national corporation—cannot afford to ignore the multitude of cultures within their organizations. The anthology begins with two contrasting articles that develop complex and sensitive (although quite different) definitions of “culture,” one of the most difficult parts of writing a book on such a topic. David Pauleen et al.'s “Exploring the Relationship between National and Organizational Culture, and Knowledge Management” provides the most nuanced definition of culture, setting the tone for the rest of the volume. The authors focus on national cultures without ignoring or obscuring the importance of regional and ethnic cultures to KM. They argue that all cultures produce tacit epistemologies or theories of knowledge, which then affect cultural cognitive processes. Because of these cultural ways of knowing, KM systems must take into account the knowledge communities that will be involved.

Peter Murphy's contrasting “The Art of Systems: The Cognitive-Aesthetic Culture of Portal Cities and the Development of Meta-Cultural Advanced Knowledge Economies” views culture as reliant upon the design and aesthetics among which people live, particularly the “pattern thinking” which emerges from the aesthetic forms of the city (p. 35). The author argues that the culture of city

living has spurred the “knowledge economy,” that is, the design of the city encourages innovation because it encourages a specific, pattern-oriented type of cognition. Although Murphy’s model has fewer immediate practical implications than cultural KM models suggested by other authors in the volume (for instance, Murphy’s theories do little to explain cultural knowledge differences between cities such as New York and Hong Kong), it provides a fascinating alternative perspective on the relationship between knowledge and culture.

The theoretical arguments of the opening essays are bolstered by several articles proposing possible implementations and systems for cross-cultural knowledge management. Robert Mason’s “Culture: An Overlooked Key to Unlocking Organizational Knowledge” theorizes links between culture and learning patterns and distills these links into practical “border-spanning” techniques for tailoring KM systems to cross-cultural learners (p. 29). Gerhard Fink and Nigel Holden’s “Cultural Stretch: Knowledge Transfer and Disconcerting Resistance to Absorption and Application” focuses on the challenges of transferring knowledge across cultural barriers. Their recommendations for addressing those challenges emphasize qualities in management and staff necessary to successfully undertake such tasks. Chern Li Liew’s “From Concept to Context: Toward Social-Cultural Awareness and Responsibility in the Organization of Knowledge” speaks succinctly to the problems of ontologies and controlled vocabularies within a cross-cultural environment. These tools of categorization are essential to managing knowledge, but can restrict cross-cultural sharing when cultural knowledge structures differ. And Chad Saunders and Mike Chiasson end the discussion of system-building with “Managing Innovative Knowledge: Cultural Perspectives on Patenting,” a comparative history of inventing and intellectual property—a very different example of how cultures manage innovative knowledge.

*Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Knowledge Management* completes its trajectory from theory to practice with a series of case studies ranging in geography across Europe, Asia, and South America. The case studies include quantitative and qualitative research on “virtual teams”; a discussion of the lingering cultural effects of communism on workers in Russia and China; an example of successful knowledge management in the Peruvian asparagus industry; and an analysis of barriers to knowledge transfer among national cultures in the Netherlands, the United States, and India. Although descriptions of successful and unsuccessful knowledge management ventures round out the volume with evidence of concrete practices, the case studies seem dissatisfying after the complex discussions of culture featured elsewhere in the volume. In several cases, the studies propose little more in the way of KM solutions than increasing patience and time. The case studies also define concepts of culture with

the least distinction; no case study mentions cultural influences at a level more granular than the national.

Though the language of culture sometimes loses important distinctions in individual essays, as a series the essays of this volume explore theoretical dimensions of culture with great sensitivity and successfully incorporate such theoretical dimensions into practical applications. Information Studies researchers and professionals engaged with questions of cross- and poly-cultural information practices will find that *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Knowledge Management* adds a useful cultural lens to the discussion of effective knowledge management and knowledge practices more widely.

### **Reviewer**

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