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In the following article Dr. Wei Zhang compares texts that may be suitable for a course in Knowledge Management. Members of DSI are invited to suggest books that should be reviewed in this column and reviewers to review them. Send suggestions to the Feature Editor.

Textbook for an Undergraduate Knowledge Management Course

by Wei Zhang, University of Massachusetts, Boston

Knowledge Management (KM) concerns identifying and leveraging what an organization knows to gain sustainable competitive advantages. It has become a hot topic for researchers and practitioners in recent years. There are many graduate-level KM courses offered in business schools across the country, but KM courses for undergraduate students are rare. Understandably, I was hesitant when I was asked to develop a KM course for undergraduate students. On the one hand, it is important for undergraduate students to be exposed to the

subject given the popularity of KM practices in organizations. As new knowledge workers, they will be involved in KM projects sooner or later, though more likely as individual contributors rather than managers. On the other hand, undergraduate students, with their limited business experience, could have a difficult time understanding the high-level business aspects of KM. Moreover, topics discussed in KM are far more intangible and fuzzier than those typically discussed in other IS courses such as data management and computer networks. Undergraduate students who



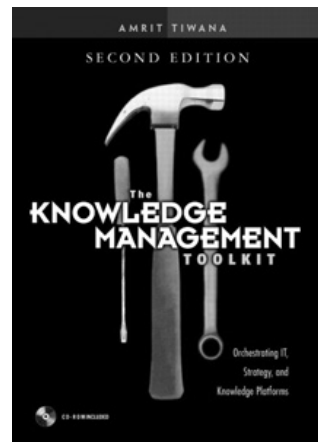
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Knowledge Management
by Elias M Awad, Hassan M. Ghaziri
Prentice Hall, 2003
480 pages, \$132.20



The Knowledge Management Toolkit: Orchestrating IT, Strategy, and Knowledge Platforms (2nd Edition)
by Amrit Tiwana
Prentice Hall, 2004
416 pages, \$42.24

are used to definite answers to well-defined questions could be frustrated by the inherent complexities surrounding knowledge and KM. To succeed, the new course had to take a more detailed and technical perspective than the graduate-level courses in KM.

Many graduate-level KM courses use Davenport and Prusak's classic book *Working Knowledge: How Organizations Manage What They Know* (Harvard Business School Press, 1998) as the required textbook and complement it with a customized course package of journal articles and cases. This combination works fine for graduate students, but probably not for undergraduate students who may have too little business experience to resonate to the insights offered by the book. While cases are invaluable teaching tools for business students, journal articles may be too theoretical and less attractive to many, if not most, undergraduate students. In addition, good textbooks always offer a good framework of the subject domain, which is important for a young field like KM. They also offer a focus of learning and a sense of security. The perception that they always have a textbook to fall back on is invaluable for undergraduate students.

There are not many KM textbooks for undergraduate students. My search eventually led me to decide between two textbooks: *Knowledge Management*, by Elias M. Awad and Hassan M. Ghaziri (Prentice Hall, priced at \$132.20 on the publisher's Website), or *The Knowledge Management Toolkit*, by Amrit Tiwana (2nd ed., Prentice Hall PTR, priced at \$59.99 on the publisher's Website). Following the comparison framework used in a previous review (see "Project Management: Comparison of Two Popular Textbooks," J. E. Humble, *Decision Line*, October 2005), this review focuses on two aspects: general approach/contents and additional resources for instructors and students.

Approach and Contents

The general approach of the two books is quite different. Awad and Ghaziri's

treatment of the subject appears more traditional. Their text is organized into five parts, with each part concentrating on an aspect of KM: Part 1 presents the (theoretical) fundamentals of knowledge and KM; Part 2 focuses on knowledge creation and capture; Part 3 examines knowledge codification and system implementation; Part 4 is dedicated to KM system tools and portals; ethical, legal, and managerial issues are discussed in Part 5. The topics covered and the organization of the book live up to the authors' statement in the preface that the book "is process oriented. It strikes a balance between the behavioral aspects of knowledge and KM and refers to technology as a medium for knowledge transfer, especially in the e-world."

Students should be familiar with the way the chapters are written and find the book easy to read. Each chapter starts with a preview (In a Nutshell), followed by well-organized discussions of a few topics. Following the discussions, a section titled "Implications of KM" relates chapter material to "knowledge management or management decision making," which should intrigue undergraduate students. Each chapter also ends with sections such as "Terms to Know" and "Knowledge Exercises" that help students to review what they have learned. The writing of Awad and Ghaziri's text is smooth and at a level that is appropriate for undergraduate students. The authors also make an effort to relate the new materials in KM to what the students should have learned in Information Management. For example, in Chapter 3, they compare the development life cycle of a KM system to that of a conventional information system.

Tiwana's text "seeks to bridge the gap between KM theory and practice." The focus of the book is the 10-step KM road map, which provides a "tool," a "mechanism," and an "enabler" that helps to actually implement KM in a company. The road map covers a complete life cycle of KM implementation, from pre-system infrastructure evaluation and leverage to post-system performance analysis. The book and the road

map are of great practical value, as indicated by the praises printed at the first page of the book and the four-and-a-half star rating it received on Amazon.com.

Content-wise, the Tiwana text starts with three chapters that discuss the concepts of knowledge and KM, building foundations for introducing the road map. The other 11 chapters are dedicated to the 10-step road map, with each step explained in detail in one chapter. Although the book is heavily practitioner oriented, Tiwana integrates theoretical discussions throughout the book and makes the book much richer. While some may be concerned by the unorthodox perspective of the Tiwana text, I find it refreshing and valuable. As KM researchers, we agree that "learning often does not happen best through explicit knowledge... but through practice and learning-in-action" (see *Knowledge and People; Course Syllabi*, S. D. Talisayon, retrieved from <http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/news/hits/030121bw.htm> on Feb. 2, 2006). Many KM courses require students to work on KM projects. The 10-step road map provides the students with a fine framework to organize their projects, allowing them to learn KM by practicing KM.

The Tiwana text does lack some essential elements of a textbook such as exercises, which may make some students uncomfortable and add some extra workload for instructors who must generate exercise questions by themselves. The writing of the book is not as good as the Awad and Ghaziri text. For example, the use of terminology could be more consistent and concise. I found myself sometimes confused by how KM platform, KM system, KM road-map, KM architecture, and KM blueprint relate to and differ from each other. While each step of the road map is well defined, the theories underlying the steps are sometimes not clearly explained or are not at a level that is easy to understand by undergraduate students, particularly in Chapter 6, "Aligning Knowledge Management and Business Strategy."

Additional Resources for Instructors and Students

The two books offer different additional resources for instructors and students. The companion website of the Awad and Ghaziri text (<http://www.prenhall.com/awad/>) provides students and instructors with a set of downloadable PowerPoint slides. Instructors can also access instructor's manuals and test item files for the chapters. These resources can be of great help when an instructor prepares for the classes.

The Tiwana text comes with a companion CD which includes, among other items, a KM platform deployment case and a set of software tools. Judging from the date of the files, the case and the tools have not changed since 1999 when the first edition of the book was published. Nevertheless, a few software tools ran smoothly on my laptop with Windows XP Professional, even though they were designed for Win-

dows 98 or Windows NT, ancient platforms in computer years. Being able to demonstrate these software tools should be a huge plus for adopting the Tiwana text for undergraduate KM courses since undergraduate students in general respond much better to concrete and tangible systems/tools than abstract concepts.

Conclusions

The two textbooks differ from each other greatly, yet both seem valuable for teaching KM to undergraduate students, which makes the decision to choose one difficult. On one side, the Awad and Ghaziri text offers the familiar and comforting structure of a typical textbook. It is better written, easier to read and understand, but with less supporting materials and additional resources. It should be a good choice for courses that are geared more toward theoretical explorations. On the other hand, the

Tiwana text provides excellent practical value and complements the text with interesting software tools. It is also considerably cheaper, costing less than half of the Awad and Ghaziri text. Instructors who incorporate KM projects into their syllabi might find the Tiwana book more suitable for their courses. ■

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Attention International Empirical Researchers

Assessing global competitiveness of manufacturing supply chains through an international alliance of leading universities

The GMRG is an all inclusive group that provides cooperative research with scholars from around the world. We need additional data gatherers. The GMRG has been gathering data for almost 20 years with three previous versions of the questionnaire. The current fourth version of the questionnaire is GMRG 4.0.

The questionnaire is divided into separate modules: one required module and four optional that researchers choose according to their interests. The required module has 3 sections: 1) demographics (for sample control), 2) competitive goals (outcome variables), and 3) internal performance measures. All these sections are needed for researchers that wish to publish in top journals. There are four optional modules: (1) Manufacturing planning and control; (2) Purchasing; (3) Outsourcing (transaction cost analysis based); and (4) Forecasting. Each module was developed by a team of well-published scholars from around the world. Each optional module has a suggested model that directly ties to each question (and supporting literature). Currently, there are over 25 countries that have completed, are gathering, or will be gathering data. The questionnaire is sanctioned by APICS and CAPS. GMRG needs more USA and international data gatherers.

Data will be only shared with GMRG academic data gatherers that have gathered a representative sample. Any questions can be sent to Professors Chwen Sheu, Kansas State University (csheu@ksu.edu) or John G. Wacker (j.wacker@cox.net). The questionnaires may be viewed on the GMRG official web site: www.gmr.org

NAMES IN THE NEWS

CAROL LATTA, Executive Director, Decision Sciences Institute



James Bookbinder, University of Waterloo, was recently guest editor of a special issue (Vol. 41, No. 6, 2005) of *Transportation Research E* on "Global Logistics."

The special issue includes papers specifically about Europe and NAFTA, as well as articles that treat international logistics questions not confined to particular regions. For the past few years, Bookbinder has been working on various topics concerning International Supply Chains. These include a comparison of Logistics Systems in the European Community with those in Asia, as well as his ongoing research concerning NAFTA.

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Special issue: www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/13665545

(follow links to Vol. 41, no. 6)



William Tallon, Northern Illinois University, has accepted the position as dean of the Gordon Ford College of Business, Western Kentucky University. After

16 years as part of the faculty and administration of the NIU College of Business, he will assume the role of dean on July 1, 2006. "It's kind of bittersweet," says Tallon of leaving behind NIU. "I have spent so much of my life here and worked with so many wonderful people. On the other hand, the Gordon Ford College of Business is well positioned to become the premier provider of business education in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and I am very proud of the opportunity to have a major role in leading the school to new levels of excellence."

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