

Examination Knowledge management in learning organisations January 26th, 2009

Time: 13.30-16.30

For the assignments you could earn a maximum of 38 points being 40% of the total amount, which makes the total amount of points to be earned 95. This leaves 57 points for this examination.

You pass the overall examination when the number of points earned with the assignments and the number of points earned with this examination is 53 or more.

Question 1 (8 points, a=2, b=6)

- a) On page 61 of their paper Walsh en Ungson give a definition of an “organisational memory”. Some people think this definition is so broad and general that it has no practical value for knowledge managers. Do you agree or disagree with them? Give arguments.
- b) On page 71 Walsh en Ungson quote March who states that “memory is an enemy of organisations, an enemy that can reinforce a single-loop learning style that maintains the status quo”. How can you prevent this from happening? Refer to Senge and Kim and give arguments.

Question 2 (10 points, a=8, b=2)

Kim describes seven incomplete learning cycles, namely:

1. Role-constrained learning
2. Audience learning
3. Superstitious learning
4. Learning under ambiguity
5. Situational learning
6. Fragmented learning
7. Opportunistic learning

a) Nonaka and Takeuchi explain the organisational knowledge creation process by describing four modes of knowledge conversion: socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation. Choose four incomplete learning cycles. Investigate for the knowledge creation processes “socialization” and “externalization” if they can or can’t contribute to overcoming the problems associated with each of the four selected incomplete learning cycles. If they can, describe how they can do it. If they can’t, explain why they can’t contribute.

b) Organisational storytelling is a central part of organizational life. Within current research, storytelling is also receiving attention as a powerful management tool to facilitate knowledge sharing, guide problem solving and decision making, and generate commitment to change. [...]Stories are seen as valuable vessels for storing and passing forward knowledge. Peter Senge uses the story of the Beer Game to introduce and illustrate the importance of the discipline of Systems thinking for learning organisations. Looking at the seven incomplete learning cycles of Kim, which is most similar to the behaviour of the players involved in the Beer Game? Also explain why.

Question 3 (9 points)

For answering this assignment you should use one or more of the following sources: Kooken, Ley & de Hoog; Nonaka & Takeuchi; Senge; Kim; slides of the courses.

The last decade there has been a shift in how learning within organisations is perceived by researchers. The focus changed from training based learning (=learning in a classroom) to organisational learning. In general, it is believed that training can be useful for an organisation but that organisational learning is also very valuable for the organisation and its success. Some even argue that nowadays organisational learning can be more valuable for an organisation than training.

Below there are six pairs of concepts. Pick three pairs and use the concepts of each pair to formulate an argument about *why* organisational learning can be more valuable for an organisation than training based learning. In your argumentation you should explain if each of the concepts in a pair do or do not make organisational learning more valuable for an organisation than training based learning. Refer in your argumentation to the source you used. Note: you may use a pair only once.

- * knowledge economy and industrial economy
- * informal learning and formal learning
- * individual mental maps and shared mental maps
- * shared vision and no shared vision
- * tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge
- * knowledge gaining and knowledge creation

Question 4 (9 points)

The paper by Bondarenko & Janssen (“Documents at hand”: learning from paper to improve digital) investigates and reports about three areas of personal document management: paper, e-mail and file folder structure. For the latter two they describe several problems/bottlenecks that do occur in practice. In the paper by Ping-Wei et al. about knowledge discovery and data mining, text mining is explained. Compare the three forms of text mining mentioned by Ping-Wei et al. with the problems/bottlenecks identified by Bondarenko and Janssen for e-mail and file folder structure and find out if the forms of text mining can or can’t help in solving these problems. Provide arguments!

Question 5 (7 points, a=5, b=2)

Organisational culture is an important issue for knowledge management. In most of the literature cultures are classified into types. Below you can find a text taken from Dalkir describing the Goffee & Johns classification.

and so forth.

One way of exploring cultures is to classify them into types. Organizational culture may be differentiated in many ways. Goffee and Johns (2000), for example, identified four types of organizational culture, which they created by using two dimensions. The first dimension, *sociability*, is a measure for friendliness. A high sociable culture indicates that people within the culture tend to be friendly to each other without expecting something in return. Sociability is consistent with a high people orientation, high team orientation, and focus on process rather than outcomes. *Solidarity*, the second dimension, measures the task orientation. High solidarity means that people can work well together toward common goals, even when they have personal disputes or conflicts.

This classification scheme produces four types of organizational cultures: communal, networked, mercenary, and fragmented (see Table 7-1).

1. A *communal culture* can give its members a sense of belonging, though it also is task-driven. Leaders of this culture are usually very

TABLE 7-1
FOUR TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES

	High Solidarity	Low Solidarity
High Sociability	1. Communal Culture	2. Networked Culture
Low Sociability	3. Mercenary Culture	4. Fragmented Culture

inspirational and charismatic. The major negative is that they often exert too much influence and other members are rarely vocal.

2. In a *networked culture*, members are treated as friends and family. People have close contact with each other and love each other. They are willing to help each other and share information. The disadvantage of this culture is that people are so kind to each other that they are reluctant to point out and criticize the poor performance.
3. A *mercenary culture* focuses on strict goals. Members are expected to meet the goals and to get the job done quickly. Since everyone focuses on goals and objectivity, there is little room for political cliques. The negative is that those with poor performance may be treated inhumanely.
4. In a *fragmented culture*, the sense of belonging to and identification with the organization is usually very weak. The individualists constitute the organizations, and their commitment is given first to individual members and task work. The downside is that there is a lack of cooperation.

Culture may be characterized in a number of ways, and organizational cultural analysis must be one of the first steps to be taken in any KM initiative. One of the fundamental prerequisites of a culture that fosters rather than hinders knowledge management is the notion of trust. When organizational members feel that they are respected, that they can expect to be treated in a professional manner, and that they can trust the other members of their group, then knowledge sharing is greatly enhanced. Trust removes any potential barriers owing to lack of confidence that the person on the receiving end will not attribute the authors of knowledge or that they will make inappropriate use of the knowledge shared.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ANALYSIS

Compare this classification with classification of organizational culture presented by Boisot by answering the following questions:

- Give for each type of culture mentioned by Goffee & Johns the culture type of Boisot that is most similar to it. Provide arguments for your decisions!
- Based on your answer under a), what can you conclude about the effect of different underlying classification dimensions used by the authors?

Question 6 (10 points, a=3, b=3, c=4)

Below you can find a comparison between different countries based on the growth of value added (=VA. Groei). This growth consists of three factors: labour (=Arbeid), Capital (=Kapitaal) and MFP (= Multi Factor productivity, see the definition below the table). The translated header of the table is “The Netherlands works less and less and invests capital below average leading to an increasing gap with the leaders (USA and Finland)”. This header as the conclusion from the table is made by the “Innovatieplatform”.



Answer the questions below after having a closer look at the table.

- Do you agree with the conclusion of the Innovatieplatform? Provide arguments for your answer!
- What could Boisot conclude about the relative importance of knowledge in the economies of the countries included in the table?
- How would Boisot incorporate (or has already incorporated) the concept of Multi-Factor productivity in his theoretical framework?

For non-native speakers, the countries in the table are from top to bottom Spain, Finland, UK, USA, France, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, The Netherlands, Germany, Italy.

Question 7 (4 points)

Below you can find a citation from the book “Value-based knowledge management” by Tissen, Andriessen & Lekanne Deprez (1998):

“We learned that unstructured knowledge is more valuable due to its overall strategic focus. It is also practically impossible to control because it is highly complex, exists in a dynamic environment, and needs significant context to understand it” (p.184)

If you would show this citation to Boisot, what would be his answer? Would he agree or disagree? Provide arguments for your answer!