Case Studies in Knowledge Management Research

Edited by

Kenneth A. Grant
List of Contributors

Pierre Barbaroux, Research Center of the French Air Force, Defense and Knowledge Management Department, France
Peter Balafas, HBOS (formerly of the Danwood Group), Edinburgh, UK
Zuraina Dato Mansor, University Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia
Ray Dawson, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK
Monica De Carolis, University of Calabria, Rende, Italy
John C. Dumay, Discipline of Accounting, University of Sydney, Australia
Cécile Godé-Sanchez, Research Center of the French Air Force, Defense and Knowledge Management Department, France
Kenneth A. Grant, Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada
Jie Gu, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, HKSAR, China
Matt Hinton, The Open University Business School, Milton Keynes, UK
Manasa Kakulavarapu, Wipro Technologies, Bangalore, India
Dinar Kale, The Open University Business School, Milton Keynes, UK
Hans Koolmees, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, Heerlen, The Netherlands
Rongbin W.B. Lee, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, HKSAR, China
Stephen Little, The Open University Business School, Milton Keynes, UK
Cherie C.Y. Lui, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, HKSAR, China
Jesús Martínez, Center for Legal Studies and Specialist Training, Generalitat, Government of Catalonia, Spain
Mario Pérez-Montoro, Department of Library and Information Science, University of Barcelona, Spain
Ved Prakash Wipro Technologies, Bangalore, India
Judi Sandrock, University of Pretoria, South Africa
Sylvia Schoenmakers, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, Heerlen, The Netherlands
Henk Smeijsters, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, Heerlen, The Netherlands
Peter Tobin, University of Pretoria, South Africa
John A. Tull, Macquarie Graduate School of Management, Sydney, Australia
Saverino Verteramo, University of Calabria, Rende, Italy
Contents

Introduction to Cases Studies in Knowledge Management Research ........ v

How Organizations Learn to Develop Capabilities: The Case of French Fighter Squadrons................................................................. 1

  Pierre Barbaroux, and Cécile Godé-Sanchez

What Problem Are We Trying to Solve? - A Case Study of a Failed Knowledge Management Initiative.............................................. 18

  Ray Dawson and Peter Balafas

Knowledge Management, an Enduring Fashion ................................. 34

  Kenneth A. Grant

A Case Study of Knowledge Elicitation on Intellectual Capital Performance in The Fund Service Industry............................................. 64

  Jie Gu, Rongbin W.B. Lee and Cherie C.Y. Lui

KM Effectiveness Gap Analysis: The Case of an Indian IT Firm.............. 85

  Manasa Kakulavarapu and Ved Prakash

Reconfiguration of knowledge management practices in new product development- The case of the Indian pharmaceutical industry .......... 102

  Dinar Kale, Stephen Little and Matt Hinton

International Strategic Alliance and Organisational Learning: Factors for Promoting Learning: A Malaysian Case ................................. 120

  Zuraina Dato Mansor
## Contents

Enabling Knowledge Creation in Judicial Environments: The Case of Catalonia’s Public Administration ................................................................. 137

* Mario Pérez-Montoro and Jesús Martínez

Critical Success Factors for Communities of Practice in a Global Mining Company ................................................................................................. 155

* Judi Sandrock and Peter Tobin

Practice Based Research and Action Learning in a Learning Organization - The case: Patient Centred Treatment in a general hospital. ................. 173

* Henk Smeijsters, Hans Koolmees, Sylvia Schoenmakers

Does Intellectual Capital Management ‘Make a Difference’? A Critical Case Study Application of Structuration Theory ........................................ 192

* John A. Tull and John C. Dumay


* Saverino Verteramo and Monica De Carolis
Introduction to Cases Studies in Knowledge Management Research

1. The Discipline of Knowledge Management
There is little doubt that Knowledge Management (KM) is regarded as an important issue. It is recognized in academe as a field of study of some considerable import and this is evidenced by the number of journals and conferences that focus on this subject. It is also an issue on which many organisations have invested considerable sums, with quite varied results.

To demonstrate the very high level of interest in KM, I recently carried out a bibliometric examination of KM-related publication from 1999 to 2009, using the ProQuest database. Over this 20 year period, I found almost 26,000 citations for “knowledge management”, with a consistent level of interest at around 1,500 citations a year for the last five years and strong interest being shown in both trade and scholarly publications. To set these numbers in context, similar searches for two other popular management techniques -- “business process reengineering” and “quality circles” produced 9,336 and 2,361 citations respectively. (Some additional data from this bibliometric examination of the KM field are presented in my paper included in this book.)

Knowledge management (KM) exploded into prominence in the mid-1990s, with J-C Spender (2005) concluding that:

The most obvious news is that knowledge management (KM) has become big business, growing explosively since Drucker drew attention to it in 1988
(Drucker, 1988). We now see KM conferences all over the world, a huge number of KM trade journals, and battalions of KM consultants. The majority of organizations, both private and public, have KM projects of various types and their spending is enormous...There has been a parallel growth of academic discussion about knowledge. He then goes on to say,

As KM has risen in importance and managerial fashionability the hype and confusion has multiplied...

This is a common refrain within the IT literature. KM continues to attract widespread interest from researchers and industry. It is seen as a major area of concern by senior executives across the world (Rigby, 2010) Yet, no single widely accepted definition of KM exists. As Smith (2004) suggested, “knowledge management (KM) is a rapidly growing field that crosses diverse disciplines,” from psychology to information systems, and can be “viewed as a conceptually complex broad umbrella of issue and viewpoints”.

Despite this impression of the sudden emergence of KM, its roots can be traced back at least 50 years (Lambe, 2011). More specifically, it can be argued that the field considered to be knowledge management is actually the coalescence of at least four prior bodies of knowledge - the recognition of the importance of intellectual assets or capital; the concept of the learning organization; the existence of communities of practice and the evolution of IT applications beyond transaction processing to include interpersonal communications and unstructured data storage and sharing. My own bibliographic research (Grant, 2010) shows that these four prior bodies of knowledge still have a distinct visibility within the KM literature, along with a strong interest in the links between KM and business strategy. Thus, KM can be seen as an umbrella concept that continues to embrace a number of discrete themes, as is reflected in the cases presented in this book.

KM evolved as a business activity with strong input from industry practitioners and consultants, such as Sveiby and Risling (1986), Stewart (1991) and Drucker (1992). As the field developed, the visibility of practitioners in the literature diminished. Indeed, “by 2008, practitioners’ contributions
dropped to only ten percent of all KM/IC authors. Pragmatic field studies and experiments, which require an active cooperation of businesses and the involvement of practitioners, constitute only 0.33 percent of all inquiry methods. There has also been a decline in case studies.” (Serenko et al., 2010). This is a significant concern, since case studies represent one of the best links between conceptual thinking and actual practice in the field.

Despite this reported decline, good case studies are still being written and this book presents some interesting examples.

2. Why a Book of KM Case Studies?
In the editorial to Leading Issues in Knowledge Management Research, a sister volume to this book, Charles Després described recent changes in both practitioner and academic journals that suggest a new period of interest in KM and identified a need for an increased focus on context as a key element of future research in the discipline (Després, 2011). Cases, by their nature, are inherently studies in context.

Indeed, case studies can be used in a variety of contexts. They can be used as a pedagogical device to promote a more active form of learning, they can be used as a framework to collect and document evidence about a phenomenon or the case can be a research objective in its own right (Remenyi et al., 2002). The use of case studies allows the researcher to handle the complexity that is often an inherent part of research in business.

From a research perspective,

- A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomena and in context and not clearly evident. (Yin, 2003)
- Researchers usually learn by studying the innovations put in place by practitioners, rather than by providing the initial wisdom for these novel ideas”... “We believe that the case research strategy is well-suited to capturing the knowledge of practitioners and developing theories from it. (Benbasat et al., 1987)
The case study produces the type of context-dependent knowledge that research on learning shows to be necessary to allow people to develop from rule-based beginners to virtuoso experts. (Flyvbjerg, 2006)

In other words, a case is not a controlled experiment; rather it is an examination of “real-life” and knowledge in context. Thus, case studies can be used to help develop practitioners, better researchers and the relevant body of knowledge (Eisenhardt, 1989, Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

3. Selecting the Cases
In selecting cases for this book I considered four factors.

The first was that they provide an interesting story. Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of knowledge sharing that has also been recognized as one of the sub-disciplines within KM (Brown et al., 2005). Stories provide context, capture interest and allow the sharing of tacit knowledge. They tell us about good things and bad things. They allow the listener/reader to share vicariously in the storyteller’s experience. As Yin comments, the “case study report can itself be a significant communication device. For many nonspecialists, the description and analysis of a single case often suggest implications about a general phenomenon.” (Yin, 2003) While teaching cases are most obvious examples of this form of narrative case study, I would suggest that a good storyline is surely important to most case uses.

The second factor I considered was that the case makes a good contribution to the field. The case should be relatively timeless (i.e. it still has applicability), it should offer some potential for generalization or at least the use of its findings and approach in future studies.

The third factor was that the case write-up be fairly comprehensive. That is, within the length limitations of the paper, it demonstrates the relevance of the issue being studied, the appropriateness of the case study method for the study, provides some guidance on the methodology used, a good description of the case setting and findings and, most importantly, a dis-
cussion of the contribution of the study to the field. As Eisenhardt (1991) suggests, “Research that must fit into the page limit of a journal article is necessarily limited in scope and story detail”, however the cases chosen have made good efforts in most of these areas.

Finally, I looked for a broad range of cases so that, when taken together, they addressed the key areas of interest within the KM community and a broad range of organizational contexts.

4. **The Cases Selected**

Table 1 summarizes the 12 cases chosen. They come from 10 different countries on four continents. While most are single case studies, the unit of analysis includes both individual organisations, public and private sector, and industries. The cases demonstrate the wide-ranging reach of KM thought, including: addressing fighter pilot competencies; the need for knowledge creation in the Indian pharmaceutical industry; organisational learning in Malaysian strategic alliances; knowledge communities in the Catalan justice system; and the importance of intellectual capital management in European automotive manufacturing.

The focus of the cases demonstrates a range of innovative approaches to knowledge management. Most have links to the business strategies of the organization studied. Three examine Intellectual Capital/Asset practices, four take an Organisational Learning perspective, four look at Communities of Practice and four study the implementation of KM IT systems.

The cases also demonstrate the wide variety of approaches available to researchers using the case method. While most examine a single case, two present multiple case studies that demonstrate multiple levels of analysis (#3 & #6).

As might be expected, the most frequent methods of data collection are interviews and examination of available documentation. Two of them (#5 & #9) use surveys as the primary data collection method and some combine focus groups, interviews and surveys. One is a form of action research
(#2), where one of the researchers worked within the company being studied.

The majority of the cases reported on successful projects although, in some cases (#3, #5 & #11), they also identified areas of concern and potential improvement. Case #2 is worthy of particular examination as it discusses the failure of a project originally reported as a success. Dawson and Balafas revisit a case study from several years earlier to discover that, while the original research suggested a successful KM project, the company had not followed through to implement what had been planned. They highlight that, while the planned KM project had strong support within the company, it also lacked a clear identification of the benefits and, in hindsight, this proved to be critical. This is a challenge that seems to be faced by many KM projects, where, while knowledge management is seen to be a “good thing” this is not enough to ensure adoption of KM.

In conclusion, the cases in this book demonstrate that KM is alive and well across the world and that researchers continue to find the case method a useful tool to use in their work. They also demonstrate that KM is, perhaps, best considered as a meta-discipline, within which a variety of themes can be pursued.

Just as Michael Polanyi asserts that all knowledge is, to some degree, personal, the choice of papers for a book such as this reflects the personal biases of the editor. I hope that you will find the cases chosen as interesting as I did, and a useful contribution to case study research in KM. My thanks goes to all the authors who have allowed their work to be reproduced in this book.

Kenneth A. Grant
Professor
Ted Rogers School of Management
Ryerson University
Toronto, Canada
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Case Focus</th>
<th>Methodology Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Barbaroux, P &amp; Godè-Sanchez, C, 2008</td>
<td>Frenchfighter squadron competencies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Single Case, exploratory study, interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Dawson, R.J. &amp; Balafas, P.J., 2008</td>
<td>KM Failure in UK company</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Single Case, Action Research, interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Grant, K.A., 2010</td>
<td>KM in Professional Services Firms</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
<td>Management Fashion Theory, Multiple Case, 5 firms, interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Kekuvarapu, M &amp; Prakash, V., 2007</td>
<td>Knowledge sharing in an Indian IT services firm</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Single Case, interviews and survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Kale D. et al, 2003</td>
<td>Innovation in Indian pharmaceutical industry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Multiple Case, 5 firms, Mix of qual. and quant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Mansor, Z.D., 2010</td>
<td>Malaysian strategic alliances</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Single Case, interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Perez-Montoro, M, &amp; Martinez, J., 2007</td>
<td>Knowledge creation in Spanish justice system</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Single Case, Pilot &amp; rollout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Santrock, J. &amp; Tobin, P., 2007</td>
<td>Knowledge sharing in a global mining company</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Single Case, survey and focus group, Mix of qual. and quant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Tull, J.A. &amp; Dumay, J.C., 2007</td>
<td>IC Management in European automotive manufacturer</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>Structuration Theory, Single Case, Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Vorteramo, S. &amp; De Carolis, M., 2009</td>
<td>Practice groups in Italian consulting firm</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Single Case Interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The Cases in this Book
References
Grant, K. A. (2010) Knowledge Management, an Enduring Fashion. 7th International Conference on Intellectual Capital, Knowledge Management & Organisational Learning. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China.