

KM Today



Interview by Haidee E. Allerton

T+D talks with an acknowledged pioneer of the knowledge management discipline and author of numerous books on KM, Laurence Prusak, about the state of knowledge management today.

T+D Are knowledge management and learning merging? If so, which function is dominant in most organizations?

Prusak Knowledge management and learning are, obviously, by the very definitions of the terms closely related. Knowledge is achieved by learning, for example. However, most of the learning projects in firms are done by HR and OD departments, while most KM stuff comes from IT, strategy, or general management. There's little confluence between those groups or even in the literature. Lately, there has been more movement to merge the two traditions, so we'll have to see what happens in this space.

T+D What signs do you see that KM is or isn't becoming a strategic business tool?

Prusak When we first started talking about KM in the early 1990s, there was little or no interest in the subject. It's now part of the discourse of most executives and managers worldwide. It's written about extensively and is

taught in almost all of the major business schools. References to knowledge and KM are found embedded in all of the strategic management literature—from basic texts to advanced articles.

T+D What companies have good metrics on the ROI of their KM systems?

Prusak One can't measure knowledge in any way, so there's no way to develop ROI on knowledge itself. What many organizations do is develop relevant proxies or alternatives to knowledge measurement. For example, IBM boasts each year that it leads the world in technology patents. Internally, that's seen as a valid proxy for in-depth knowledge about technology.

T+D What's your background, Larry?

Prusak It's wildly different from training and development.

T+D And yet, you're considered to be part of the t&d field. Who are some other KM gurus?

Prusak Ikujiro Nonaka at the Center for Research and Investigation of Advanced Science and Technology. He co-wrote *The Knowledge-Creating Company*. My co-author Tom Davenport, who's at the Accenture Institute for Strategic Change. There are others.

T+D One accepted definition of *knowledge management* is the process by which organizations generate value from their intellectual assets.

The Darwin Executive Guide guide.darwinmag.com on knowledge management says there's no universal definition of KM and no agreement as to what constitutes knowledge in the first place. It likens knowledge workers to golf caddies: A good caddie does more than carry clubs; he or she gives advice on which club to use and how to hit the ball.

How would you describe the evolution and the current state of knowledge management?

New KM Master's Program

There are many KM degrees and programs in the United States and Europe. The Copenhagen Business School, in collaboration with Learning Lab Denmark, has introduced a new executive program, master of knowledge management.

"A growing number of organizations have been integrating knowledge into their systems after realizing that it is the cornerstone of innovation, marketing, technology, and personal development," says Mette Moensted, professor of knowledge management at Copenhagen Business School and head of its new executive KM degree program. She adds, "Because billions have been invested in solutions and technology for gathering information, *knowledge management* has, inaccurately, become a synonym for IT-steering systems. But information isn't knowledge."

According to the thinking at Copenhagen Business School, KM is 5 percent technology and 95 percent management. Many organizations have forgotten the managerial task, which is the essence of KM. Laurence Prusak says that not only is information not enough, but knowledge is not enough. "The answer lies in the management of the knowledge at hand."

The KM master's program consists of nine modules, each beginning and ending with a workshop in Denmark or Sweden. Between workshops, candidates do assignments and interact in Web communities. Candidates also integrate their own job duties into the curriculum, and vice versa. Two years of part-time study culminate in a full one-year program.

To learn more [click here](http://www.masterkm.net).

Prusak I think of it as a movement—a reaction against the technology hype. There has been too much focus on technology, too little on knowledge. The KM Movement has been going on for about 10 to 15 years. KM is about how companies know what they know, how they know new things, and what can be done to evaluate and transfer knowledge. What forms does knowledge take? Those are still open questions, and we're still learning. TD

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