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Knowledge Management: The Cultural Context for Enabling Technology

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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: THE CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR ENABLING TECHNOLOGY

To be presented by the Socio-Technical Activity Research (STAR)
Group on Knowledge Management,
and

to be chaired by Irena Ali
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the panel discussion is to share and discuss findings of the panellist's' research into knowledge management and their understanding of the cultural and human factors that support effective implementation of technology. The panel will comprise presentations and discussion on the cultural imperatives and implications of knowledge management, including: preparing the cultural context, designing and implementing supporting tools and making interventions and changes after implementation.

FOCUS OF PANEL

Knowledge exists in the minds of individuals and is generated and shaped through interaction with others. In an organizational setting, knowledge management must, *at the very least*, be about how knowledge is acquired, constructed, transferred, and otherwise shared with other members of the organization, in a way that seeks to achieve the organization's objectives.

Knowledge management seeks to harness the power of individuals by supporting them with information technologies and other tools, with the broad aim of enhancing the *learning capability* of individuals, groups, and in turn, organizations.

Before such tools are implemented, it is necessary to prepare the cultural ground, and after implementation, it is necessary to maintain the cultural context. The technology alone will not create the trust and interpersonal environment necessary to achieve an optimally effective network. Values

cannot be shared electronically or via pieces of paper. Organisations are not based on electronic networks alone; rather, relationships must also be constructed through face-to-face interactions. Organisations have a responsibility to sustain a culture in which learning occurs and this requires an understanding of elements that foster the creation, sharing, and management of knowledge within and between organisational groups.

AIM OF THE PANEL

This panel will include presentations and discussion on the cultural imperatives and implications of knowledge management, including: preparing the cultural context, designing and implementing supporting tools and making interventions and changes after implementation.

The purpose of the panel discussion is to share and discuss findings of the panellist's' research into knowledge management and their understanding of the cultural and human factors that support effective implementation of technology.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Information Systems practitioners would benefit by the discussion of factors that have been found to contribute to the effective learning organisation. The cultural and human context is often overlooked by IS practitioners, and a panel on this perspective should be of interest to them, as well as to academics. Furthermore, academics in IS development and knowledge management would be invited to critically discuss the panellists perspectives of knowledge management.

*** THE PANELLISTS**

All panellists are either founding members or associate members of the STAR group on KM. This group was founded by a collaborative group of Australian researchers working in Knowledge Management and related areas. The purpose of the group is to act as a focal point for knowledge management researchers throughout Australia and the world and to develop networks to promote collaboration and advance understanding. Members of the group have presented popular tutorials at two international conferences: INTERACT97 in Sydney, DSS99 in Melbourne; and two national conferences: ACIS97 in Adelaide and OZCHI2000 in Sydney. All of the panellists have a substantial publication record in this area of research, and a selected list of their most relevant, refereed publications is appended to the end of this proposal. The group is funded for the next three years by a prestigious Discovery Grant from the Australian Research Council. Brief biographical details of the panellists appear below.

Ms Irena Ali (Contact for any further correspondence in regard to this proposal)

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Irena Ali is a Defence Scientist at the Defence Systems Analysis Division. Irena's background is in information management and information seeking. Her work focuses on developing social learning architectures and researching organizational and cultural factors contributing to effective organisational learning. She has published and presented both nationally and internationally in the field of organisational and social learning.

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A/Professor Hasan has a PhD in Information Systems and is a member of the Australian Standard Committee. She is Director of the Activity Theory Usability Laboratory at the university and has published extensively in the areas of Human Computer Interaction, Executive Information Systems and Knowledge Management.

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Dr Gould is a Senior Lecturer and researcher at the University of Wollongong. His research interests include the application of tool mediation aspects of Vygotskian psychology and Activity Theory to knowledge management and human computer interaction.

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Henry Linger is a Senior Lecturer, and Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Healthcare Knowledge Management Program and Deputy Director of the Knowledge Management Research Group at Monash University. Mr Linger conducts research in the area of knowledge work, knowledge management and organisational memory. His work is reported in international journals and conferences and he has presented seminars and workshops both nationally and internationally.

PROPOSED OUTLINE OF THE PANEL DISCUSSION

Ms Ali will chair the panel, introduce the panellist and facilitate discussion. Depending on the amount of time available for this Panel, each of the panellists can speak for anything from 10-30 minutes, with 5-15 minutes of questions and audience discussion after each speaker. This will allow the Panel to fit into anything from a one-hour to a three-hour time slot, although obviously, the longer the time slot, the more time available for knowledge sharing and reflection. The panellists will each speak about their own research and from their own perspective and expertise, as outlined below.

Ms Irena Ali will speak briefly about the findings of a four-year research project into organisational factors that support generative learning in organisations. The variety of the settings under study and the consistency of study findings, suggests that the results can be extrapolated to a wide range of organisations and could be instructive for organisations embarking on the path to effective knowledge management.

Dr Ted Gould will give an overview of Vygotskian psychology and Activity Theory and its utility for the design of information systems that can intelligently support task performance, knowledge processing and learning.

A/Professor Helen Hasan will highlight the cultural and human factors that should be considered when designing and implementing systems that can support a range of knowledge work in organisations, including systems that incorporate organisational memory.

Mr Henry Linger will discuss exploring knowledge management processes and the organisational learning outcomes that need to be achieved in knowledge organisations, and he will draw on his experience to discuss interventions and changes in these supporting tools after their initial implementation.

The networking opportunities provided by the STAR Group will also be discussed.

PRESENTERS' RELEVANT REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

Ali, I. Gori, R. and Warne, L. (2000) Socio-technical Approach to social learning in organisations: a study of two settings in the Australian Defence Forces, Conference presentation at the *Operational Research Society Conference OR42, 12-14 Sep 2000*, The University of Wales, Swansea.

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