

Business Line's Catalyst

From THE HINDU group of publications
Thursday, May 31, 2001

Catalyst

Resources

Brand Quest

Home

Knowledge Management in B-schools



A.V. Vedpuriswar & Krishna Venkitachalam

Development and sharing of knowledge have been going on ever since man learnt to speak and write. Indeed, the first turning point in knowledge sharing came when man learnt to write, enabling future generations to have access to the knowledge of the earlier generation. The discovery of the printing press, which allowed copies of the same document to be made and distributed to people in a cost-effective manner was another watershed event. Few, however, thought it necessary to look at knowledge management (KM) as a separate discipline till recently. Now, KM has clearly emerged as one of the most visible disciplines in management education. And the main reason for this trend seems to be information technology in general and the Internet in particular.

When we think of knowledge, we instinctively tend to think of teachers, schools, colleges and universities. Indeed, for most people, the primary source of knowledge is teachers and academic institutions. Yet, how committed are our institutions of higher learning to KM? Very little, especially if we look at what is happening globally. In this article, we discuss how Indian B-schools can use the Internet to accelerate the process of knowledge dissemination.



Most of the leading B-schools in Europe and the US have strong KM initiatives, many of which are web-based. They have Web sites rich in content. IMD's Web site www.imd.ch among other items has a feature 'Perspectives' consisting of articles written by the faculty and a full section on world competitiveness. Insead (www.insead.edu) of France has a knowledge portal. Harvard Business School (www.hbs.edu) has a powerful Web site, which provides a range of educational resources, some free and some priced. Leading American B-schools also have powerful Intranets that allow information to be shared among faculty and students within the campus.

Some of the KM initiatives undertaken by academics in the West are truly mind boggling. Recently, we had the privilege of listening to Prof. Raj Reddy, (of Carnegie Mellon University), the world's leading expert in artificial intelligence. He explained how he is attempting to collect virtually all the information available in the world and host it free of cost, in an easily retrievable form on one Web site. www.ulib.org. Prof. Reddy is talking about going back hundreds of years in time. And his vision is to store information pertaining to at least 1,000 years and make it available free of cost to the general public.

Another laudable initiative is that of Prof. Werner Antweiler of University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. His Web site [pacific.commerce.ubc.ca / xr](http://pacific.commerce.ubc.ca/xr) allows us to access foreign exchange rates going back several years for almost all traded currencies. If you want to know how the rupee was trading against the dollar in 1993, don't go to the RBI! Prof. Antweiler's Web site will give you the figure in seconds. Similarly, Paul Krugman's site www.wws.princeton.edu/pkrugman/ offers a wealth of resources, which will be of great use to any researcher.

With stray exceptions, such a commitment to compiling, documenting and sharing knowledge is lacking among our academicians. How many of us have a home page? Do we document our lecture notes and store them for posterity? We teach batch after batch of students. Do we document the common mistakes which students make in the examination or the questions typically asked by the students in the class? Imagine a scenario where such information is provided to the students before the semester starts. Students would come well prepared and the quality of discussion in the class would improve by leaps and bounds.

Not only that, if one of the regular instructors is not available for the semester, an alternative instructor can be quickly briefed and pressed into service, without in any way diluting the academic standards.

Thanks to the dotcom craze, most of our leading B-schools have Web sites today. Unfortunately, their quality leaves a lot to be desired. Except for a prospectus and a few photographs, there is nothing to excite a visitor. Unless the site is enriched with lecture notes, power point presentations made by faculty, research papers and useful links it will remain static and be of little utility. A bulletin board is also a must to accelerate the process of sharing insights. In the medium to long run, our B- Schools should aim to develop knowledge portals like Insead.

But in the short run, basic information like lecture schedules, course curriculum, lecture notes and solutions to assignment problems can be made freely available on the Web.

I would like to think that our faculty, especially in the top 100 B-schools, are reasonably capable people. Many of them are well-read and the increasingly demanding students are maintaining the pressure on them to upgrade their knowledge.

So, more than knowledge development, it is knowledge sharing which is the key issue. In general, we Indians are reluctant to share what we know with others. We feel worried, that all the hard work put in by us will be meaningless if some one has easy access to our knowledge. This is a wrong mindset. People will invariably learn what we know as no secret is permanent. On the other hand, if we share our knowledge, reciprocity is quite likely. And as knowledge is shared among academics, new knowledge will be created. This type of climbing spiral is what we need to make our B-schools centres of

excellence. Like in business, it is innovation which will create sustainable competitive advantages for a B-school. And knowledge sharing is a must to foster an innovation-driven culture.

The Net has thrown up possibilities which were not available earlier. While installing an intranet such as Lotus Notes can be a very expensive process, the Internet is a very inexpensive medium to store and transmit files of data. Let us hope Indian B-schools will appreciate the potential of the Web as a knowledge sharing tool.

(A V Vedpuriswar is the Dean, ITUC School of Management, a business school affiliated to the Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India, Hyderabad, while Krishna Venkitachalam is on the faculty)

• [Catalyst](#) • [Resources](#) • [Brand Quest](#) • [Home](#) •

Copyrights © 2001 Business Line

Republication or redissemination of the contents of this screen are expressly prohibited without the written consent of Business Line
