

Work for all: Develop knowledge management

Uday Kulkarni is an associate professor of the Department of Information Systems at the [Arizona State University](#) (ASU). He participated as part of the audience in the sixteenth [Americas Conference on Information Systems \(Amcis\)](#), event that – according to what he told us – served him well to take a different impression than what he had about the development of information technology in our country. An expert in knowledge management, Uday Kulkarni pointed out that the organizations must have this discipline as a crosscutting element in all their areas.

From a knowledge management perspective, how do you make this connection between companies, academies, and governments happen in order to have practical meaning?

Ok so it was a very broad question. The way it happens as I've seen in the collaboration between academia and industry is through 2 channels, through our research and through our teaching. I teach a graduate level course where my students are mid-level managers and I'm teaching them a course in business intelligence and knowledge management. I bring in knowledge management area in my classroom. I expose the students to that and make them think about issues that I'm trying to answer. In that, what happens is that students learn about what are the real cutting edge topics in knowledge management and they start thinking about applying them to their workplace. Because most of my students, all of my students are working in industry, they're about 35-37 years old and are midlevel managers.

Through that then, that's how I start making them think about it but what really happens is they come back with, I go into many of their organizations and interview people with my research if they are interested. So, say, I have a class of 70 students, I always find 5 or 6 who are thrilled by whatever they have learned. And then I develop contacts through them and go into their companies and talk to their executives about my research application. So that provides me with my data that is needed to grow my research. So for example, I'm doing research in intensive business processes, that I started doing a long time ago, I'm still in that area, and what I'm doing now is doing studies of knowledge intensive business processes in many organizations like DHL and some of the chip manufactures, like Intel, and going and understanding their business processes which are knowledge intensive and then that data is used for growing my research.

What is your impression of the 16th Amcis event?

I have attended most of the sessions in and around my area of research like knowledge management and business intelligence.

I think the merging of the CIOs and the researchers that the conference started is really really helpful: I was pleasantly surprised, this is my first visit to Peru and I was surprised to see what they had already done and the thinking. They are having in done so, applying not just applying, but thinking about how the technologies are integrated into their work. I go to other countries, I traveled to India, Thailand, I traveled to other places for conferences but I talked and worked with people there and my impression earlier was probably wrong about developing countries like those I have seen.

Peru stands out there, I think, with some of the other countries I have visited like India or Thailand. India is producing a lot of IT themselves in terms of software technology but I see that they are absolutely ready to be leaders in the future in business intelligence and knowledge management from the two things I've seen. I got the feeling that I want to come here and teach some time and also spend more time with them because I can learn from them and we can all benefit from each other.

Management knowledge is exclusive to the general manager or to the information technology manager? Or is it also applicable to the marketing, production managers, etc?

I think it's more beneficial, it's completely beneficial for other areas other than information technology. It is just the way of giving them the knowledge management systems that are useful for their function areas like marketing, finance, operations, manufacturing, etcetera. Those are the main areas that are going to benefit or that are benefitting from knowledge management. And its not just for CIOs and CEOs, it needs to be engrained in the organization so the understanding of how to exchange knowledge, what sort of information to capture, what sort of knowledge to store, how to reuse it and how to benefit from it.

It is true that the leadership needs to take the first step in leading the organization with the right culture and the right technology but then it has to be embraces by the entire organization. And that is what I see is happening.

You mean, knowledge management must be a crosscutting activity in the organization team...

It is about the key phrase “across the organization” not across in different areas but across different areas. So the mind view of knowledge management of a process, from start to finish, starting with let’s say a solution selling process or a financial planning process, a lot of people from different parts of the organization take part in that process from start to finish so that there is a structured process. And knowledge around that process travels through different areas of the organization including manufacturing, supply chain, marketing eventually, packaging, customer service, etcetera etcetera. So, the knowledge gained in one part of the organization needs to flow to other parts of the organization through the process that touches everybody to make it complete. You cannot do a solo knowledge management just for marketing or just for finance.

Each manager might have their own methods to administrate their own needs?

The key is breaking away from breaking apart. You have integration across the organization for the upload and information that is needed. You might have some specialized systems for marketing, for like doing some kind of market research and getting back those results or you might have some specialized system for optimizing orders in a supply chain or operation but when you have to do a process that stretches across the entire organization, than these systems do help in delivering these functions.

But you need to have knowledge that passes from supply chain to marketing to finance and to human resources which is at a level that is different from their day to day jobs. They need to know the order process or supply what the supply chain is doing in order to build the system or the product or provide the services that are needed by people in the different fields. So if you take the concept of business intelligence where you need to make managerial decisions, you need information from all these sources to make good decisions.

It’s one thing to manage or administrate data and information and something different: maybe more qualifying management knowledge.

Managing knowledge, when you consider knowledge, you have that is stored in people’s minds who are experts in those different areas of their own specialization. And then there is knowledge that has been identified as that which can be stored in computer systems such as solutions to problems that are really hard to solve but have been solved before. Or documents that give you background knowledge about a situation that might occur in the future like diagrams and pictures and all

which is not really data but it has to be used and interpreted by the user. And that is why we call it knowledge.

So these two broad categories of knowledge are those that stick inside of people's heads that are experts and the other is called explicit knowledge. So there needs to be systems which allow people to directly contact somebody who is an expert in an area and has knowledge and solved that problem before instead of having to reinvent the solution themselves. So the systems here are going to be geared towards understanding people's expertise and putting them in a proper profile form so you can easily reach the person or team you want at the right time. As far as explicit knowledge is concerned, you need to categorize or classify that knowledge in proper ways with classification schemes in order for that knowledge to be retrieved later on for reuse.