

**SAA ARCHIVES  
MANAGEMENT  
ROUNDTABLE  
NEWSLETTER**

**FEBRUARY 1999**

---

**BOOK REVIEW**

*Harvard Business Review on Knowledge Management.* Harvard Business Review Paperback Series. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Publishing, 1998. 224 p. Indexed.

How smart is YOUR organization? This compendium provides answers. Its contributors, including noted management expert Peter F. Drucker, examine how organizations operate and transform themselves. Learning can be structured so that it is a natural outcome. Every organization has a learning history which enables it to function more effectively. The concept of a learning history rests on the assumption that employees think as individuals and work together as a group.

*Knowledge Management* looks at ways in which organizations leverage their employees' intellectual assets. The knowledge-based organization creates, acquires, and disseminates knowledge; in doing so, it transforms itself in light of what it has learned.

Knowledge-based organizations have flatter structures than traditional command-and-control organizations. The leader of the knowledge-based organization functions in a staff (facilitative) capacity instead of a line (supervisory) mode. He or she displays strong leadership skills: "Leaders of the best organizations tend to be demanding, visionary, and intolerant of half-hearted efforts."

Knowledge-based organizations successfully tap the tacit and subjective knowledge of their workers. They embrace continuous innovation by drawing on the employees' intuition and ideas. Continuous innovation comes about through a diversity of work styles of employees who constantly innovate. The key is to make local innovation known throughout the organization.

"Creative abrasion" or "cross-disciplinary sharing" is a hallmark of successful organizations. It results when employees share different approaches to solving common problems. Staff members vary in their perceptions, decision-making processes, and problem-solving approaches. Creative abrasion is the product of various viewpoints rubbing against each other.

Managers of knowledge-based organizations manage their employees' intellectual assets. Professional intellect consists of these components: (1) cognitive knowledge, or book learning ("know-what"), (2) advanced skills ("know-how"), (3) systems understanding ("know-why"), and (4) self-motivated creativity ("care-why"). Knowledge resides primarily at the bottom of the organization among its specialists. For its flattened structure to work smoothly, employees of knowledge-based organizations must display a high degree of discipline and responsibility. Consensus builds teamwork. Sharing of information magnifies the value of intellectual assets for the entire organization.

Knowledge-based organizations share a strong commitment to learning. Their employees' mistakes become opportunities for them to gain insights that will profit both themselves and the organization.

Organizations that embrace learning have five main functions: (1) systematic problem solving, (2) experimentation, (3) profiting from past experience, (4) learning from others, including the process of benchmarking, and (5) dissemination of knowledge.

However, obstacles can stand in the way. Learning is impeded when employees become defensive and refuse to accept responsibility for their mistakes. Staff members deny themselves an opportunity to profit from their errors. As a result, they blame others, and the organization suffers. For learning to take place, everyone must accept responsibility for mistakes: "If we do not have an open dialogue we will not learn."

*Knowledge Management* is of great value to archivists. Even though much of our work is

#### **HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PUBLISHING WEBSITE**

The School's website ([www.hbsp.harvard.edu](http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu)) is of interest to archivists serving as administrators and managers. It lists and describes publications of Harvard Business School. Searching is by author, title, or subject. A search under the topic "Change," for example, yields 300 citations. The web site also allows one to sign up for several management listservs. (Note: The editor does not endorse the services of Harvard Business School Publishing.)

#### **PROFESSIONAL NEWS WANTED**

The editor seeks information about professional accomplishments of the Roundtable's members for inclusion in future editions of the *Newsletter*. Submissions should be forwarded to Casey Edward Greene, Head of Special Collections, Rosenberg Library, 2310 Sealy, Galveston, TX 77550, or [Cgreene@rosenberg-library.org](mailto:Cgreene@rosenberg-library.org).

rooted in established principles (e.g., respect for provenance) and practice, the archives environment can still be transformed. Archives staff learn on the job and display local innovation which can benefit the entire institution if it is made available to other employees. By working smarter, archives can accomplish more by making better use of their employees' intellectual assets.

The editor will review a companion volume, *Harvard Business Review on Change*, in the next edition of the *Newsletter*.

#### **KURTZ TO SPEAK ON MANAGING CHANGE**

Dr. Michael J. Kurtz, our Chair, will speak on "Managing Change in an Archival Environment" in Austin, Texas, next May. Michael's presentation will be a pre-conference workshop at the annual meeting of the Society of Southwest Archivists and is scheduled for May 27, 1999. He will discuss team-based work structures, change-oriented staff development and training, creating an integrated leadership team, and establishing targeted partnerships with other organizations.

Dr. Kurtz serves as Assistant Archivist for Records Services at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. He is an adjunct faculty member affiliated with the College of Library and Information Services at the University of Maryland-College Park and has published on the management of archives.

More information on Michael's workshop is available at <http://lib-04.lib.uh.edu/ssa/wkshpswp.htm>.