The Knowledge Management Yearbook 1999-2000

(Book review)

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The Knowledge Management Yearbook 1999-2000
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The Knowledge Management Yearbook 1999-2000 is a compilation of articles deemed by the editors to be some of the most representative and best published works from 1997 and 1998. Criteria for selection included practicality of the usability in solving problems and exploiting knowledge management practices, and that they be authoritative. As stated in the preface, “the articles that made the cut are the ones that represent the best in their class, providing you with a standard for reading and judging other materials” (p. xi).

This volume is exceptionally well organized in five parts, each with an introduction that provides the reader with a set of expectations and explanation of what is included in that part. This is a work that is meant to serve as a reference book, not one to be read from cover-to-cover.

Part One, entitled the Nature of Knowledge and its Management contains articles explaining the theoretical basis for knowledge management in modern organizations.

Part Two, Knowledge-Based Strategies includes a number of case studies and reports of best practices within organizations from a number of industries and professional fields. Organizations from around the world are included.

Part Three, Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning, also includes a number of case studies regarding the execution of knowledge management, but takes it one step further than Part Two in discussing many of the lessons learned and changes organizations will make to enhance the management of their knowledge assets.

Part Four, Knowledge Tools, Techniques, and Processes; provides exactly what the title indicates. Equipment, materials, software, etc., required to implement an effective knowledge management effort within a variety of organizations is outlined within the articles contained in this part.

Part Five, Knowledge Management References, makes this book worth owning and keeping handy for quick reference, even if it were offered without the previous four parts. Included are six sections:

1. A guide to the literature, 1996-1998, compiled by Eric Lesser, a senior consultant with IBM Global Services. This section is an annotated bibliography of twenty articles written during the timeframe indicated, some of which are included in this volume.

2. Directory of knowledge management resources on-line – an annotated listing of websites of organizations specializing in professional fields directly related to knowledge management as well as information and addresses for appropriate discussion lists.

3. Directory of knowledge management organizations – a compilation and description of professional associations of interest to knowledge management professionals complete with addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and web addresses.

4. The directory of periodicals dealing with knowledge management includes a description of the main purpose and audience of each publication along with subscription information, including rates.
(5) The language of knowledge is a glossary reprinted with the permission of the Delphi Group, including many terms either unique to the field of knowledge management or which use different meanings than the commonly understood definitions.

(6) Quotes on knowledge management and the learning organization is a collection of quotes, intended to be used by the reader in planning, writing, and presenting their own work regarding knowledge management.

The vast majority of these articles were exceptionally well written, as would be expected from the publications from which they were reprinted. Included in the original publication sites are the Harvard Business Review, IIE Solutions, IEEE Intelligent Systems, Training and Development, The Journal for Quality and Participation, Sloan Management Review, Quality Progress, California Management Review, and The American Economic Review (not a comprehensive listing of the original sources). There were also a number of excerpts from books specifically written about knowledge management. A disappointment was the number of typographical and grammatical errors in the introductory and transitional sections provided by the editors.

There are a number of useful themes that run through many of the articles included in this yearbook. Many of the articles include definitions of knowledge management, tacit and focal knowledge, organizational intelligence, and many others. It was interesting that another commonality in many of the articles was that the same organizations, regardless of physical locale, were identified as having the best practices and were organizations targeted for benchmarking their efforts regarding knowledge management. Another common theme of note is the importance stressed of not only upper management support but also their active involvement in any knowledge management effort.

In this reader’s opinion, there are two major benefits of owning and using this reference on a routine basis. The first is the wealth of information provided in one volume, which I am convinced took uncountable hours to compile, assess, and determine its utility for inclusion. Many of the articles I had read, but had not gathered into one place so that they would be readily accessible when needed. The editors are to be commended for the quality of their effort in compiling a much-needed resource.

The second benefit is the outstanding resource provided in Part Five. There are several new bookmarks saved in my computer for websites I had not yet found by surfing for information regarding knowledge management. As this field grows and our understanding of the need for managing knowledge, one of our most critical assets, increases, resources of this kind will prove to be invaluable.

The editors stated in the preface that this is intended to be the first of many yearbooks on knowledge management. The utilization of the information provided here would be well worth the purchase price in the years until the next yearbook is published. This tool will also serve as an historical document of where we are, how far we’ve come in the few short years that managing knowledge has been a priority, and our predictions for

I recommend this book for inclusion in corporate, organizational, and academic libraries, as well as the personal libraries of any present and future professional working toward the harnessing of knowledge within his or her own organization.