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Author(s)	Andre, Saito
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Abstract

The emerging knowledge economy and society bring new challenges to organizations, managers and workers: the accelerating pace of innovation in products, services and processes; the growing importance of work that requires extensive education, experience and judgment; and the escalating complexity of knowledge, which becomes increasingly distributed and changeable, among others. The field of knowledge management (KM), however young, has attracted contributions from a wide range of disciplines seeking to provide answers to those challenges, and may be a good source of instruction to managers and workers willing to get prepared for them.

In this work, we propose a model of individual knowledge management competence to support the education of knowledge managers, understood as general managers capable of dealing with those challenges. A preliminary model was theoretically developed after an extensive review of literature in the KM field and on the concept of competence, and then validated and refined in two ways: first, a questionnaire survey of KM researchers and practitioners, and second, a content analysis of curricula from master's programs in KM. The model explains KM competence as specific combinations of presumed KM-related activities and the individual capabilities required to perform them. It also indicates that those activities and capabilities are strongly dependent on particular perspectives on knowledge and its management.

We describe four basic perspectives – information, human, computing, and strategy – that lead to very distinct ways to understand and practice KM. From an *information*-oriented perspective, knowledge is mostly seen as codified/codifiable content and transferable expertise/experience, and KM usually means to facilitate access to information, expertise and so-called best practices. From a *human*-oriented perspective, knowledge is largely interpreted as social practice and collective sense making, and KM usually means to cultivate contexts and facilitate connections that improve practice and sense making. From a *computing*-oriented perspective, knowledge is typically regarded as objective and suited to computational approaches, and KM normally means to develop systems/methods that compute knowledge and to build computational models for decision making. Finally, from a *strategy*-oriented perspective: knowledge is interpreted at the organizational level as capability or asset, and KM typically means to prioritize knowledge valuable to the organization and to design and implement strategies and processes to acquire, create, use and protect it.

Those perspectives can be combined in myriad ways, and the model proposed suggests not a single definition of KM competence, but multiple profiles based on distinct understandings of what comprises KM. The study describes four typical profiles being developed in current KM education: the information manager, the learning facilitator, the knowledge systems developer and the KM manager. Finally, we conclude this work by suggesting other profiles that better focus on the managerial challenges in the knowledge economy and society, and propose ways to develop them through improved graduate programs.

Keywords: knowledge management competence, knowledge management education, knowledge manager, knowledge economy, knowledge society.