

**Review of the book: *What they didn't tell you about knowledge management*, by
Jay Liebowitz.**

Andrea Japzon

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What They Didn't Tell You About Knowledge Management. Jay Liebowitz. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006. 121 pp. \$35.00. (ISBN 0-8108-5725-1)

Jay Liebowitz has written extensively on expert systems, knowledge management (KM), and information systems, as evidenced by the publication of almost 30 books and more than 200 articles on the subjects. *What They Didn't Tell You about Knowledge Management* offers a concise practical guide specifically for the LIS professional. The book is best suited to those LIS professionals who are currently involved with a KM initiative, are interested in pursuing a career in KM, or are working in corporate or government libraries. The book is concise with only 84 pages of text and another 20 pages of appendices. This work provides only the briefest of overviews on KM, making it a starting point for the uninitiated. For richer descriptions and greater development of KM concepts and practices, *The Knowledge Management Yearbook* (Cortada & Woods, 2000) or Liebowitz's *Knowledge Management Handbook* (1999) should be consulted.

The book is filled with charts, bulleted lists, and excerpts from other publications meant to quickly guide the reader through the knowledge-management landscape. These examples are from KM in practice and provide the reader with a sense of how KM manifests itself in the workplace. While the examples are the strength of the book, Liebowitz does not explain or describe them in enough detail to integrate them into the work as a whole. However, the references that accompany each chapter are well chosen and provide the reader with the opportunity to explore in greater detail any of the concepts or practices presented.

Liebowitz draws heavily from his experience as the first Chief Knowledge Officer at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, MD. The successful integration of KM with the work of the library there is described throughout the book. Given Liebowitz's knowledge of the federal government, he is careful to describe the differences between federal and corporate knowledge-management practices. KM is a critical initiative for the U.S., as 60% of the federal government's General Schedule employees and 90% of the Senior Executive Service are projected to retire in the next 10 years (Fillichio, 2006). Appendix B consists of excerpts from the report *Human Capital: Insights for U.S. Agencies from Other Countries' Succession Planning and Management Initiatives* (General Accounting Office, 2003). This report examines the efforts put forth by countries with a federal employee situation similar to that in the U.S. The excerpts provide perspective on the types of problems to be addressed through KM, but again Liebowitz fails to integrate the significance of the excerpts into the work as a whole.

Chapter 1 addresses the assertion that KM might just be the “management fad of the day.” In response, Liebowitz discusses the benefits that give knowledge management sustaining power within an organization: adaptability, agility, creativity, institutional memory, and internal and external

organizational effectiveness. He speaks from his experiences at Goddard regarding the importance of implementing a strategic plan for KM and relating the plan to core competencies within an organization. In more detail, he discusses a case study in which he helped a large organization develop a strategic plan, and presents specific recommendations. He includes a chart that describes different KM practices: knowledge identification, capture, application, and creation—and the corresponding responsibility for implementation at the level of the director, professionals, and support staff.

Chapter 2, “The Knowledge Behind Knowledge Management,” provides the most background on KM as the chapter title indicates. The author briefly discusses the shift in corporate thinking from “knowledge is power,” which focuses on individual contributions, to the realization that “sharing knowledge is power,” which focuses on contributions made by teams. This shift indicates the importance of trust and cooperation in creating corporate intelligence. The chapter concludes with questions for future research in KM and a reference list, both notable for their potential for further exploration.

Also in chapter 2, Liebowitz discusses the possible positions for KM within an organization: human resources, information technology department, organizational development, and the library and information sciences department. While the book covers a vast array of topics in brief detail, the overarching theme stresses the importance of integrating knowledge-management initiatives and, when possible, the library or information center, into the everyday work practices of all employees. Throughout the book he refers to a dichotomous approach to integration in the following ways: “connection vs. collection,” “personalization vs. codification,” or “human resources vs. information systems.” He recommends that the culture of an organization determine the approach. Using Goddard as an example—a culture that leans towards codification—he provides an extensive list of examples used to extend and balance their approach to KM. To encourage personalization, he suggests instituting mentorship programs, creative learning groups, and incentives or rewards to motivate employees to share knowledge.

Many KM practices are based on the foundations of LIS practice: taxonomy and ontology generation, knowledge representation, preservation, and codifying sources of information. These areas of LIS are given very short treatment in chapter 3, “KM in the Life of an Information and Library Professional.” A chart of KM programs at LIS schools along with a brief review of the literature on the inclusion of KM curriculum in LIS education is provided. From there, a pilot schedule is presented for a Document Management System (DMS) and is followed by a list of seven different choices for a DMS. The choices are ranked according to criteria produced through the Expert Choice system (<http://www.expertchoice.com/>), which automates the Analytical Hierarchy Process. The book is full of practice-based examples like this one. While the examples are useful on their own, integrating them, through more discussion, throughout the content of the chapters would improve the continuity of the work.

In the fourth chapter, entitled “Is KM Right for You?” Liebowitz provides a litmus test of situations in response to the question posed. The litmus test includes such indicators as an aging employee population, poorly documented procedures and inconsistent capturing of knowledge, and employees who spend too much time looking for information. Additionally, he makes his own knowledge audit, the Knowledge Access and Sharing Survey, available in Appendix A. This audit tool provides an excellent survey of the types of issues to be considered; it serves to review the knowledge flows in an organization, assess what

KM approach would best benefit an organization, and help establish a KM strategy. A case study using the audit is included to illustrate its potential as a resource for application in other organizations.

A knowledge audit can help an organization decide what to do first and what approach to begin with: whether to plan for knowledge fairs or for a DMS. Chapter 5 discusses possible first steps. The chapter contains an exhaustive four and half page list of functional requirements for a DMS, including evaluation criteria. Again, more discussion is desired, in this case, regarding the importance of optimizing the right functional requirements. Equal treatment is not given to the personalization or connection possibilities. The use of online communities, lessons-learned systems, and knowledge-sharing forums as possible first steps towards integrating KM practices are briefly discussed.

Chapter 6 presents lessons learned about KM. Liebowitz advises starting with small projects that are likely to win easy participation. He suggests performing a postimplementation audit, and establishing metrics at the beginning of any newly established KM activity for that purpose. In chapter 7, Liebowitz discusses ways to establish metrics to prove the value of investing in KM. He broadly covers the intangible nature of intellectual assets and how these assets are likely to be evaluated from different vantage points within an organization: human resources, information technology, and organizational development. Liebowitz's insights in this area are likely to be particularly helpful to LIS professionals in understanding how their contributions to an organization's KM program are likely to be evaluated. Examples of metrics are briefly presented; the metrics specific to LIS are limited to counts of the amounts of knowledge captured for codification. Liebowitz concludes the chapter with a job advertisement for a library specialist turned knowledge manager at a pharmaceutical company. He includes the ad to demonstrate the increased demand for LIS professionals and the desire to include their expertise in the organization and preservation of information in the evaluation of KM systems and initiatives.

The concluding chapter addresses the future of KM. Liebowitz asserts that knowledge management will not become a discipline in its own right but that its practices will continue to integrate with other fields such as organizational learning and computer science. He envisions LIS professionals as brokers making connections between the people of an organization and the knowledge it creates, with the library or information center as the middle ground between codification and personalization. In that vision, he sees a role for LIS professionals in pushing information to employees rather than taking the more traditional role of reacting to information requests. He sees a future in which LIS professionals take leadership roles in KM programs through the integration of their technological, organizational, and human interaction skills. He is hopeful that in time libraries will take ownership of KM programs within organizations. His statement, "The library has always been a treasure house of information, and it needs to continue to expand into the knowledge chest as well" (p. 33) expresses Liebowitz's charge to corporate and government LIS professionals. The ideas presented in *What They Didn't Tell You about Knowledge Management* are certainly in support of that charge. This work provides a broad overview of the KM field and serves as an initial source for exploration for LIS professionals working in a corporate setting or considering doing so.

References

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