
From the Editors

By Carl C. Hoffmann, Ph.D. and Karen V. Beaman



In this issue of the *IHRIM Journal*, Guest Editor, Carl Hoffmann, has collected a series of articles dealing with what may be the central issue of the 21st century. Knowledge management ideas and the ability to put those ideas to use is driving the e-economy. Assets, balance sheets and return on equity have at least temporarily been replaced by concepts. AOL buying Time Warner is a triumph of concept over traditional value. Amazon.com has a huge market capitalization, yet no profits. Large bricks and mortar companies cannot keep the best and the brightest because of the attraction of dot coms. These companies are highly risky. The attraction that these companies have to employees has something to do with money, both short-term in the form of pay and long-term in the form of equity. Security is not a factor. But more importantly, the attraction of these companies is due to a culture which is focused on changing the world and creating an exciting work experience focused on innovation. Dot coms are the quintessential community of practice focused on building and capitalizing on knowledge. What role do human resource management and information systems have to play in this non-traditional world?

The problem that HR faces in helping to manage knowledge in modern companies is very well posed in Bob Stambaugh's article, "The Knowledge-Creating HRIS: Learning to Live in the Messy World of Work." In his survey of the literature, Stambaugh points out that HR and HRIS and the corporations they serve have traditionally relied on a set of rigid, mechanical rules and standardization. Standardization was embodied in the assembly line. Knowledge, however, is created in very organic settings that surround communities of knowledge that are very organic and free form. Our systems that rely on standard definitions and rules are somewhat antithetical to this creative organic process. There is an even more important paradox. The analysis on which knowledge creation is based relies on standard, reliable and reproducible measures. The dissemination of that knowledge relies on language that is standard and understood in a

uniform way by both speaker and listener. Its application in the manufacturing, sales or distribution process must be supported by systems and processes that can be taught and measured.

How companies obtain the best of both organic and mechanical organizations is further elaborated in Richard McDermott's article, "Knowing in Community: Ten Critical Success Factors in Building Communities of Practice." McDermott shows how companies institute knowledge creation and dissemination through communities of practice. In "Making Connections," Chris Collison gives us an example of how his company used organization and technology to create and disseminate knowledge. De-

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bra Furey's article, "The Role of Human Resources Organisations in Effective Knowledge Management Programmes," outlines how the human resource function can help support knowledge creation and dissemination by being a knowledge champion, architect and contributor. Debra's article will give the heads of HR much comfort.

Technology's role is championed in new and creative ways by the last three articles in this issue focused on knowledge management. In "Organizational Knowledge as a Web Application," Gary Durbin defines how systems can help facilitate identifying and linking communities of knowledge beyond the simple application of groupware. Tod Loofbourrow's article, "Managing Human Resources Knowledge: A Framework for Results," is equally rewarding as he describes how rules-based systems can be used to disseminate and incorporate knowledge into process. Loofbourrow articulates how rules-based systems can be incorporated with data and text to not only provide faster, better and cheaper informa-

tion and solutions to the workforce, but also how they can be used by HR to treat their workers as markets of one.

New state-of-the-art knowledge management solutions are proliferating in the workplace. However, one real-world challenge that KM faces is, simply, lack of use. In their quarterly column, George Alliger and Scott Tannenbaum, "On the Knowledge Frontier: You Can Build It, But Will They Come?," describe 10 major reasons why, even if you build a great KM system, users may not come. They review what those reasons are, how to recognize them, and how to plan in advance to address them so that KM initiatives can be the success they deserve to be.

We are also pleased to bring you a new article in our International Perspectives series, focusing on Asia. In recent years, the economic forces of globalization and deregulation have started to force Japanese companies to alter their conventional ways. Yumiko Christine Yokoi, in the debut article of this series, "Japan — Dealing with the New Realities," examines some of the evolutionary developments in human resources management in Japan today and discusses some of the ways that human resources management has been changing.

These are interesting and exciting articles that were a joy to assimilate for this *Journal*. It has been a treat to work with these authors in bringing them to you.

Regards,

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