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KnowBits

Is anybody there?

Since knowldgWORKS News began (about a month ago), about 400 people have subscribed. I have heard from a couple of people, mostly positive, some not so positive, but no where near the 400 people that apparently let their mailbox fill with these bits. Next week is contribution week - I have a couple of contributions that have been made from the readers, and I want to publish these as they offer different facets to the picture.

But I have been wondering, given that there are 400 subscribers, it would be nice to hear how the newsletter is doing, i.e, is it meeting your needs? Do other topics need to be covered? Are you even reading the newsletter? I'd like to hear from you.

I want to suggest the following. The newsletter serves as a community building instrument. If some of the 400 subscribers are reading the newsletter then we have an interest in the same thing. I would be interested in knowing about the readership - what you are doing - your work, current KW problems, where you are, etc. By sharing this information, we begin to strengthen the ties of the community. Any volunteers? I would include these small bios in up and coming issues.

And on a related note ...

I am very interested in growing our community SO if you find value in this newsletter, please recommend it to your friends, family, business partners, etc. etc. and recommend that they subscribe. Your help in passing on the word is greatly appreciated.

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Interesting Nuggets in June 1999 Knowledge Management

This month's Knowledge Management magazine has some nice nuggets.

Important insights by Peter Drucker, Pg. 16  
"Now the definition of a manager is somebody who makes knowledge productive."

I think this statement would be consistent with our operating definition of knowledge, namely, "Knowledge is that which enables you to do things." Thank you, Peter ;-).

Also Pg. 16.

"Don't talk about knowledge management. There is no such thing. There are only knowledge people." This reminds us that it is the people that are key.

Pg. 18 - A "best practice" for a model for ROK (return on knowledge). No algorithm but a discussion of the characteristics of the model.

Pg. 38 - "Hunting, Gathering, and Telling Stories." This brief article exposes the relevance of a hunter-gatherer model as one that might be used as the model for modern day organizations. An opinion, but an interesting read.

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Volume 1 Number 8  
Topic: People  
It's Really the People Stupid

So far, most of the knowldgWORKS News has been devoted to some aspect of the knowledge work process. But whether it be definition, as in what is knowledge management, issues, or activities, everything is dependent upon the person doing the knowledge work. The tone of this newsletter might lead one to believe that people are secondary to this process, but in reality this, of course is not the case. The adage "No people - No knowledge," reminds us that people must be considered first and foremost. In any knowledge work, the focus must be on the people. Loosing sight of this means that your knowledge work efforts will probably be unsuccessful. In any situation where people are called upon to share something valuable, trust becomes a key consideration.

#### The Gricean Maxims

In linguistics there are a series of statements, a lot like rules, that specify an apparent set of assumptions that underly all human communication. These are called the Gricean Maxims and consist of the following:

1. Maxim of Cooperation
2. Maxim of Quality
3. Maxim of Quantity
4. Maxim of Relevance
5. Maxim of Manner

The maxims are key to understanding during two-way communication. If these assumptions did not operate during conversation, we probably would not understand each other when we spoke.

The Gricean maxims can be used as a paradigm for knowledge work. Just as there are implicit assumptions that operate during two-way conversation, I propose that there are a similar set of assumptions that operate in knowledge work. I would like to suggest a possible set of knowledge work maxims.

#### The Knowledge Work Maxims

##### Prerequisite

For the sake of the maxims, we need a way to describe what occurs in a knowledge conversation between two parties. For the purpose of this discussion, we define a knowledge transaction as what occurs between two individuals in a knowledge conversation. Knowledge transactions can occur between two people, between a person and a group, a person and a repository, a group and a repository, or an institution and a repository.

Maxim 1  
Assumption of Trust

This maxim is simple, basic, and fundamental. No trust - no transaction. Trust represents a complex, somewhat indeterminate aspect of the relationship between two parties. Participants in a knowledge transaction need to be certain of every aspect of the transaction in order to trust it. Different participants have different levels of tolerance for uncertainty. A participant's comfort zone regarding certainty is going to govern the nature of the participant's involvement and commitment to the transaction. If your culture is one of distrust, knowledge transactions may be seriously jeopardized.

Maxim 2  
Assumption of Value

In any knowledge transaction, there is an assumption of value on the part of the participants. In a transaction that involves a knowledge seller and a knowledge buyer, both parties assume they will receive value. Consider a case where one of the participants of a knowledge transaction is a person and the other is a repository. Since a repository cannot make assumptions, the assumptions of value will be between the person using the repository and the organization owning the repository.

Both the owner of the repository (who is rewarded with accolades from users and a positive performance review when the repository provides value) and the employee who provides data to the repository (who is rewarded with recognition and a positive performance review when she takes time to share her knowledge) gain value from keeping the repository accurate and up-to-date. For some employees putting data into the repository is viewed as valuable because the ability to easily access the data later will allow them to improve their job performance. If employees do not see themselves as directly benefiting from the natural consequences of having an accurate, up to date repository, it becomes necessary to assure that they receive value in the form of organizational benefits.

Maxim 3  
Assumption of Accuracy

In any knowledge transaction, knowledge buyers believe they are receiving accurate knowledge and knowledge sellers believe they are providing accurate knowledge. If the knowledge buyers and/or sellers do not believe in the accuracy of the knowledge, the knowledge market will be adversely affected.

The accuracy of knowledge refers to the truth or falsity of the knowledge with respect to the context. For example, you, as a knowledge buyer, might inquire of me, a knowledge seller, what tool is needed to unscrew a Phillips head screw. If I tell you that an adjustable wrench can be used for this purpose, the knowledge I have provided in the context of your need is not accurate.

Maxim 4  
Assumption of Timeliness

In any knowledge transaction there must be an expectation between buyer and seller of the time required to provide the desired knowledge. This may be in terms of a precise specification of the time in which the knowledge is required or a less precise specification of time.

Imagine a spy sent behind enemy lines to learn of the enemy's plan. If, by the time the spy returns home, the war is finished and the spy's country has lost, his General is no longer interested that the enemy is planning to attack.

If a knowledge transaction is time constrained, the time constraint might have a direct effect on the value of the transaction. This effect can either be a lowering or a raising of the value of the transaction. Consider that certain knowledge is needed to produce a product. If several companies are working on similar products, the company that has the knowledge in time to be first to market gains the most value from the knowledge. As the competition progressed, the value of the knowledge increases until either (a) it was known that one of the competing companies obtained the knowledge or (b) a market introduction was imminent. After this point, the value of the knowledge decreases.

Maxim 5  
Assumption of Accessibility

A knowledge transaction might involve three parties - a seller, a buyer, and the third party in the process, a broker. A broker serves as middleman between buyer and seller. Brokers have knowledge about knowledge. Brokers can make knowledge available by sharing its location, ways to get at it, or by providing the knowledge itself. Even though a broker may be able to identify where the knowledge resides, this does not ensure that anyone will be able to access it. There must be some assurance in a brokered transaction that the knowledge can be accessed.

Final Thoughts

From the standpoint of knowledge work, these five assumptions are highly interconnected. If you, for example, purchase knowledge from a broker and the knowledge is not accessible, the assumption of accessibility is violated, and in turn the assumptions of value (you get what you paid for) and trust are also violated.

These maxims try to address some important people considerations, by specifying the underlying assumptions and expectations that are the basis for knowledge interactions. It would seem appropriate that any knowledge -based effort would rely on these assumptions and depends on the participants understanding of these assumptions. As is usually the case, open discussion about these assumptions will allow participants to be informed about the nature of their knowledge transactions.

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If you are interested in learning more about knowledge work, subscribe to this newsletter by sending email to:

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To unsubscribe send an e-mail to: knowldgWORKSNews-off@lists.webvalence.com.

You may type an x in the subject or body if your e-mail program requires.

Next week's issue: Your contributions.

Previous issues of the knowldgWORKS News are archived at <http://www.accsys-corp.com>.

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