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Well-written Book on Knowledge Management

Knowledge is not manageable by way of information technology alone establish the authors of a very reader-friendly, but at the same time highly relevant book on how to manage the organisation's knowledge flow. This book belongs on the bookshelf of everyone with an interest in knowledge and knowledge management.

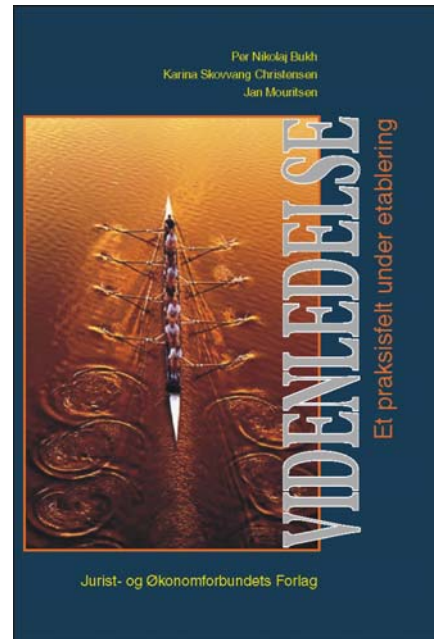
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Ever since the 1960s when Peter Drucker was one of the first to draw attention to the importance of knowledge workers for the way we organise and manage our organisations, knowledge has been of primary importance to anyone with an interest in management. With the emergence of a so-called 'knowledge economy' – i.e. economists found that knowledge must necessarily also be important for companies where traditional, technological assets are by now of secondary importance – the importance of knowledge has been widely known. And this has led to the interest in knowledge management – i.e. how to manage the organisation's knowledge flow and make sure that it matches the demands for new knowledge from the organisation's surroundings and strategy.

Until now, basically two types of publications have been produced within the field – the theoretical and the practical ones. As someone who has studied – and sometimes spelled my way through – the highly theoretical publications in the field, and who, at the same time, has been frustrated with the solely practice-related contributions, it was a pleasure to get hold of 'Videnledelse – et praksisfelt under etablering' (trans. Knowledge Management – Establishing a Field of Practice) which is one of the very first books to bridge the gap between theory and practice within the field.

'Videnledelse – et praksisfelt under etablering' is written by Per Nikolaj Bukh, Karina Skovvang Christensen and Jan Mouritsen who are attached to the Aarhus School of Business and Copenhagen Business School in Denmark together with a number of



carefully selected guest writers who really are experts within their fields. The result is a very reader-friendly, but at the same time highly relevant and profound book which belongs on the bookshelf of absolutely everyone with an interest in knowledge and knowledge management.

Old Discussion

The discussion about, what knowledge is, is not a new one. Ever since the old Greeks, Plato and Aristotle, philosophers and scientists have tried to establish what knowledge is. Many suggestions have been made which have gradually brought us closer to something that is both intuitively correct and applicable in a management context. This story is told by Professor and Research Director at Learning Lab Denmark, Hans Siggaard Jensen, and he tells it really well. Steen Hildebrandt's interesting definition and discussion of knowledge is the starting point of the book. The discussion holds that knowledge will often be related to processes which basically cannot be managed in the traditional sense or lose their efficiency when managed too tightly. Just think of the part of the company's knowledge which is tacit knowledge and which only exists in the heads of key employees and experts of various kinds. Here formalisation and tight management is probably of no use.

Technology not enough

Therefore, the authors begin the book by clearing up a typical misunderstanding within the field – that knowledge is manageable by way of information technology alone; because it is not.

Fortunately, the authors do not succumb to the temptation of saying that information technology, explicitation and measurements do not play any part at all like it has been concluded by some people. But knowledge management has to take place in the form of pragmatic interaction using many different means.

This is a point of departure which I think is comprehensible seen from a management point of view. Not a recipe, but a concrete starting point which suggests possible means and how these should be applied. Therefore, I hope that a lot of managers will read this book. The authors of the book make their own definition of knowledge management in one of the chapters of the book and see it as being composed of two perspectives which in practice should be combined into knowledge management.

Further, the book gives us some interesting and relevant examples of how to implement knowledge management in practice. Cases from Danish organisations such as Ericsson Telebit (software producer), Maxon Telecom A/S (manufacturing business), Lundbeck (pharmaceutical company), Crisplant (company developing system solutions for material handling), PostDanmark (the Danish Postal Service), Forsyningsvirksomhederne Aalborg

(utility company), Konkurrencestyrelsen (the Danish Competition Agency – an agency under the Danish Ministry of Trade and Industry), Andersen Management International (management consultant) and DIEU (management training course provider) help illustrate and exemplify ‘real-life’ knowledge management. All cases are interesting to read and heighten the quality of the book, but I cannot stop myself from emphasizing Lotte Kragh and Camilla de Wit’s chapter on ‘The Management of Knowledge Employees – a Question of Commitment’ which contains interesting cases as well as a highly relevant discussion of one of the primary themes related to knowledge management.

The Intellectual Capital Statement

Naturally – and fortunately – the authors also devote themselves to their favourite concept, the intellectual capital statement, in two excellent chapters. The intellectual capital statement is here summed up as a field and contextualised as one of the primary means to a practical approach to knowledge management. Thereby, the relationship of strategic challenges, efforts and indicators over the intellectual capital statement to the company’s competence development is created.

All things considered, this is a very good book. It is well-written in a good language, pragmatic and comprehensible. And maybe surprisingly, it is a coherent book in spite of the fact that it is a book written by many different writers. The dominant impression is that it is an interesting, well-written, relevant and very applicable book to people with an interest in knowledge and knowledge management.

On the theoretical and practical side, the book is very inspiring to the reader, and there is much good advice for the practitioner who would like to succeed in implementing knowledge management in his own organisation.

Per Nikolaj Bukh, Karina Skovvang Christensen & Jan Mouritsen: ‘Videnledelse – et praksisfelt under etablering’. 275 pages, price: DKK 575.00