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Knowledge Management in Social Work: The Interplay of Knowledge Sharing Platforms

Abstract

This article discusses the research on a social service organisation practising knowledge management in Hong Kong. Discussion on different knowledge sharing activities conducted on different platforms and their interplay illustrates that a good balance between the two knowledge management approaches can better achieve the objectives in this newly developed management.

Keywords: Knowledge management, community of practice, social service organisation, social work and IT, Hong Kong

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Knowledge management can generally be defined as the management of creation, acquisition, analysis, maintenance and dissemination of knowledge in an organisation in order to achieve its goals (Karl, 2004). Over the last decade, social service organisations have started practising this emerging management area (Pawson *et al*., 2003; Rubenstein-Montano *et al*., 2001; Schoech *et al*., 2001). However, respective conceptual discussions, such as the different types of social work knowledge to be managed and how they can be managed, have not received much attention until recent years (Gould 2003; Leung, 2007). In an earlier article, the author argued that the dominant discussions related to knowledge management are not well adapted to social work (Leung, 2007). A careful examination of exactly how the mainstream perspectives on and strategies of knowledge management may or may not be applied to social service organisations needs to be conducted, before this newly developed area of management can really be of benefit to the profession.

There are two mainstream perspectives in knowledge management: technical and people-oriented. The technical perspective emphasizes capturing, processing, and disseminating an organisation's knowledge through the effective management of its databases and the codification of people's tacit knowledge (Holtshouse, 1998; Teece, 1998). Information and communication technologies play an essential role in fulfilling these objectives. On the other hand, the primary goal of the people-oriented perspective is to promote people-to-people (and mainly face-to-face) knowledge sharing, usually through the development of a Community of Practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998). Knowledge sharing is viewed as a social process and is influenced greatly by the socio-cultural factors of an organisation, which determine the success or failure of any knowledge management efforts (von Krogh, 1998; Yang, 2004). The people-

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oriented perspective also utilises technologies, but as facilitative mechanisms which enable or enhance the social processes.

Existing social work literature also reflects these two perspectives on knowledge. The evidence-based school perceives knowledge as a substantive 'product' obtained from logical, scientific, reductionist research (Reid, 2002; Rosen, 2003). This view is similar to the technical perspective of knowledge management, that knowledge, once created, exists *per se,* and is independent of the carrier. The other school focuses on social workers' reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and 'know-how' in terms of knowledge application, instead of merely their 'know-what'. It places a higher value on the "process knowledge" of sound reasoning and judgment (Klein & Bloom, 1995; Sheppard *et al*., 2000).

These two epistemological views of knowledge within social work have posed a conceptual challenge for the profession's discussion of knowledge management. By aligning the above-mentioned perspectives, the author suggests a conceptual framework for discussing knowledge management in social work (Leung, 2007:195). This framework is then used to analyse a social service organisation (hereafter referred to as the "Agency"), that practises knowledge management in Hong Kong. While the research findings on the types and processes of knowledge sharing are discussed in another article by the author (Leung, 2009b), this paper focuses on the interplay of different knowledge sharing platforms, and illustrates that a good balance between technical and people-oriented knowledge management approaches can better achieve the objectives associated with this newly developed area of social services management.[1]

[1] This article therefore presents only part of the research findings. Readers interested in the whole study,

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The Agency

The Agency studied was established in the 1930s in Hong Kong. It is dedicated to promoting the well-being and holistic development of young people. Under its mission "Nurture the Young, Create the Future", the agency provides psychosocial support and life skills training to young people in Hong Kong. It also takes part in advocating a child-friendly community. School counselling, services for youth-at-risk and integrated social services for the young people are the major types of services provided. At the time of the study in 2006, it was operating 70 service units and employed over 700 full-time staff, approximately half of whom were professional social workers.

The Agency's knowledge management practice was initiated by its senior management in 2002 and motivated by two considerations. The first was 'generation replacement': many senior practitioners were on the verge of retirement, which would result in a substantial loss of organisational knowledge. The second consideration was knowledge creation and reuse. Given the dramatic social changes in Hong Kong society in previous years, such as the influx of new, young immigrants from Mainland China after 1997, new knowledge and skills such as understanding of the Mainland culture/sub-culture were required. Prior to 2002, the organisation's knowledge, if recorded, was mainly stored in paper-based formats, which made the circulation of it inconvenient and limited. It was hoped that, through effective knowledge management practices and with the aid of technologies, the Agency could both retain

which is based on the author's PhD thesis (Author citation, 2009a), can download it from http://www.zenozone.idv.hk/phd/.

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its intellectual assets and promote knowledge creation by cultivating a culture of sharing. Particularly, old timer social workers were encouraged to share their practice wisdom to new comers before they left, and colleagues with special expertise (e.g. working with children suffering from Asperger syndrome) could wider spread what they knew.

This initiative was implemented under the office of one of the Assistant Directors, and operated by the Knowledge Development Officer and the Training and Development Officer. The former held responsibility for the development and promotion of technology-based knowledge-sharing activities, the latter for all other face-to-face knowledge sharing activities. In knowledge management literature, these two posts are usually referred to as the Chief Knowledge Officer and Chief Learning Officer respectively.

In 2004, a web-based knowledge management system (KMS) built on the Microsoft® SharePoint Portal Server 2003 was developed for the Agency's purposes. The system integrated the Agency's email system, contact management and event management, as well as its workflow, content and document management. In this system, knowledge artifacts are stored both in centralized repositories and in distributed ones managed by individual service units, CoPs, project teams and individual staff members. Access to the distributed knowledge repositories is regulated by their respective owners. In 2005, over 500 sub-sites were created within the KMS, and more than 5,500 knowledge artifacts were archived. Common examples of such artifacts are manuals, meeting minutes, service reports and presentation handouts. At the same time, the Training and Development Officer arranged approximately 200 face-to-face knowledge-sharing activities in that year. Examples of

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these were staff conferences, training courses, job-induction programmes and practice groups.

The following sections elaborate how this study was conducted and discuss the interplay among these different knowledge sharing activities and platforms.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative interpretative case study design. The context-rich research method is particularly effective in gaining insight into this research area of concern. During the period from September 2005 to May 2006, data were acquired from three sources - archival records of the KMS, interviews with Agency staff and direct observation of selected knowledge sharing activities. Through bi-weekly logins to the KMS, the author recorded all online discussions and every new knowledge artifact uploaded to the KMS. During the nine-month period, 278 discussion messages were posted and 303 knowledge artifacts were uploaded.

Seventeen interviews were also conducted. These included interviews with fifteen social workers, the Knowledge Development Officer and the Training and Development Officer. The two named officers were interviewed because of their special roles and functions related to the Agency's knowledge management initiative, while the fifteen social workers were randomly drawn from service units. Table 1 shows some background information relating to the interviewed social workers. These interviews provided an in-depth understanding of the views of both the frontline practitioners and the administrators. All interviews were transcribed for analysis.

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Social Worker	Sex	SW Qualification	Yr. of service	Major Serving Target
A	M	Graduate	5	youth in general
B	M	Graduate	3	high school students
C	M	Graduate	5	youth in general
D	F	Post-graduate	3	children with special needs
E	F	Post-graduate	10	children in general
F	F	Sub-degree	3	youth in general
G	F	Sub-degree	10	children in general
H	F	Sub-degree	10	street gangs
I	M	Sub-degree	8	youth in general
J	F	Sub-degree	9	youth in general
K	M	Sub-degree	>20 yr	youth with special needs
L	F	Graduate	26 yr	children & parents
M	F	Sub-degree	35 yr	street gangs
N	M	Sub-degree	>20 yr	youth in general
O	M	Sub-degree	11 yr	youth in general

Table 1: Background information on interviewed social workers

Two direct field observations were also carried out and these provided an additional understanding of the organisation's dialectic knowledge-sharing and generating processes. The first observation was a training workshop and the second a sharing session amongst social workers practising a common therapeutic approach. The field notes were subsequently analysed.

All three types of data were analysed using QSR N6 (the updated version is NVivo 9), a software package for qualitative content analysis. Detailed discussions of the analysis, such as the units of analysis, coding procedures, issues of reliability and validity and ethical concern, etc. can be accessed by referring to the methodology chapter of the author's report mentioned above.

Results

Knowledge sharing using the KMS

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The KMS is effective in facilitating the sharing of 'product' knowledge. The three main functions of the system have been identified as follows - disseminating Agency information,[2] archiving and distributing the organisation's knowledge artifacts and facilitating online discussion.

As the organisation's email system is integrated into the KMS, most people consider it to be an important channel by which to obtain updated Agency information. All the interviewees said that they would login and check their emails daily or at least once every few days. The email system was also used for the daily transfer of electronic files.

Out of the 303 new artifacts uploaded onto the KMS during the data collection period, the majority (87%) were text-based documents, either in MS Word or Adobe Portable Document Format (pdf) formats. A further eight percent were presentation files (e.g. MS PowerPoint files). Three percent were spreadsheets containing Agency inventory or material lists for reference. The remaining two percent were audio-visual files that could be used in service processes.

During the interviews, interviewees expressed their views on sharing and using these knowledge artifacts. Nine thought that the KMS had helped to keep them informed about the most recent developments in the Agency, although three expressed having difficulties in terms of document retrieval. Seven interviewees appreciated the sharing of artifacts such as document templates, assessment tools or presentation files, as they could reuse such procedural knowledge directly and easily. For those who experienced difficulty in retrieving useful documents, their main problem was in obtaining the most relevant materials out of numerous search results. This indicated

[2] 'Actionable information in context' is also regarded as one important type of an organisation's knowledge in the discussion of knowledge management (KM Forum Archives, 1996).

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that further improvement in document indexing was required, so that more accurate searches could be facilitated.

Occasionally, the retrieval of knowledge artifacts became a starting point for further knowledge sharing. Four interviewees said that when they wanted further details about the subject matter discussed in a downloaded artifact, they would call the recorded sharer for more information. In other words, artifact sharing would sometimes become the first move towards further knowledge sharing in the organisation.

The third major function of the KMS was the provision of a platform for online discussion amongst Agency staff. Everyone was free to join. The 278 messages counted within the data collection period were posted by 76 discussants, or an average of 3.7 messages per discussant. Bearing in mind the total number of employees in the whole organisation (>700), it can be said that the level of participation in the discussion forum was not very high.

Most of the topics discussed on the forum were, in fact, information-seeking and -giving, such as announcements about the staff association, or someone requesting information as to the availability of community resources, with other discussants replying. One discussant had initiated a topic to discuss child welfare policy but received no reply. Further investigation of discussants' participating patterns showed that thirty-five (46%) of them had posted only once, thirty-four (45%) had posted two to six messages and the remaining seven (9%) more than ten. Moreover, most discussants spent only a short period of time on a particular topic. Whether or not it had been responded to, the topic was often left unattended and closed in less than a week. It is thus concluded from these observations that the

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discussion forum on the KMS was not a popular virtual meeting place in terms of disseminating knowledge.

Face-to-face knowledge sharing activities

Face-to-face knowledge sharing was a much more important activity in the Agency's passing on of 'process' knowledge. Four kinds of knowledge sharing activities were identified: supervision, unit-based, network-based and organisation-wide. Among these, network-based sharing was considered an especially important knowledge management strategy adopted by the Agency and is further discussed in the section on the concept of CoP, below.

Supervision has a long history in social work practice and is also a well-established mechanism within the Agency. Supervision is conventionally perceived to fulfil two major functions: an administrative function and an educational and supportive function (Eisikovits & Guttman, 1983; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Tsui, 2005). Knowledge sharing (and the supervisee's learning) is supposed to occur across both functional areas. The administrative functions of supervision were well perceived, as was reflected in the answers of ten interviewees. However, these interviewees had diverse views on the educational and supportive function fulfilled by supervision. Four interviewees considered it to be inadequate, although others had a more neutral attitude.

> Worker I:
>
> I regard it (supervision) merely as an administrative arrangement ... we only talk about what I've achieved; are the tasks assigned accomplished? ... he's not interested in my frontline service, but his administrative concerns only.
>
> Worker J:

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> (supervision is) not enough ... we're too busy, and there are many (administrative) tasks to take care of during the (supervision) session.

From the interviews, it would seem that supervision, as a conventional sharing and learning activity for social workers, is not performing as well, in this case at least, as it is assumed to be. As Workers I and J revealed, one plausible reason for this is that it is a consequence of the welfare policy changes that took place during the preceding decade in Hong Kong. An ever-increasing work burden and heightened accountability concerns have directed most of the social workers' attention to administrative issues.

Unit-based sharing activities took place within the service units. Common examples were team meetings and retreats, peer group consultations and emergency meetings on crisis handling. Ten of the interviewees welcomed these sharing activities, thinking that fellow practitioners had a common language and mutual understanding of their daily situations, and that this would make their sharing 'down to earth'.

> Worker B:
>
> ... they know what you come across, they have handled the cases you have ... advise you how to talk to that kind of student ... describing every detail of the 'soft' skills ...

In addition, rapport and emotional support among participants was often observed and appreciated in these sharing sessions.

The third type of face-to-face knowledge sharing was network-based sharing activities (discussed under CoP in the next section). The term 'network' indicates that the participants came from different service units, united around specific working relationships. Two types of such networks were found. An *administrative network*

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referred to a group of service units located in the same geographical region. They had common knowledge needs due to the similar community profiles they were facing. The second type was a *functional network* which mostly referred to special project teams and practice groups established within the Agency. Staff members from different service units joined together to render or pilot specific kinds of services (e.g. dealing with children with learning disorders, developing special career guidance projects). Training, work meetings, review sessions, etc. were held and knowledge was generated and shared. The two field observations conducted for this study focused on sharing activities of these kinds.

Interviewees appreciated network-based sharing a great deal. Four treasured the exposure to the wider knowledge base from which colleagues' expertise was drawn (e.g. Worker G). Three appreciated the processes of enacting learning and consolidating experiences through this kind of sharing (e.g. Worker B).

> Worker G:
>
> … that sharing (on school crisis handling) is extremely useful, not just the principles, but her own real-life experience ... she told us all the details... most important of all, she's serving in the same district as I am, I know the community and can visualize what it would be like (if I had to face the scenario).
>
> Worker B:
>
> It is important to have practice after training, and talk afterwards ... we'll observe how colleagues conduct the (adventure-based) exercise ... evaluate our performance in meetings, plan for the next sessions ... sharing on practice experience helps a lot also.

The fourth type of face-to-face sharing, organisation-wide knowledge sharing, extended further, beyond networks. Very often, it took the form of activities for

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promoting professional development, organized by the Training and Development Officer. Interviewees generally regarded these activities as an opportunity to be informed about the latest developments and training concerns of the Agency as a whole. However, due to the massive group sizes and wide range of people involved (from all ranks and files), the topics chosen could not meet everyone's needs and concerns.

CoP as a sharing platform

Knowledge sharing in a community of practice (CoP), alternatively expressed as network-based sharing, as discussed above, is one of the most important knowledge management strategies adopted by the Agency. The concept of CoP, first coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), is often regarded as playing a significant role in knowledge creation and proliferation, and as a strategy has received the most attention in the field of people-oriented knowledge management (Allatta, 2003; Ardichvili *et al*., 2003; Smith & McKeen, 2003; Wenger *et al*., 2002).

In the Agency, CoPs were established through a top-down or a bottom-up process. In the top-down approach, the management chose service areas for strategic development and formed project teams to implement this development. The assigned teams were then responsible for the design of the service, its delivery and for practitioners' learning in their respective areas.

By contrast, the bottom-up creation of CoPs was usually initiated by groups of social workers having common practice concerns. These joined together and alerted the management to their needs. Starting with some small-scale training, the groups would practice what they had learnt and then share the experience. Further requests

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for training support would often be made at this point. At some stage, when these needs were recognised and endorsed by the top management, practice communities would be formed for specific areas of concern and people would then join these communities voluntarily and individually.

The follow-on stages of development for both types of CoP were similar. After the initial training and/or self-learning activities, CoP members continued practicing what they had learnt. Post-practice reviews, or "after-action reviews" (Baird *et al*., 2000), were arranged, in which members met to review their experiences, evaluate their successes or failures recognize the lessons learnt and identify areas for improvement. The experiences and learning would also be recorded in meeting minutes or practice notes. The knowledge artifacts thus produced would then be sent back to the Community members to facilitate further practice, review and learning.

In its third stage, the CoP would expand and share its knowledge and experience with other people in the organisation. Project teams might arrange some large-scale sharing sessions for everyone working in the organisation. Individual members of the CoP, on the other hand, would usually adopt a decentralized or distributed approach. They would share the knowledge gained in their respective service units, motivating and inviting interested colleagues to join the practice and the Community. These newly joined practitioners would then be included in the next round of after-action reviews. By these means, CoPs expanded and their knowledge proliferated through different sharing means and channels. Occasionally, the Agency would carry out further formal knowledge consolidation exercises such as conference presentations and/or manual publications, capturing and externalizing their knowledge into the wider professional community.

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Discussion

Roles of the KMS

One objective of the KMS was to turn the Agency into a paperless organisation. The email system, the organisation calendar and the announcement board were embedded in the system. Every member of staff had therefore developed the habit of using the system as an *information channel*. The dissemination of organisational information had been highly integrated with the Agency's daily operations through the KMS.

In addition to being an information channel, the KMS was also perceived to be important as a *knowledge archive*. As described above, most interviewees thought that the stored artifacts were useful in supporting their daily practices, although the extent to which this was true might be different for different people. The indexed and searchable databases made the retrieval of knowledge artifacts systematic and reliable.

On the other hand, two other identifiable roles of the KMS were not widely recognized among Agency staff - those of a *knowledge gateway* and a *virtual meeting place*. As a knowledge gateway, the KMS can direct system users to further knowledge sources. Alavi and Leidner (1999) term this the "yellow pages" function. The Agency's KMS can fulfil this function in three ways. The first and simplest way is by leading users to other online knowledge sources through hyperlinks. The second way is through the "Who's who" section, a correspondence list that shows all resource persons in the organisation and their respective expertise. Users can thereby contact the target colleague and talk to that person. The third way is through tracing the source of a shared artifact, talking to the knowledge owner and gaining further

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knowledge in the respective area, which is usually a tacit and more complex process. However, only two interviewees mentioned these methods as a way of getting more from the system.

The KMS can also be developed as a virtual meeting place. CoP members, for example, can 'meet' and discuss a topic within the discussion forum, or some preparation work can be arranged before an actual face-to-face meeting is held. Absentees can also retrieve information or be informed about the decisions made. This usage could particularly benefit project teams consisting of members of service units from different geographical regions. Again, only one or two interviewees recognised this possible use of the KMS for better sharing.

The recommendation section below further discusses how the two roles of the KMS could be better promoted.

Strengths and potential drawbacks of CoPs

As discussed above, CoPs developed within the Agency have been effective in facilitating knowledge sharing. They have played an important role in integrating knowledge management into the organisation's work processes. In particular, they were effective in facilitating the sharing of knowledge-as-process (Leung, 2007), which denotes knowledge that is socially constructed or re-created among the CoPs' members when they meet and share. Improvised practice skills and valuing processes in social work intervention are some examples of knowledge that cannot easily be shared through an electronic platform. Apart from the face-to-face sessions, CoPs also provide "short cuts" in terms of problem solving for members, as they know clearly who and how to ask. Their common practice context and expertise in respective

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knowledge areas facilitates their peers to comprehend problems and provide solutions or suggestions efficiently.

CoP members do not just work on specific problems. Through the after-action reviews in particular, they analyse commonalities and variations of problems that they come across, locate the patterns, figure out the reasons behind the problems and set standards for future practices. This can lead to "double loop learning" in an organisation (Argyris & Schön, 1996). These capacities and functions thus make CoPs the best forums for spreading best practice across an organisation (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). The Training and Development Officer at the Agency in this study also emphasized this as a very important expectation with regard to the different knowledge networks established in the Agency.

Nevertheless, things can also go wrong in a CoP. In the Agency, the "amnesia" of CoPs was observed. The Knowledge Development Officer admitted that some CoPs had not kept good records of their activities. This tends to impede the accessibility of relevant knowledge to other members and, in turn, to learning within the organisation as a whole. Another drawback is "imperialism", a term used by Wenger *et al.* (2002) to describe the problems that may occur when a CoP grows and attains status (through knowledge creation or product inventions, for example) in an organisation. Another CoP or individual may then experience the problem of "marginality". One interviewee complained that organisational support was inadequate for the practice group she had joined, as it was not one of the service areas chosen for strategic development. Another interviewee reported having difficulty in joining a different CoP, as the members had created too much technical jargon,

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specialised work methods and customised conventions - a "sticky" environment that makes others' peripheral participation difficult.

Recommendations

The above discussion hints that good interplay between the electronic KMS and people-based CoPs will help extend the strengths of one platform and make up for the inadequacy of the other. Through systematic archiving, and the efficient and managed dissemination of knowledge artifacts generated in CoPs, the KMS can help overcome the "amnesia" problem as well as facilitate the appropriate legitimate peripheral participation of non-members. On the other hand, the direct dialogical contacts emphasized in CoP development help create and transfer complex knowledge that cannot be handled easily by the KMS. Furthermore, the interpersonal relationships established in these contacts can also promote people's trust, and motivate them to make better use of the electronic platform.

The above-mentioned interplay was in fact observed in one of the Agency CoPs which worked on a specific therapeutic model. As reported by the Knowledge Development Officer, face-to-face sessions were the dominant sharing platform during the first stage in the development of this practice group, which was similar to what the other CoPs had done. In the next stage, however, the practice group chose to put its recorded artifacts of practice wisdom (i.e. minutes, practice notes, etc., as mentioned in the previous section) onto the KMS and made them available to every member of the Agency. This CoP thus helped to create more a more efficient method of sharing and updating the work of the practice group with a larger audience, as well as managing to document and archive their specific knowledge systematically. The

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group had also created an expert list, in which the pioneer CoP members and their expertise were shown, serving as a guide for any new members if they wanted to learn more from existing ones. The Knowledge Development Officer added that colleagues did make use of this expert list, as they generally knew each other well in the Agency. In the third stage, members of this CoP had their experiences further consolidated. More knowledge artifacts were produced and disseminated, while the therapeutic model was also formally adopted as one of the intervention approaches in some service units (in other words the practice was embedded into organisational structures and systems). In this stage, the KMS continued to play its role in supporting this consolidation and the proliferation of this knowledge.

To enhance further interplay between the platforms, the author has the following suggestions.

Firstly, the KMS' roles as a knowledge gateway and online meeting place should be promoted. To do this, the dynamicity of the KMS should be emphasized and maintained. People are more willing to participate in a website that is vibrant, updated and interactive: this gives participants a sense that they are relating to other people through the website, rather than just getting some electronic materials from a static website. "Momentum" is an essence to be maintained and developed in the online community (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). The Knowledge Development Officer should further promote different functions of the system, in order to make people feel that they are meeting other people, instead of dealing with a machine or mere online documents.

The characteristics of online discussion should also be taken into consideration. The current discussion forum is more suitable for time-bound but non-urgent

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dissemination of information to groups of people within the organisation, with only a brief discussion being expected. If the Knowledge Development Officer wanted to extend and promote online discussion, further content management and technical measures would be needed. Content management measures might include better indexing of documents and folders, categorization of discussion topics, designation of facilitators, rating of sharing, etc. With regard to technical measures, data and text mining of the message archives (Tan, 1999) could be considered so that there is a facility to reuse knowledge generated in these discussions.

While the Knowledge Development Officer could potentially exert the above centralised measures to improve the KMS' performance, particularly when the members of the organisation have further developed some common understanding or conventions of how to work with the system, another direction to take could be to introduce some decentralised or personalized strategies in the customization of the KMS. Web 2.0 applications, rapidly developed in the past few years, can play an important role here (Levy, 2009). A wiki, for example, is a common and effective tool for capturing and building up a knowledge base of a certain subject matter by inviting contributions from respective groups or communities of people. Wiki web parts that can be plugged into the SharePoint 2007 version and after are freely available (e.g. KWizCom, DataSprings, SharePointBoost). Tagging is another web 2.0 tool that can be adopted. A tag is often a piece of metadata that system users add to describe the key characteristics of another file (document, photo, video, etc.), posted by oneself or another user. Tagging can thus help users define their personalized way of indexing the organisational knowledge they come across. Furthermore, a collection of user-defined and agreed-upon tags adds up to what is called "folksonomy" (Levy,

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2009:125). Tagging is thus another strategy for promoting and inviting contributions to help build an organisational knowledge base.

On the other hand, CoPs should be promoted in both real and virtual spaces. Good interplay between knowledge platforms can also facilitate better legitimate peripheral participation for a CoP. As discussed above, better use of the KMS for documenting the course of CoP development could help newcomers obtain enough background and context about how the CoP is running to maximise their learning and involvement in the relevant area. Reading the knowledge artifacts of the CoP is an easy and convenient method of peripheral participation for newcomers and it helps them assess their readiness and motivation for joining the community. An 'open-door' policy allowing people to participate in real face-to-face sharing should definitely be encouraged and maintained. As the Knowledge Development Officer suggested, CoP leaders should promote the vision that, for long-term development and continuous knowledge creation, CoPs should be prepared to extend beyond their founding membership.

The third suggestion for enhancing the interplay between these two knowledge sharing platforms is to strengthen the collaboration on "knowledge harvesting" (Christie & Sandelands, 2000) between the Knowledge Development Officer and the Training and Development Officer. Practitioners participating in face-to-face sharing sessions often improvise and bring in knowledge spontaneously. This knowledge is often beneficial to other organisational members. A challenge for management here is to make such good sharing extend beyond the sessions and become accessible to others. Knowledge harvesting, evolved from expert systems work, ethnography and other related fields, aims at capturing this expert knowledge on the spot. Both the

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Training and Development Officer and the Knowledge Development Officer in the Agency discussed understood their roles and responsibilities in this respect and agreed on the need for a better-coordinated effort in terms of knowledge harvesting.[3]

It should also be emphasized that commitment and continuous support from senior management is a must in order to make these suggestions workable and the improvements achievable. Management involvement in continuously steering the change effort, sustaining staff morale, cultivating the sharing culture, etc. are all considered essential conditions for success in knowledge management. Last but not the least, the success of a KMS should not be measured only by the level of usage or other system metrics; rather, it should be evaluated according to the impact it has on the quality of services received by clients as a result of knowledge sharing.

Conclusion

Knowledge management is a new management area in social services. From the author's own experiences, many social service administrators have misunderstood this concept, regarding it as a fashionable replacement for the terms 'computer systems' or 'information technology', and are of the belief that to practice knowledge management is nothing more than building the relevant system and asking people to use it. Obviously knowledge management is more than just a computer system, and organisations have to take more than technical care to make a KMS work, and to work well with other knowledge sharing platforms.

[3] Detailed steps with regard to knowledge harvesting for human services can be found in the online specialist library on knowledge management of the National Health Service, United Kingdom. (http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/harvesting_toolkit.asp).

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Although the single-case design of this study may sometimes be criticized for its limited generalizability, it has extended the previous discussions of knowledge management in social work that have usually focused on the technical, human-machine interface, or on administrative concerns (Rubenstein-Montano *et al*., 2001; Schoech *et al*., 2001; Stauss *et al*. 2009). This study shows that these concerns are in fact interrelated, since the knowledge to be managed within an organisation has, in practice, many facets. While some kinds of knowledge (or parts of knowledge) can be captured as artifacts, and effectively stored and disseminated by a computer system, other kinds/parts can only be adequately shared and learned through people-to-people interaction. Both technical and people-based methods of knowledge sharing should therefore have their own roles and positions within knowledge management practice. Social service administrators should understand the relationships involved in this and should facilitate good interplay among the various sharing platforms so as to achieve the desired outcomes.

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Manuscript ISW-10-0120.R2: Responses to Reviewers Comments

#	Comments of Reviewer 1	Response / Action Taken
1.	p. 2: The first paragraph of the introduction needs some revision. It does not seem to flow very logically. First the author starts out with a sentence about knowledge management in social service organizations (which seemed vague because of the word 'experimented with'), then s/he argues that conceptual discussion of the term has not received much attention. This part is unclear. What does the author mean by 'conceptual discussion'? Please start with a brief discussion about what knowledge management is and what it entails. How has knowledge management been used/applied in social services? All this should be the first paragraph of the introduction.	▪ Revise accordingly (p.2, line 5-22)
2.	p. 3, line 5-7: Please change 'sees' to 'perceives'.	▪ Revise accordingly (p.3, line 12)
3.	Also, what do you mean by 'evidence-based school'? What is 'the other school' called? The author suggests a 'conceptual framework for discussing knowledge management in social work'. So what is this framework called?	▪ The other school can be characterized by Schön's concept of "reflective practitioner"; respective idea added accordingly. (p.3, line 21) ▪ I haven't given a specific name for the framework. The full reference is put back now (as hopefully the editor will recommend the publication of this article) (p.3, line 38)
4.	p. 4: Where was the 'Agency studied' established? Hong Kong? For whom does the 'agency' serve? Young people with behavioral problems? Young people with mental health problems? Runaway youth? Please provide a little more information and what kinds of services it provides.	▪ Yes, the Agency is located in Hong Kong. Examples of types of services provided are added too. (p.4, line 12)
5.	The knowledge management initiative was introduced in 2002. By who--the author? Who were the relevant stakeholders?	▪ The Agency's senior management initiated the KM practice. Revise accordingly (p.4 line 33-36)
6.	What knowledge and skills were required? (Line 38)	▪ Example added (p.4, line 47-50)
7.	"...and promote knowledge creation by cultivate a culture of sharing" is vague. What kind of knowledge? Sharing with whom?	▪ Examples added (p.5, line 7-15)
8.	Can you provide more info on Knowledge Development and the Training and Development Officer"? For instance, what branch is this under?	▪ The two officers are under one of the Assistant Directors. Information provided accordingly (p.5, line 17-19)
9.	p. 5: 'artefact' (Line 19) should be 'artifact'	▪ Revise accordingly (various pages)
10.	There needs to be a sentence or a brief paragraph that logically links the last sentence and the Methodology section (transitional sentence is needed). It feels fragmented and disjointed.	▪ A transitional sentence is added (p.6, line 10-12)

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11.	P. 5: Can you provide a brief rationale as to why you adopted a qualitative interpretative case study design?	▪ Revise accordingly (p.6, line 19-24)
12.	I think you need to briefly include the limitations of your research study in the conclusion section.	▪ Revised accordingly (p.23, line 5-7)

#	**Comments of Reviewer 2**	**Response / Action Taken**
1.	Page 18, line 57, …better categorization…: I note your response and see your additional discussion regarding tagging and folksonomy. However, I still disagree with your conjecture regarding categorization, but it is perfectly fine to disagree. I do note, though, that you did not offer up any empirical studies to support your view, i.e., "these old ways of filing working for us." The old ways of filing have not worked hence the whole impetus behind knowledge management efforts via Sharepoint, wikis, etc. Nevertheless, your additional discussion addresses my concerns.	▪ Thank you
2.	Regarding the lack of questions suggestive of areas for additional analysis and future research, I note your response. I'll defer to the Editor as to whether articles submitted to this journal are such that the author and/or readers might be intrigued by the findings such that additional questions are worth pursuing.	▪ As mentioned, interesting readers are suggested to refer to my full thesis