

**Title:** Knowledge Management in on-line distance education

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**Conference Theme:** either e-learning or distributed communities of practice.

## *Knowledge Management in on-line distance education*

### **Abstract**

Most organisations realise that “knowledge” is a strategic resource that gives them sustainable competitive advantage and helps them achieve their long-term organisational goals. In the Post Capitalist Society, Drucker (1993) emphasized that knowledge is the basic economic resource in our society. The realisation that knowledge is the key driver behind organisational success comes from the need to respond to markets that are becoming global and increasingly competitive, stakeholders that are more sophisticated and demanding, and an ever-increasing rate of technological change. It is knowledge that helps organisations deal with these challenges effectively.

With the realization that knowledge is their core competency, organisations are now attempting to manage knowledge in a more systematic and effective way using the latest advances in computer and information technologies. Knowledge management techniques and tools, a collective of processes or activities that helps organisations harness knowledge, have been used by organisations to encourage the creation and sharing of knowledge. It thus results in the improvement of productivity, innovation, competitiveness, as well as the relationship among people in those organisations.

Education in today’s environment is subject to the same pressures of the marketplace. According to Brown and Duguid (Brown and Duguid, 2000), there are profound changes in competition that have pushed universities and higher education institutions to think like business. The educational markets are becoming global as universities and higher education institutions are attempting to internationalise their curricula and offer high-quality program to students regardless of location. They are also facing higher competition for a share of student market, both local and international. Moreover, they have to adjust themselves and develop strategies to respond rapidly to the changes in technologies and increasing demands of stakeholders. Many of them have turned to a new paradigm that merges conventional distance education with computer technologies: ‘Online Distance Education’.

Although this mode of education is growing, there are some potential problems. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), knowledge is transformed from an individual to a collective dimension, and from the tacit to explicit form. It can be said that transforming tacit knowledge into explicitly communicable messages could be done by creating opportunities for people to engage in face-to-face group activities or other social activities. It is at social occasion like these that people are most likely talk and discuss, converting their tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

In Online Distance Education, the most serious obstacle is probably the constraints of time and space. Online Distance Education means there are less social opportunities for people to engage in face-to-face meeting and may also involve with some social, cultural or even language

differences. Because of time and space constraints, there is a loss of physical interaction and contextual clues between teacher and learner, and among the learners themselves. These problems result in a lack of trust, making people afraid to share their knowledge and collaborate with others in learning communities.

In the business context, many organisations apply knowledge management concepts, and computer technologies, to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, and solve their problems. Can we apply the concepts, techniques and tools from knowledge management to solve the problems of Online Distance Education?