

Book Reviews

Making Knowledge Visible

Orna, Elizabeth. *Making Knowledge Visible: Communicating Knowledge through Information products*. Gower, 2005.

The act of communicating knowledge, or stored experience, Orna asserts, is the act of making it visible, of creating information. Orna sets out to discuss, in a sometimes pragmatic book, the creation and dissemination of information products, which consist of any information and a container (a container is the medium of the message, e.g. speech, print, graphics, moving images, etc). She puts forth a firm rationale for why a book on information products is warranted – other similar books have ignored how information gets from one person to another in favour of focusing on how to best tag, categorise or index said information.

The central argument of *Making Knowledge Visible* is that we should recognize information products (referred to as IPs throughout) as essential elements of what an organization does. Therefore they should (1) become a major part of knowledge management (KM) initiatives, and (2) be properly resourced and (3) be included in an organisation's strategic objectives. If I consider those organizations at which I have worked, I believe that information products are created by many – and these range from a clinical topic summary, to an all-users email, to a press release. Two observations are: we do not normally refer to these things as 'information products', and these items receive differing amounts of scrutiny before dissemination. Orna focuses on information products that are obviously products, for example, the information sheet that comes with a packet of pills, the instruction for a lawnmower, a published work, as well as other deliberate, choreographed internal sources of knowledge. This clearly does not jive with her very inclusive definition and she needed to make it clear she was limiting her discussion to typical sources of information.

I found resonances in the section on information culture (Ch. 3) and its impact on information products. An over-emphasis on the role of IT and an undervaluing of information content and management are precursors to information product detriment, and this is something we have probably all observed.

A typo in the title of chapter four, 'The value that IPs add (*add* subtract)' adds more confusion to a chapter that is a little vague to begin with. At times, and this is evident here in chapter four, *Making Knowledge Visible* feels like a collection of quotations from Orna's colleagues; some are interesting and others add little. Perhaps because her scope is so general, concerning all types of information exchange in all organizations, the quotations can feel very

out of context. One such quotation, for example, compares asking a printer to create the design of a leaflet, to asking a drug company to cover all of a person's medical needs, without going to a doctor; this seems interesting enough, but it leaves me scratching my head. This book is clearly not a critique of the printing industry. Nor is the quotation worked into the meat of Orna's argument. This isn't the right showcase for it.

A section focusing on how IPs can subtract value is quite interesting: it explains how the murderer Ian Huntley, was hired as a caretaker because of an omission of previous violent crimes in his police records.

Some readers may find details about how to conduct an information audit (Chapter 9) helpful. 'Chapter 10: Making a start' is a fairly practical list of symptoms that should prompt remedial action, such as information products that "give trouble to a large proportion of users"; it is basically telling us to listen to the complaints about our IPs.

While it perhaps falls a bit short of its intended scope and breadth, *Making Knowledge Visible* is certainly quite skimmable and probably quite helpful to those who are new to knowledge and information management. If I could sum up this book in one sentence, it would be: all information products "should benefit from the combined application of three kinds of professional activity: information technology, information design, and information management" (p.105) – in ascending order of importance, right?

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