

---

## Preface

---

The central motivation for assembling the contributions in this *Handbook on the Knowledge Economy* derives from the observation that many in government and business seem to have taken up the challenge of putting in place whatever is needed for a knowledge-based economy or a knowledge-based organization but very few appear to be inclined to explain what knowledge is or how it works socially, organizationally or economically. While there are good reasons for this situation, not knowing what knowledge is or how it works in any detail is problematic for those who are charged with managing or facilitating it. Policymakers would not consider constructing monetary policy without the input of some detailed knowledge of economics. Managers would not implement an information system without detailed input from knowledgeable information systems experts. Similarly, good knowledge of knowledge should be seen as essential for knowledge management and knowledge-related policy.

When considering the work of knowledge managers and knowledge policymakers, any ignorance about knowledge, apart from being ironic, means that the analytical and conceptual frameworks being developed and applied by them to guide strategy, policy and tactics at macro- and micro-social and economic levels are in danger of being invalid and unreliable. If this is the case much of the effort to promote knowledge is at best incomplete and at worst counterproductive. This can hardly be considered a good situation.

In this light, it is interesting to note that very little is said in knowledge management or knowledge-related policy about some issues that would seem, even at face value, to be deeply connected to knowledge. Those issues include imagination, insight, creativity, curiosity and wisdom. These are all very powerful and necessary aspects of intellection that draw on and assist in creating knowledge. This handbook also demonstrates that an understanding of what knowledge entails raises other important (but less obvious to the casual observer) issues such as values, power, culture, communication, risk perceptions and ethics that are central to effective knowledge systems. It seems disappointing to us that so little is said in the dominant knowledge discourse about these issues. We do not want to dwell here on the absence in knowledge discourse of the topics listed above except to say this handbook demonstrates that it is important to bring them into the centre of knowledge debates and practices, and provides the conceptual and other tools for doing so.

What is encouraging is that much useful fundamental and applied research

David Rooney, Greg Hearn and Abraham Ninan – 9781845426842  
Downloaded from Elgar Online at 09/22/2019 06:37:44AM

via free access

has now been done on knowledge and related topics in ways that go beyond the limited scope of classical epistemology. This new research on knowledge has been done with the specific intention of assisting managers and policy specialists to better deal with knowledge. Organizational knowledge research, social epistemology and information economics are among the key contributors here. The problem for most practitioners with this body of research is that they are not in a position to keep up with it. This is particularly so because the research is published across a wide range of academic disciplines and interdisciplinary areas that are difficult to track without the kinds of bibliographic searching technologies that are mostly only available in university libraries. Practitioners need not feel too bad about this because it is also the case that some relevant research, such as that in consciousness studies and wisdom studies, is rarely looked at even by knowledge management and policy researchers.

This handbook has pulled together many leading researchers from a range of knowledge studies disciplines in one convenient volume. We have also asked contributors to make their chapters as accessible as possible without robbing their content of intellectual efficacy. Not all readers will find all chapters equally accessible. Readers should not be alarmed by this. Not all chapters are aimed at the same audience. Some are aimed more at policymakers, others more at business managers, while others are oriented towards professional researchers. The main reason we have done this is that the audience for knowledge research is rather wide, which is not surprising given that knowledge is integral to all aspects and levels of human endeavour. Another reason for it is that people working for knowledge need to have a broad knowledge of knowledge even if they are not specialists in more than one aspect of it. In the final analysis, knowledge economy, knowledge management and knowledge society leaders need to understand each other because all these 'sites' for the application of expertise in knowledge overlap considerably.

The recent enthusiasm for knowledge management and knowledge-based economies has led to much activity in business and government, and is commendable and exciting. Yet the speed at which the knowledge cause has been taken up, while impressive, raises some concerns. In this respect it is worth asking how much of that speed can be seen as undue haste resulting in a less considered set of methods for achieving objectives than is needed and deserved? If the knowledge cause has been taken up hastily it may be an explanation for why many of the frameworks that are now being applied to knowledge management and knowledge-related policy look more like recycled industrial and other frameworks that are simply being repurposed for knowledge-based economies. If speed is an issue it presents another explanation for why many of the people practising knowledge management and implementing knowledge-related policy do not have specific knowledge about knowledge.

As already suggested, the pace of change has been faster than it is possible for professionals to keep up with. The reality remains, though, that action needs to catch up with thinking, and this book can help with that.

The catch-up game is important because much rides on it. The enthusiasm for knowledge is going to remain for the foreseeable future and there is therefore every reason to practise knowledge policy and management better. This is particularly so because to take knowledge seriously is to see economy and society through a new lens, and this affords the ability to see new possibilities for positive action. We can for example set new objectives and reframe old ones. We can adopt new and refreshing methods of addressing previously neglected problems. Indeed, as you read the chapters in this book we hope it will be impressed upon you that we must be cognizant of the social nature of knowledge and of the need to be more humane in practising these new techniques. In the final analysis, knowledge is a profoundly human quality and is central to what makes us capable of being human and humane. We hope therefore that this volume will assist in the better understanding of what knowledge is about and how it can be used better for social and economic objectives.

David Rooney, Greg Hearn and Abraham Ninan  
Brisbane, November 2004

