

Designing Knowledge Ecosystems for Communities of Practice

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An interactive version of this document is
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Definining Communities of Practice

"Communities of Practice" is a term that refers to the ways in which people naturally work together. It acknowledges and celebrates the power of informal communities of peers, their creativity and resourcefulness in solving problems, and inventing better, easier ways to meet their commitments.

"[They] are peers in the execution of 'real work'. What holds them together is a common sense of purpose and a real need to know what each other knows." John Seely Brown, VP and Chief Scientist, Xerox Corp

"A community of practice is group of people who are informally bound to one another by exposure to a common class of problem." Brook Manville, Director of Knowledge Management at McKinsey & Co.

Why Should You Pay Attention to Your Communities of Practice?

Core competences don't reside
in the abstractions of management theories.

In the real world of organizations,
they reside and grow in communities of practice.

Communities of Practice and their networks can help you

- a) organize work in ways that makes people grow and be happy
- b) accelerate business cycles
- c) learn faster than the competition

Communities of Practice Deliver their Value Proposition by:

- Developing and spreading better practices faster
- Connecting "islands of knowledge" into self-organizing, knowledge sharing networks of professional communities
- Feeding and being fed by web-based repositories of both proven solutions and new approaches
- Fostering cross-functional and cross-divisional collaboration
- Increasing your members' ability to initiate and contribute to projects across organizational boundaries

Why Knowledge Management Is an Oxymoron?

Knowledge is

not a "thing" that can be "managed".

**It is a capacity of people and communities,
continuously generated and renewed in their conversation,
to meet new challenges and opportunities.**

People responsible for knowledge value creation can be inspired and supported, but they cannot be "managed" as people were managed in the industrial era, as mere extensions of the machinery.

Organizations obsessed with extracting and measuring knowledge, will not have much to measure unless they shift the focus of their knowledge initiatives to developing an open culture of communication and collaboration that is supportive to the sharing of innovative work and business practices.

What Is a Knowledge Ecosystem: through a "Bi-focal" Lens

Looked at through a bi-focal lense, a knowledge ecosystem is:

1. a network of conversations, face-to-face and electronic meetings, facilitated for results, richly hyperlinked with, feeding, and fed by
2. knowledge repositories of what, who, why, how, where, and when

Communities of practice co-evolve with their shared body of knowledge, and the protocols and tools for upgrading it. The dynamic force of this co-evolution is the network of conversations, in which critical perspectives, new needs and circumstances, and better solutions to meet them, are introduced.

The yin/yang diagram represents the duality of: a) relatively static knowledge bases and b) the dynamic conversations, and the hyperlinks that



What Is a Knowledge Ecosystem: through the "Triple Network" Lens

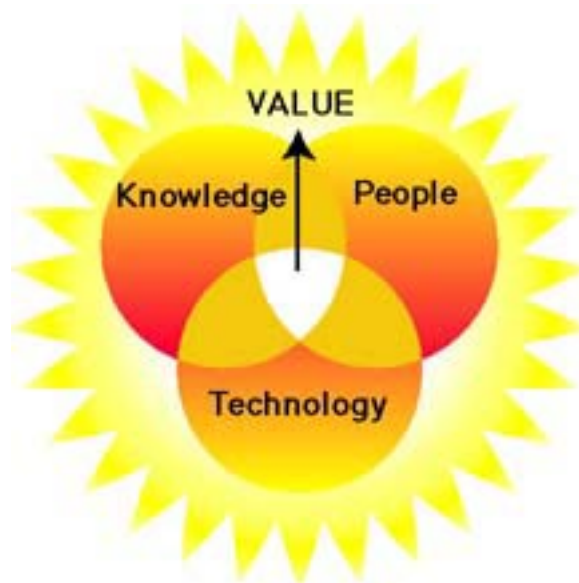
A knowledge ecosystem is a triple network:

a) a **People** network of productive conversations facilitated for continuously creating

b) a **Knowledge** network of ideas, information and inspiration, that cross-fertilize and feed on each other, supported by

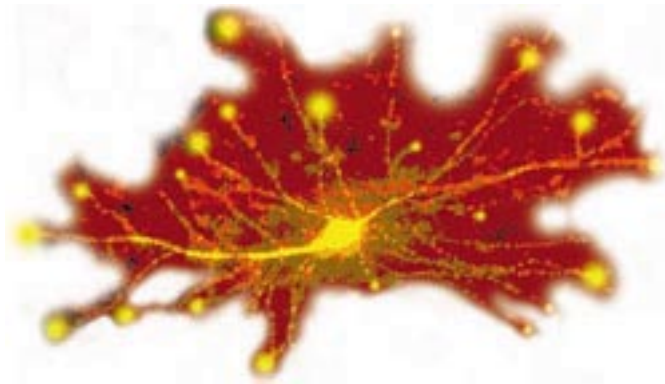
c) a **Technology** network of knowledge bases, communication links, action scripts, sense-making and negotiation tools,

that generates business and social **Value** through the **Action** of its members augmented by the intelligence of the whole ecosystem.



What Is a Knowledge Ecosystem: through the "CAS" Lens

A knowledge ecosystem is
a complex adaptive system (CAS) of people in communities
co-located in the same space, physical and/or virtual,
in which they cultivate relationships, tools, and practices
for creating, integrating, sharing, and using knowledge.

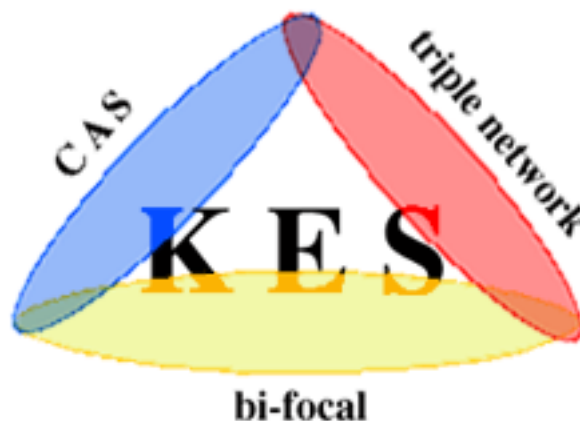


What Is a Knowledge Ecosystem: Choose Your Lens

If you are a knowledge worker/facilitator, or cybrarian for a community of practice, you may want to use the bi-focal lense.

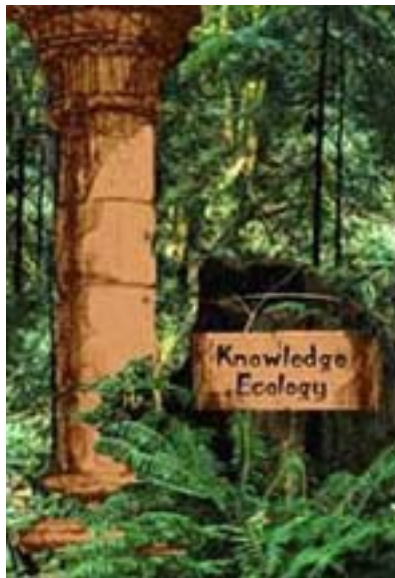
If you are a CIO, Chief Knowledge Officer, or Chief Learning Officer, the "triple network" or "CAS" lens may be more useful.

If you are an HR or OD professional, try on the "CAS" lens.



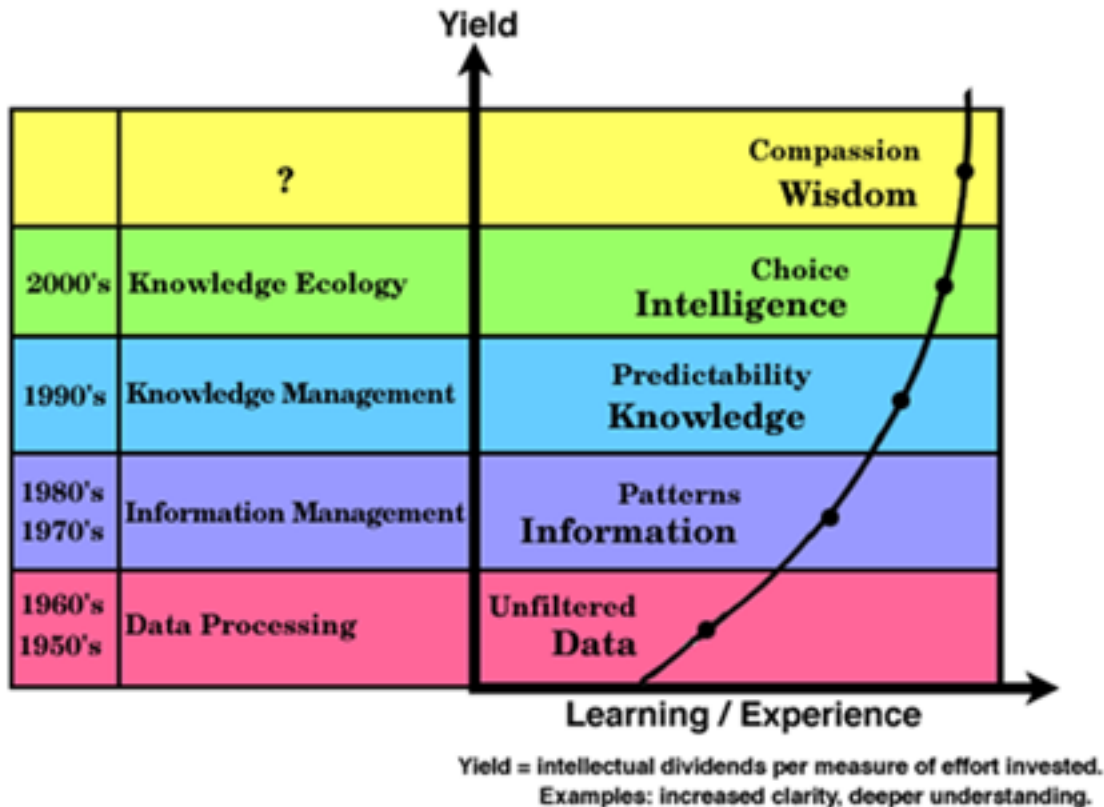
What Is Knowledge Ecology?

Knowledge ecology (KE) is
an interdisciplinary field
of studying the relationships, tools and methods
for simultaneously creating, integrating, sharing, and using knowledge.



The "Data to Wisdom" Curve

The graph below reflects the learning journey whereby we progressively transform the raw, unfiltered facts and symbols progressively into information, knowledge, and eventually into intelligence and wisdom.



Adapted and developed from online communication by Bob Thomson, on the Canadian Web, igc:p.news, May 26, 1994

Knowledge Management and Knowledge Ecology

	Knowledge Management	Knowledge Ecology
Information & Context	Provides you with actionable information and opportunity.	Adds the context , synergy and trust necessary to use information, recognize opportunity, and turn them into knowledge and action.
Architecture & Gardening	The emphasis is on knowledge objects, intellectual asset protection and leveraging, information architecture , auditing and improving knowledge flows and rules.	The emphasis is on culture, knowledge gardening , soft systems, pattern recognition, prototyping, adaption and feedback, knowledge creation and use.
Bottom-line & Community-orientation	"Bottom line" -oriented; it allows us to see the challenges and opportunities for assessing, organizing, portraying and profiting from knowledge.	Community-oriented ; it allows us to see what it takes to grow and sustain networks of relationships, from which knowledge--capacity for effective action--will emerge.
Policy & Dialogue	Focus on knowledge distribution and access policies , and ways to ensure compliance with them.	Focus on dialog about the policy to ensure all employees agreed on the interpretations, built a joint understanding and explored their shared meaning of the content. KE would assist in obtaining alignment but not insist on control.
Particle & Wave	Has to do with intellectual matter; it has a "particle" or "thing" focus: rules, knowledge transfer engineering, best practices, patents, document collections, FAQs, metrics.	Has to do with intellectual energy; it has a "wave" or "relationship" focus: trust, knowledge creation, meaning, belief, dialogue, opinion, innovation, creativity.