Title:

From Cultural Participation to Information Visualization: A New Framework for Old Knowledge Management Schemas

Abstract:

The conference theme, “iFutures: Systems, Selves, Society,” calls for research to explore how cultural contexts and information systems affect society. One significant information research area that struggles to address the imperative for cultural sensitivity is knowledge management (KM). Many KM schemas envision meaningful organization of vast knowledge across multiple domains, but ongoing debate about their capacity to do so suggests these attempts fall short. Information research and education turns to other discourse communities, such as epistemology and semiotics, to enrich its approach. To rethink learning for iSchools, this poster presentation proposes innovating KM schemas to reflect archetypes of knowledge systems and information practices manifest in faith-based communities of practice (CoP). Exploring practice as meaning in particular context, this qualitative study aimed to balance Etienne Wenger’s (1998) duality of reification and participation processes. A content analysis of KM schema qua “hard” knowledge, across religious traditions revealed striking correlations between the conceptual components and spatial representation of knowledge in the mystical symbol systems of two religions commonly considered the most different – Hinduism (polytheism) and Judaism (monotheism). Subsequently, the researcher traveled throughout India, Israel, and Europe to locate communities that believe the schemas of the cakras in tantric Hindu philosophy and the sephirot of Kabbalah (Jewish philosophy) represent ultimate reality. To connect reification of KM with the tacit or “soft” knowledge that informs the everyday lives of religious mystics, the researcher intensively interviewed thirty-six kabbalists and tantrists from a snowball sample acquired via covert participation in communal worship with the Jewish CoP and by complete observation of the Hindu CoP. Findings suggest ancient KM schemas sustain cultural identity in the research and practices in the Indian and Jewish communities that still use them. In addition to this study’s implications for KM, there are also implications for information retrieval: the schemas’ central structures are diagrammatically and conceptually identical to Roberts Taylor’s (1968, p. 182) early model of information needs. Findings suggest that implementation of an integrated system of faceted classification schemas based on the cakras and sephirot should be a new priority in knowledge organization and cultural information systems research and for information visualization applications.

References:


