What is the place of information and knowledge in an organisational context? What implications do informal channels of communication hold for information management within organisations? How have online information systems such as del.icio.us been used to develop informal means of information seeking and classification?

Pre-tutorial reading:

Review your lecture notes for week 3, in particular the sections that discuss the following text:


If you are interested, you can find a copy of that article online through the Monash Voyager catalogue. You will need your Authcate details to access it:


Lab component:

a) Working in pairs, use the web to find out about the formal information systems of the following organisations (a good way to start is by looking at their websites):

- Microsoft or Ford or IBM or General Motors
- Greenpeace
- Victoria Police
- A large organisation of your choice

Using other sources where appropriate, find out what you can about their internal power structure(s) and organisational culture(s), including the way they share information and knowledge:

- Internally
- With others outside the organisation
b) Spend some time looking through two of the following sites, which use tags to develop folksonomies as a means of seeking and classifying information:

http://flickr.com/

http://del.icio.us/

http://www.43things.com/

http://www.technorati.com/

How might an organisation make use of such approaches to information management? Are modern private and public organisations by their nature antithetical to practices such as tagging by users?

**Tutorial component:**

As discussed in a recent lecture, Brown and Starkey (1994: 810) suggest that organisations possess ‘five major elements of communication and information’:

- The management information system
- Ad hoc communications
- Informal communications
- The information medium
- The degree of information consciousness

1. Listen to the tutorial presentations for this week, and participate in the group discussion that follows.

2. Working in groups of four or five, identify and discuss each of these elements as they have functioned in one of the following settings, as well as a different kind of organisation, selected by your group from those examined in the lab session:
   a. The secondary school you attended
   b. A prison (and/or the Big Brother TV show)
   c. A family-owned milk bar
   d. A franchised fast food outlet, and the franchise global and regional head office (think also of the links between each of these units)

3. In each case, how important for the successful functioning of the organisation is the knowledge possessed by individuals? What are the key areas in terms of information and knowledge sharing in which:
   a. It makes little difference whether individuals leave the organisation?
   b. The departure of particular individuals has significant implications for the organisation?
4. In each case, assess whether the work environment is one that encourages or discourages the sharing of knowledge amongst individuals, and between individuals and the organisation.

   a. What are the implications of this for all parties?
   b. Are there ways in which this relationship can be improved? If so, who within the organisations might benefit from such changes?
   c. What difference (if any) does the presence of technology (including computers) make for the relationship between individual knowledge and organisational goals and practice?
   d. What difference (if any) does the effort bargain make for the relationship between individual knowledge and organisational goals and practice?