

Taxonomies and knowledge management

Organise your content; there may be a need for librarians.

(O'Dell and Grayson, 1998)

The label 'taxonomy' is a relatively recent arrival in the world of the knowledge manager. The early classics of knowledge management do not mention taxonomies and refer only fleetingly to issues of categorising content. You won't find them in Verna Allee's *The Knowledge Evolution* (1997), neither will you find them in Davenport and Prusak's *Working Knowledge* (1998) although they do discuss knowledge mapping and the desirability of standardised vocabularies. Davenport and Prusak's earlier *Information Ecology* (1997) devotes a page and a half to the need to categorise information but never mentions taxonomies and clearly favours a thesaurus of subject terms over a classification scheme. 'If information is to be captured and leveraged, it must first be categorised' (Davenport and Prusak, 1997: 173).

Nancy Dixon's *Common Knowledge* (2000) is explicitly focused on knowledge transfer but makes only fleeting reference to categorisation and the need to use the common language of the organisation in describing that knowledge. O'Dell and Grayson's *If Only We Knew What We Knew* (1998) spends less than half a page on taxonomies and the need to classify knowledge. They prescribe briefly: 'Organise your content; there may be a need for librarians.'

Apart from the fact that not all librarians know how to *build* taxonomies (as distinct from *applying* them), there is a startling lack of sophistication in how these eminent authors see the issue of information or knowledge organisation.

We might forgive them by pointing out that these early writers were