



## Making knowledge visible...

Elizabeth Orna (Information and Editorial Consultancy, Norwich, United Kingdom) is a member of this journal's Editorial Board. Readers will recall that the editorial for the June issue was in the form of an e-mail interview with her soon after her *Information strategy in practice* was published by Gower (Van Brakel 2004). This highly acclaimed practical textbook contains invaluable lessons learned from her personal experience in the fast-developing information consultancy business. The book also discusses the information auditing process in detail, from initial analysis to implementing, interpreting and presenting the findings of the audit. She then describes how these culminate in a practical approach to designing and implementing a successful information strategy for an enterprise.

Late last year Orna did it again! To quote Clive Holtham, Professor of Information Management, Cass Business School, City of London, 'Liz Orna has produced another book based on research that is both so deep and broad that it puts to shame many of the more partial contributions to the field'. In his foreword to Orna's latest work *Making knowledge visible: communicating knowledge through information products*, Holtham (Orna 2005:6) summarizes his evaluation of the book as follows:

1. 'It takes an integrating perspective, working across boundaries and without dividing the concepts information management, knowledge management and information technology
2. It is a reflective work, able to recognise the thoughts and ideas and contributions of other experts on the topic
3. It is a constant reminder of how IT implementation has continuously ignored the purpose of IT, namely using information and knowledge to enhance competitive (business) advantage.'

Although *Making knowledge visible* is based on consultation work done by Orna's consultancy firm, it is designed for the information industry – practitioners who are involved in the design and implementation of information systems. The book incorporates numerous examples of enterprises and their information and knowledge management practices. Extracts from interviews with information and other professionals are also included as typical examples of specialized informational work. 'In this way *Making knowledge visible* is closely aligned with the practical interests and needs of those who need to manage corporate information' (Genoni 2005).

Typical of Orna's publications, Part 1 starts by providing explanations of key terms used, for example, *knowledge and information, transformations, information and knowledge management, information design and information products*. The last is introduced as a new term, indicating products that are the 'end result of the series of transformations of knowledge into information; they also become the starting point of transformation in the other direction on the part of their users, who seek to transform what they require of the information obtained in the products into knowledge, and to integrate it into their existing knowledge structure' (Orna 2005:12). *How to make knowledge more visible* is therefore the essence of the book, which means making knowledge visible via an organisation's effective management of information products.

After a detailed explanation of essential terms used in the book, the next chapter emphasizes that no business can take place without information products, and what these so-called information products should do for organizations. Two enterprises in the UK (a commercial bank and a government department) are described to illustrate what information products should do for them and why information products should be part of an overall information strategy. The next chapter projects critical elements in doing business, such as comparing the objectives and business processes of the organization to the 'information culture' of a business, that is, the way staff members think about information and behave while using it. This might seem to be very general stuff, but it is presented here in a unique and alarmingly fresh way by the use of large-scale graphics and descriptions of multiple cases, from an art gallery to a bank. What makes this book even more valuable is that verbatim evidence is provided by information professionals working in those organizations, demonstrating different examples of the nature of their information culture.

The peculiar and unique value characteristics of information and knowledge, the difficulties in valuing information and knowledge, as well as a chapter on the key stakeholders, form the content of the last section of the first part of the book. Again, the systematic approach and real-life case scenarios add tremendous value to the content.

Chapter 6 starts the third part of the book. This part addresses the subtle interaction between knowledge and information management and information products. Infrastructural issues for information products are explained, for example, managing the sources, the tasks associated with the sources as well as the integrating role of Web technology. Again, Orna's unique illustrations and case descriptions make this a valuable handbook to both student and lecturer alike. Verbal accounts (in a distinctive font) add further worth. The last chapter of Part 3 covers information design issues where information design is '...everything we do to make visible knowledge and ideas ... so that those who need them can enter into them and use what they learn from them for their own purposes' (Orna 2005:135).

The fourth and last section of the book (Part 4) is essential reading for those who agree with the author's approach and arguments about managing information products. It is basically an illustrated description of the information auditing process including why, where and how to start. Of more importance and in addition to what she wrote in her previous book (Orna 2004), is the discussion on auditing the information products themselves. The last chapter (12) is aptly phrased *Into action for value from IPs* and is nothing more than a well-structured and detailed case study on the UK-based Essex County Council's information audit. This provides a valuable conclusion to the book, as Orna not only describes the case itself, but also the Essex audit in the light of the ideas advanced in the book. This probably underlines the most important and unique contribution of the book, namely theory supported by a multitude of real-life cases from the information industry.

To conclude on a more technical level, Macevicuite (2005) had this to say about *Making knowledge visible*: 'I always like books authored by Elisabeth Orna as it always seems that the author has not only written the text but also has supervised closely every step of publishing and especially design of her books. Usually the text is illustrated by a number of figures occupying vast spaces of the page, not crammed into a corner or turned into a thumbnail that one has to explore through a magnifying glass.' We fully agree with this description and look forward to Liz Orna's next book!

Pieter van Brakel

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Comments on the above can be sent to:

**Pieter van Brakel**

Editor

[vanbrakelp@cput.ac.za](mailto:vanbrakelp@cput.ac.za)

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