

Knowledge Management in Salesian Historiography: the EAO experience

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Abstract

The Salesians and the Salesian Family is a knowledge organization. Every member in a sense are historiographers because they are witnesses and recorders of events that take place within their local context. These abundance of data and information which they possess becomes of interest to the researchers, writers, and archivists of the organization because of their potential in terms of history. As a knowledge organization, it becomes their commitment not just to create knowledge but to manage it in order that it may be utilized effectively by each and every member.

This paper focuses on the basics of knowledge management in the light of its application in Salesian historiography. It also presents some of the knowledge management tools which are in use in the East Asia Oceania region in their long term goal of digitizing history. Finally it recommends ways on how to better optimize knowledge management in the region.

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1.0 Introducing the Knowledge Organization

1.1 The Salesian Family as a knowledge organization in general

The Salesian Congregation is a knowledge-intensive organization. If we also consider its role in the wider vast movement known as the Salesian Family, that reality is even more true (Fox, 2011). As a knowledge organization it makes its knowledge resources available to everyone in the organization instead of hoarding it the way tangible resources (*like cash money*) are guarded heavily. This is because knowledge once created becomes free (*with the exceptions of copyrighted and proprietary information*). But a knowledge organization does not just build knowledge, instead it should also ensure the utilization of that knowledge. In short a knowledge organization should build, replenish, distribute, and put to use the knowledge accumulated by every individual component in that organization (Dhawan, 1999; Chaudhary, 2005). The challenge therefore for the Salesian Congregation and the Salesian Family to be true to its identity as a knowledge organization is to be able to manage its intellectual capital and resources accordingly. Thus the need for knowledge management in general.

1.2 Salesian Historiographers as a knowledge organization in particular

Now particularly in the field of Salesian Historiography, the Association for Salesian Culture and History (ACCSA) in collaboration with the Salesian Historical Institute (ISS) have come up with three continental seminars. The first took place in Nairobi (October 11-14, 2011) which focused on the preservation of spiritual heritage. The second one was at Belo Horizonte (March 17-20, 2012). The third was at Benediktbeuern (October 31- November 4, 2012) where the state of Salesian Historiography in Europe was investigated. It focused on the analysis and verification of historical investigations of Salesian works and the conservation and enhancement of the Salesian cultural heritage (ANS Rome, October 30, 2012). Here the conference highlighted "the need to collect, select with care, and sort the documentation, paying attention to the challenges of the new technological means to ensure the permanence of information" (ANS Benediktbeuern, November 5, 2012). In this present conference here in Cebu (November 4-8, 2013) for the East Asia Oceania (EAO) region we aim to go higher than the collection of historical data but rather to focus on how we as a knowledge-intensive organizational force can learn to manage the intellectual resources of our particular local salesian histories.

2.0 Managing Knowledge

2.1 What is Knowledge Management (KM)?

This brings us to what Knowledge Management (KM) is all about. This field encompasses identifying and mapping intellectual assets within an organization, generating new knowledge that would give the assets an edge over others by bestowing on it a value-added characteristic. It is the "leveraging of collective wisdom to increase responsiveness and innovation" (Frappaolo, 2006, p.8).

Knowledge Management's primary goal is to provide the right knowledge at the right time to the right person. This enables the individual to make an informed and well-timed decision, based on the relevant information he or she gets through the intelligent system. This leads us to the implicit goal of knowledge management which is to build and use the intellectual assets of an organization efficiently (*speed*) and effectively (*timing*). Thus the basic goal of knowledge management is to be able to form a system in an organization which would collect, store, and disseminate knowledge from and to its individuals (*members*) to improve their performance. In other words, the goal of knowledge management is capturing, cataloging, storing, and facilitating the use of the organization collective knowledge. (Chaudhary, 2005, p. 40)

2.2 From Tacit to Explicit Knowledge

Knowledge can be classified into two: tacit and explicit. Tacit refers to knowledge which resides in the minds of people (*eg. Salesian pioneers' access to local history*). The acquisition of tacit knowledge is usually developed through a process of trial and error during practical experiences. This is why tacit knowledge is so difficult to articulate, formalize, and encode. If knowledge

gained from practice (*eg. their Salesian experience and retelling of history*) remains only in the minds of people who had them, then this knowledge will be lost when these very persons pass away. To turn their personal knowledge into organizational knowledge, their subjective tacit knowledge must be externalized to an explicit form of representation. Once the knowledge is externalized, it is easier to move that information across communication networks. This brings three challenges to the organization: [1] capturing and formulating tacit knowledge in a communicable form (*eg. interviews of pioneers, photos, chronicles, diaries*), [2] making the knowledge easily available to the entire organization (*eg. Salesian publications and website articles*), [3] developing an organizational culture for seeking and using that tacit knowledge (*eg. Salesian culture of historiography and digitizing history*).

Explicit knowledge is formal knowledge or information. Once tacit knowledge has been articulated in formal language, then it is much easier to convey and to disseminate that knowledge across varied types of media (*eg. Salesian historical documents, books, articles, research outputs*). (Chang-Albitres & Krugler, 2005, p.5).

3.0 Knowledge management tools

3.1 Integrating human assets and technology

Knowledge management utilizes information technology tools to manage explicit knowledge. With this explicit knowledge can then be handled in a tangible way. Documents, databases/repositories, and web sites are some of the means used to communicate explicit knowledge. However there must be a balance between human-oriented knowledge management and technology-oriented knowledge management. Thus there exists the need to develop a strategy to integrate organizational knowledge into the knowledge management tools. (Chang-Albitres & Krugler, 2005, p.7)

3.2 Introducing the KM tools in the East Asia Oceania Region

The challenge organizations face concerning explicit knowledge is not its capture and formulation but rather how to handle the volume of knowledge and ensure the relevance of that knowledge to the organization. In the East Asia Oceania (EAO) region there exists an abundance of explicit knowledge which could be overwhelming. These however can be and are little by little being managed by information technology and other knowledge management tools. Some examples are given of existing EAO information technology tools which help in knowledge discovery, capture, storing, and sharing. This is not a comprehensive list of tools and categories found in the region. Hopefully this present conference can identify more through the various country representatives and can propose a re-classification to add technologies and best practices being used but were not mentioned here.

3.2.1 Web Portals and Websites

Web Portals

A Web Portal is a web page which acts as a gateway or an entry point for the users by providing useful content and linking to various sites and features on the world wide web. Many of the websites of the provinces of EAO region act as portals which lead the user to view the site links to various houses and presences within their jurisdiction. This page usually contains a search engine feature to help the user find a particular information within the province's context. They may offer other services as a dedicated e-mail, relevant news, and may link to databases. (Frappaolo, 2006, p. 35)

The ibosco.net maintained by the Korean province is an example of a portal which links to various sites and attempts at translating salesian documents into Korean.

URL is <http://ibosco.net/enhome>

Web sites and web pages

Most of the provinces and respective houses of the EAO region have websites. The list of their official websites could be found at the salesian congregation's website - [sdb.org](http://www.sdb.org)

URL is <http://www.sdb.org/en/Links>

Blogs and personal websites

Individual Salesians in various provinces make their own blogs or personal websites. Here they post various topics according to their interests. Some salesians make use of this to chronicle their daily pastoral activities. There are many who use blogs to write weekly reflections of the Sunday liturgy. Still there are others who blog about books, others about food and culinary experiences, and there are those others who just wish to share the informal moments of their Salesian community. The links to their websites can usually be found from their house website.

There is also an attempt at an EAO blog found at [sdb.org](http://www.sdb.org)

URL is <http://say.sdb.org/blogs/eao>

3.2.2 Repositories and databases

Repositories in simple terms are places where things are kept and collected. In information technology they are websites that provide a central place in which data is aggregated, kept, and maintained in an organized way, and where they could be extracted efficiently. (Frost, 2010)

The Salesian Termbase, although website in form, is actually a "database" of terminologies used in the Salesian domain. This was developed by Fr. Julian Fox, SDB from the Australian province.

URL is <http://www.bosconet.aust.com/pmwiki/pmwiki.php>

The Salesian Digital Library (SDL) is a repository in database format with an extensive collection of salesian documents that empowers users by giving them access to documents fundamental to an understanding of the charism of St. John Bosco. This repository had its beginnings in the Australian province as it was begun by Fr. Julian Fox, SDB. It continues to be under the watch of the Salesian Generalate in Rome.

URL is <http://sdl.sdb.org/cgi-bin/library?a=p&p=home&l=EN&w=utf-8>

The Don Bosco Research Repository is a collection of bibliographic data of the research outputs of students, researchers, and academics of Don Bosco Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines. It is hosted at Don Bosco Technical College, Mandaluyong.

URL is <http://repository.donbosco.net/>

The Salesian Literature Center is a website with a collection of digital resources from translations of salesian news, documents, and books into Thai, as well as other Thai literary works and documents in the province. Fr. Joseph Banchong Santisukniran, SDB heads the Commission on Salesian Literature which is responsible for this work.

URL is <http://www.salit.org/web/main.html>

3.2.3 Social Networking sites

Various social networking sites (facebook, twitter, yahoo groups) which often include also instant messaging sites facilitate the informal transfer and sharing of knowledge across the salesian world in real time. They are too numerous to be enumerated here since a good number within the Salesian family makes use of this medium because of its ease, speed, and ubiquity. (Cornelius, 2008)

3.2.4 Communities of practice

A Community of Practice (CoP) is an essential feature of KM and is composed of a group of people who are peers in the execution of work. They are not a formal team but an informal network, where each of the members have a shared set of interests and agenda and are motivated to do something about them. Communities of Practice are self-generating, the membership is self selecting and they are not necessarily co-located. (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Kimble, C., 2004; Frappaolo, 2006, p. 12)

In the EAO region this is done through the formal Bulletin Boards or collaborative tools found many times within the province or house websites or sometimes as stand alone. An example of a CoP could be a bulletin board or a discussion forum which deals with various apostolates of a province. Here the different stakeholders (salesians and lay collaborators) could discuss asynchronously and offer their suggestions in the improvement of work pertaining to an apostolate. Members of the provincial council could use this as springboard for opening of new works as it gets feedbacks from confreres from the different parts of the province. Provincial commissions could use this forum to discuss and improve their policies and guidelines. The

output details of all these are the stuff of which will make up the local salesian history in the future.

On the congregational level, there is the SDB AGORA which is already widely used by the America South Cone region and the Missions Office of Fr. Vaclav Klement, SDB. The SDB AGORA is for in-house exchange of ideas which is not visible to the rest of the world thus making it an opportune KM tool for the EAO region to optimize.

URL is <http://say.sdb.org/agora/>

A good example of CoP in the EAO region is the AustraLasia where every Salesian or any Salesian Family member can be and is a correspondent to the events happening within their locality. More, every Salesian news they cover, be they great or small, from all over the region is treated equally in its publication where the editor(s) take responsibility for the content.

Url is <http://www.bosconet.aust.com/pmwiki/pmwiki.php?n=EAO.Austra-L-asia11>

3.3 Evaluating the KM tools in the EAO region

Knowledge Management is not all about technological discipline; it is more about managing people, culture, practices, and structures of the EAO region. Effective Knowledge Management initiatives should never just be technology driven, and should not try to seek a total KM information technology solution. However, if knowledge management's tools of information technology are used right and when they are used as supporting and enhancing mechanisms for sound, existing KM practices, then they can be very valuable tools.

4.0 A Suggested To Do list for KM historiographers of EAO

4.1 Democratization of historiography

It is often heard that social media has gradually democratized journalism. Readers are no longer passive receivers of information but are now also creators of information. In the same way Salesians and Salesian Family members through their use of the social media proprietary to us do not just receive information about the Salesian world but rather they too disseminate news and information to the rest of the Salesian world. And when the news and information of today is selected, analyzed, and compiled, it becomes knowledge that form the building blocks for historiography. Thus there is need to empower every member to be involved in this effort.

4.2 A metadata mentality

Any data brought to a historiographer is a recording of a fieldwork activity (documents, photos, audio/movie file, notes, records). But most of the times the historiographer or compiler of these

data could not make heads or tails of them. Data unprocessed becomes useless and cannot be used as information. Thus each data should also have metadata attached to help the historiographer compile data into relevant folders or containers. This metadata can be used to capture its context (eg. author, date and time, place, organization, and other file properties). It's like tagging your pictures in facebook to reach those persons you would like the pictures to be seen immediately. Plus it makes it easier for you to compile your pictures in their pertinent folders. A metadata mentality facilitates data sorting and storing and makes data efficiently accessible to its users. In this way, data is processed easier and faster into information, which is eventually processed into knowledge.

4.3 Continued support for what has begun

There is no need to re-invent the wheel. KM tools exist in the EAO region but they have to be supported, utilized, and promoted otherwise they die and wither. Websites must be updated and the members have to patronize them, not only by reading but by giving feedbacks using the "comment" feature. Repositories have to be filled. Contribute your works and papers or point the repository administrators to relevant content you find. Sign up in a CoP. Start a discussion thread in a board or forum. Read and respond to posts.

5.0 Summary

The building block of history is not information but knowledge. The internet probably contains all the details needed to create historiographies. But then, these raw data or objects (*pictures of events, interviews of persons, descriptions of works, chronologies of communities*) would not make sense if not put properly into the right containers where they could be seen in their rightful context (Heerdt, 2012). But these containers are meant to be used and its objects shared and disseminated which turns our attention to people rather than the tools. Thus people have to learn to use and manage these tools. For when more and more people are involved in the creation of these objects and containers, a culture is promoted which ensures the best of practices for historiography. This process is Knowledge Management. And this is the process that distinguishes the Salesians and the Salesian Family as a knowledge-intensive organization.

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