



# KM REVIEW

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Thomas H. Davenport and Laurence Prusack

## **What's the Big Idea? Creating and Capitalizing on the Best of Management Thinking**

Idea Group Publishing, 2003

Harvard Business School Press

### ***Review by William Ives***

This latest book by Tom Davenport and Larry Prusack provides some very practical advice and useful case examples on putting ideas to work. The central theme is the symbiotic relationship of the gurus, who generate ideas, and the idea practitioners, who enable sustained business impact from ideas.

The book begins with a case for the value of business ideas, comparing General Electric, which feasted on new ideas, with the relatively poor showing of its rival, Westinghouse, which seemed to think that management innovation was an oxymoron. They go on to say that the idea practitioner is the most important player in the integration of ideas within business. These catalysts hold the conviction that people and organizations can change and they are driven by the power of ideas and the love of sharing them. But they cannot simply be thinkers, or conference circuit speakers; successful idea practitioners have to first earn respect within their organizations by demonstrating they can make things happen.

Fortunately for the readership of KM Review, Davenport and Prusack use many examples from KM, as a new business idea, to illustrate their concepts. (There's even a chapter devoted to KM.) Here they portray KM as a largely successful example of a concept that got enough idea practitioner participation to make an impact. They suggest that, while its future is not certain, KM seems to be heading toward pervasive adoption. They point out it was the idea practitioners who drove early interest in KM, while the big consulting firms were mostly pushing established ideas connected to large engagements. This observation

struck a resonate chord as I found in my own experience with consulting firms that most KM interest came from clients. These early KM idea practitioners were supported by the right tools (e.g., rise of the internet) and the right business climate (e.g. the move toward globalization).

After the recent downturn in the economy, I think a renaissance in KM is being enabled by the advent of even better tools, such as portals and new collaborative and content management products, along with an increased business interest in gaining productivity from downsized workforces. However, this resurgence remains largely driven from within organizations by idea practitioners.

This brief review cannot do the book justice and I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to make KM happen in their organization. It provides a unique and valuable perspective and offers many practical suggestions gained from talking with idea practitioners.

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