



# Resources

## BOOKS

**Nancy Dixon, Nate Allen, Tony Burgess, Pete Kilner and Steve Schweitzer**  
**Company Command**  
 Center for the Advancement of Leader Development & Organizational Learning (January 2005)

*Reviewed by Rick Wallace and Melissie Rumizen*

This book tells the story of how a community of practice (CoP) is transforming leadership in the US Army. The authors visualize the primary readers as being leaders of professional forums. Indeed, for those of us who want to lead within a CoP, this book offers a wealth of proven how-to advice along with the rich context of stories. It also offers an underlying strategic approach and methodology for overall organizational learning and change, making it valuable for those of us who formulate organizational strategy, approaches and actions.

Additionally, this book provides clear and compelling evidence that when done correctly, a strategic CoP is a powerful way to unleash the transformational power of those who do the job.

One caveat is that given the US Army context, you may need to slog through some unfamiliar terms and acronyms. However, regardless of the context the requirements for developing and leading a community still apply.

*Company Command* is divided into three sections. In part one there are stories of a professional forum in action. These stories illustrate “the ways in which connections, conversation and content work together to deliver value to members.” The how-to section, part two, focuses on the activities of

leading a community. Part two also includes steps for creating a community, ongoing activities such as welcoming new members and the art of online conversations. In Part three, Etienne Wenger, Kent Greenes and Hubert Saint Onge (mentors to the authors) answer the question: “What advice do you have for someone serving in the role of a professional forum leader?”

One chapter we found particularly thought-provoking focused on conversations that shape our thinking. Talking to participants, the authors learned they didn’t “find the answer” from community discussions. Instead, their own internal thinking process, based on interaction between their own experience and the community discussion, created individual insights, not necessarily textbook solutions. Plus, the chapter on creating priority conversations provides techniques for ensuring community discussions generate critical knowledge, increase effectiveness and advance the profession as a whole.

Our advice: read this book slowly and carefully. As the authors intend with conversations that shape thinking, you should look for new connections in what you already know, gain insight into the reasoning of the authors, broaden your perspective into your own practice, and question your own assumptions.

*This book can be ordered online at [www.commonknowledge.org](http://www.commonknowledge.org)*

**Malcolm Gladwell**  
**Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking**  
 Little, Brown, 2005

*Review by Bill Ives*

*The Tipping Point*, Malcolm

Gladwell’s first major work, was about how little things make a difference. It changed the way we think about the spread of new ideas. His latest book, *Blink*, may change the way we think about decisions. It has received numerous reviews in the popular press but what does it say for knowledge management?

Gladwell provides many entertaining examples of effective decisions made in a few seconds, ones that were more on target than decisions reached through extensive analysis. He also offers instances of faulty snap judgments. The effective ones were usually based on years of experience, internalized to become seemingly intuitive. In the faulty cases, that experience was either lacking or clouded by prejudice. Gladwell, in a recent television interview, offered the example of experienced drivers who make effective split second judgments everyday, versus new drivers who have not built up their experience base and have much higher accident rates.

His comments remind me of an insurance client I had in the early days of knowledge management that let go many supervisors in claims and underwriting in a cost cutting move. It suffered significant adverse financial consequences as the collective intelligence of those left behind could not make the same level of effective business decisions. They lacked the experience base. The solution was to identify the remaining experts and make them accessible to more junior people at key decision points. It worked. The paradox, as Gladwell implies, is that the ability to make effective quick decisions is only built up over time. Identifying, managing, and making accessible the acquired wisdom within organizations and applying it at the right time is one of the key tasks of KM. The thesis within *Blink* can be viewed as another justification

# NETWORKER

*A directory of contacts for further information on the articles in this issue of KM Review*

for what we do. Reading it can give new insights on articulating this rationale and new ways to more effectively nurture it.

*Bill Ives is co-author of Business Blogs: A Practical Guide and can be found at his blog, [http://billives.typepad.com/portals\\_and\\_km](http://billives.typepad.com/portals_and_km)*

## EVENTS

### Improving Your KM Activities

Online seminar

1:00 p.m., Central Standard Time  
APQC

*Reviewed by Megan Salch*

Is your KM program delivering measurable results? How effective are your KM processes and tools? How much information and money are you losing if your KM program is not top-notch? This seminar provided methods to assess your KM program against top performers and other relevant peer groups, as well as ways to identify improvements to increase the return on your KM investment.

On March 4, APQC's Wesley Vestal led a free online seminar, or Webinar, about assessing your KM performance. The one-hour event showed KM professionals how to use APQC's online KM assessment survey to benchmark their activities and make measurable improvements. Webinar participants:

- learned the benefits of completing a KM assessment survey;
- understood how to complete the survey; and
- saw a sample of the complimentary report that KM participants will receive after completing this survey.

Participants inquired about the assessment survey in terms of how

long it takes to complete (about 30 minutes), the cost to participate (no charge in keeping with APQC's nonprofit mission), and if industry and regional comparisons of the data are available (yes).

Vestal explained the detailed process that APQC follows for validating and normalizing the data. Validation ensures that responses are consistent with the scope and definitions contained in the survey and data normalization allows for more effective comparisons among metrics; normalization ensures that all data is collected on a common basis (e.g., cost per invoice) and mitigates comparison issues related to organizational scale.

Vestal also pointed out that many organizations struggle to measure the return on their KM investment but by using this assessment tool, they can identify performance gaps and focus improvements on the areas with the highest financial return. Plus, organizations can complete this assessment survey annually to gain insight into yearly performance and trend data.

### Frontline Knowledge

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Frontline blogging and KM at The Advocacy Project

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### In the Know

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Examining KM and risk in the organization

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### Profile

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Ensuring smooth knowledge transfer through communities at Aerotek

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### Measurement Snapshot

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The Partners HealthCare case for improved KM

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### Briefings

Lessons in minimizing risk from Step Two Designs pg. 8

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Novell community builders: a blended solution pg. 10

Contact: [lauren.klein@novell.com](mailto:lauren.klein@novell.com)

### Feature articles

Managing competencies during times of change pg. 12

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Utilizing external sources of knowledge pg. 16

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A KM maturity model for the software industry pg. 20

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Striking the right balance with KM and risk pg. 24

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Merger of the minds at St Paul Travelers pg. 28

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