
Memorial to Dr. Sam Kurokawa



It is with great sadness that the Editorial Team mourns the unexpected death of our colleague, Dr. Susumu 'Sam' Kurokawa, the leading guest editor of the special issue of *International Journal of Knowledge Management Studies*.

We dedicate this Special Issue to his memory.

Susumu 'Sam' Kurokawa, PhD (1956–2008)

Biographical notes: Susumu 'Sam' Kurokawa was an Assistant Professor of Management at the Bennett S. LeBow College of Business, Drexel University since 2001. He was also a specially appointed Professor of Technology Management at Tokyo Institute of Technology since 2006. Before joining Drexel, he was a Research Associate Professor of Management of Technology at Vanderbilt University's School of Engineering from 1996 to 2001.

Kurokawa was born in Himeji, Japan. He received BA (1980) and MBA (1982) from Kobe University, Kobe, Japan, and PhD (1992) in Management of Technological Innovation from the Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston. He conducted extensive research, education and consulting on technological innovation with a particular focus on small high-tech firms in the USA and Japan. His research publications appeared in *Research Policy*, *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce*, *Research/Technology Management* and *International Journal of Technology Management*. His research interests included inter-firm strategic alliances, entrepreneurship, electronic commerce, supply-chain management and international

S. Kurokawa

technology strategy and quality management. He was invited to present his work worldwide, including Austria, Russia, Korea, Thailand and Japan. In 2002, he was honoured by the Association for Japanese Business Studies for a paper he co-authored, “Global R&D Activities of Japanese MNCs in the USA: From Information Flow and Knowledge Management Perspectives”. He was very active in editorial work in journals published by the Inderscience Enterprises Ltd. In 2005, he was the guest editor of the Special Issue of the *International Journal of Technology Management* entitled “Strategic Management of Technology in Japanese Firms”. In 2006, he initiated and served as the lead editor of this special issue of the *International Journal of Knowledge Management Studies*.

Excerpts from eulogy delivered by Sean M. Hackett¹ on 11 April, 2008

“... I would like to offer my own thoughts on this sad occasion. I did my graduate studies at Vanderbilt University where Sam was one of my professors. Later, when I was on the job market, Sam introduced me to the Management Department at Drexel University and I went from being his former student to being his colleague. Sam helped me both as a teacher and as a colleague. My comments will reflect my experiences and memories of Sam at both Vanderbilt University and Drexel University.

... Japanese people frequently say “We Japanese do not smile too much because smiley people are suspicious”. However, Sam was different from many Japanese people in this regard... He was always smiling: smiling while making copies at the copy machine, smiling while he walked across campus on his way to class, smiling while he napped in front of his PC ... and smiling while he taught class. Whether you are teaching in Japan or in the USA, students do not like to be called upon if they are not raising their hand. But when Sam called on students he always had a smile and he was quick to put them at ease as they thought through the answer ...

... Sam was a very enthusiastic teacher. Frequently, students in my class who are giving a presentation will try to make use of the concept of *de Facto Standards*. Whenever this happens, I ask them “All right, which of you has taken Dr. Kurokawa’s Technology Management Course?” They always respond, “How did you know!?” To which I reply, “I, too, was once Dr. Kurokawa’s student”.

When I was Sam’s student, he once had us to read a Harvard Case Study on Dell Computers. After we discussed the case, he asked “Which of you understood the case completely?” He went on to say that it would be impossible to understand Dell without visiting the factory. One week later, Sam was driving a bunch of us over to Dell, smiling while drove, and smiling the whole time we went on the factory tour. That is the kind of teacher he was.

... And although teaching made him happy, his smile grew even wider when he was in his office; particularly, on days when his children accompanied him to the office. Sam loved his children very much, always referring to them as the treasure of the Kurokawa Family. He took great pleasure in the fact that his eldest son is attending Carnegie Mellon University and that his younger sons are competing in wrestling.

... Sam was a specialist in the field of MOT – Management of Technology. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was superior technology management capabilities that enabled Japanese automobile and consumer electronics manufacturers to become best in class.

Memorial

If I summarise just one of Sam's research studies, it would be the study in which he looked at the use of EDI technology among automobile industry supply-chain members. Sam carefully investigated the use of EDI across various tiers of the automobile industry's supply chain. Generalising from his results, Sam's research helps us to understand how and why the use of new technology, good technology management and continuous improvement enable firms to develop competitive advantages.

This is very significant research with real-world implications and applications. Additionally, you can apply it to the individual or personal level.

... Indeed, using Sam's research as a base, I feel confident that he might offer his sons the following advice:

First, develop a strong interest in new technologies and new ways of doing things.

Second, recognising that competition in society can be severe, keep in mind that which you learn in school and that which you learn through competitive sports.

Third, every day, little by little, think about ways to use what you learn in order to continuously, incrementally improve yourself.

... This year, as we look at the cherry blossoms, it is likely that a tear or two will be shed. But, I think that Sam would encourage us to smile through our tears, to improve ourselves a little bit each day, and to remember him fondly from time to time. Sam, we will miss you".

Note

¹Dr. Sean M. Hackett is an Assistant Professor of Management at the LeBow College of Business, Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.