
Introduction

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Biographical note: Professor Ferdinando Chiaromonte is Director at Studio Chiaromonte Snc, a company active in the area of management consultancy and development. He was formerly President of ISPIM (International Society for Professional Innovation Management), where he now holds the position of Vice President for Publications. Professor Chiaromonte is Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial and Innovation Management*, and he has been teaching Business Economics and Organisation in various Italian universities. He is the author of many books and papers on Management issues. His professional and scientific interests have, for many years, been focused in the area of innovation management, where he has led multiple projects on the assignment of national and international public bodies and private companies.

In the late 1970s it became evident that the production processes (goods and services) embedded a high percentage of intangibles (essentially information and knowledge) and that even industrial products (not only services) were moving in the same direction.

This phenomenon was, on the other hand, related and coherent, with the circumstance – already pinpointed by Porat in the 1960s – that the large majority of the total workforce of European countries was engaged in communications and information jobs.

Since then the importance of knowledge and learning, as management issues, was specifically stressed and a great deal has been written on the relationship between knowledge and innovation.

The oldest contributions to the topic focused essentially on the learning process such as, for example, the substantial identification of learning organisations with innovative ones (see Thusman and Nadler, ‘Organizing for Innovation’ in *California Management Review* – Spring 1986), or the identification of different typologies of learning their tools and their values (see the seminal work of Nonaka).

During the 1990s attention was shifting towards the importance of managing the acquired knowledge in the R&D process (see Kerssens-Van Drongelen, de Weerd-Nederhof and Fissher, ‘Describing the issues of KM in R&D: towards a communications and analysis tool’, in *R&D Management*, No. 3, July 1996 or D. Amidon Rogers, ‘The challenge of fifth generation R&D’ in *Research-Technology Management*, No. 4, July–August, 1996).

More recently, parallel to the changing concept of innovation, the acquisition, handling, transfer and maintenance of knowledge have been considered basic assets for any innovative strategy, and the focus is shifting from knowledge management to knowledge systems and their relationship with innovation systems (see Memobiblio October 2004 and March 2005 on Ispim Web for a comprehensive review of the periodical literature on the topic).

However, the literature on this area is so abundant, (even if one refers only to recent years), that it is not my intention, nor my task in this short introduction to analyse it.

Let me only recall, from a practical point of view, that in 2003 OECD decided to invest resources in a research project on KM practices. The goals of the project were to build a database on KM and link this database with data coming from other sources, particularly those related to Innovation and R&D (that already were elements of international database, nurtured by periodic surveys).

The underlying assumption of the OECD project was that managing knowledge (introducing planned strategies for the collection and documentation of ideas and suggestions by employees, and in addition, developing processes for stimulating creativity) becomes essential in order to increase the capacity for innovation.

As a matter of fact, innovation is more and more considered as ‘the production of new (theoretical or practical) knowledge, which is generated intentionally (R&D) or non intentionally (learning by doing), and which is shared, modified and recombined. In turn such a new representation of innovative activities – as a process of knowledge production, mediation and use – suddenly opens an extremely broad field of investigation, by releasing to us an exclusive S&T conception of innovation’.

This was the framework in which ISPIM decided to devote its XVI Annual Conference, held in Porto, to ‘The Role of Knowledge in Innovation Management’.

This Special Issue is a selection of the best papers presented at the Conference. It is divided into two parts. The first contains the papers mainly focused on theoretical features of Knowledge Management and Innovation, the second, those papers whose core attention is devoted to field research or management tools in the area.