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Inequality in Knowledge Repository Use in Scaling Service Operations

by Melissa A. Valentine, Tom Fangyun Tan, Bradley R. Staats and [Amy C. Edmondson](#)

Abstract

To scale service operations requires sharing knowledge across the organization. However, prior work highlights that individuals on the periphery of organizational knowledge sharing networks may struggle to access useful knowledge at work. A knowledge repository (KR) has the potential to help peripheral individuals gain access to valuable knowledge because it is universally available and can be used without social interaction. However, for it to serve this equalizing function, those on the periphery of the organizational knowledge sharing networks must actually use it, possibly overcoming barriers to doing so. In this paper, we develop a multi-level model of knowledge use in teams to explore how individuals on the periphery of knowledge networks—due to inexperience, location, lack of social capital, gender, and role—access knowledge from a KR. Unexpectedly, we find that individuals whose experience and position already provide access to vital knowledge use a KR more frequently than individuals on the organizational periphery. We argue that this occurs because the KR—despite its appearance of equivalent accessibility—is actually more accessible to central than peripheral players. Thus, KR use is not driven primarily by the need to overcome limited access to other knowledge sources. Rather KR use is enabled when actors know how to reap value from the KR, which ironically improves with increasing access to other sources of knowledge. We conclude that KRs are unlikely to scale service operations without additional intervention.

Keywords: [Knowledge Repository](#); [knowledge management](#); [scaling service operations](#); [fluid teams](#); [Groups and Teams](#); [Knowledge Management](#); [Performance](#);

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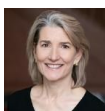
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