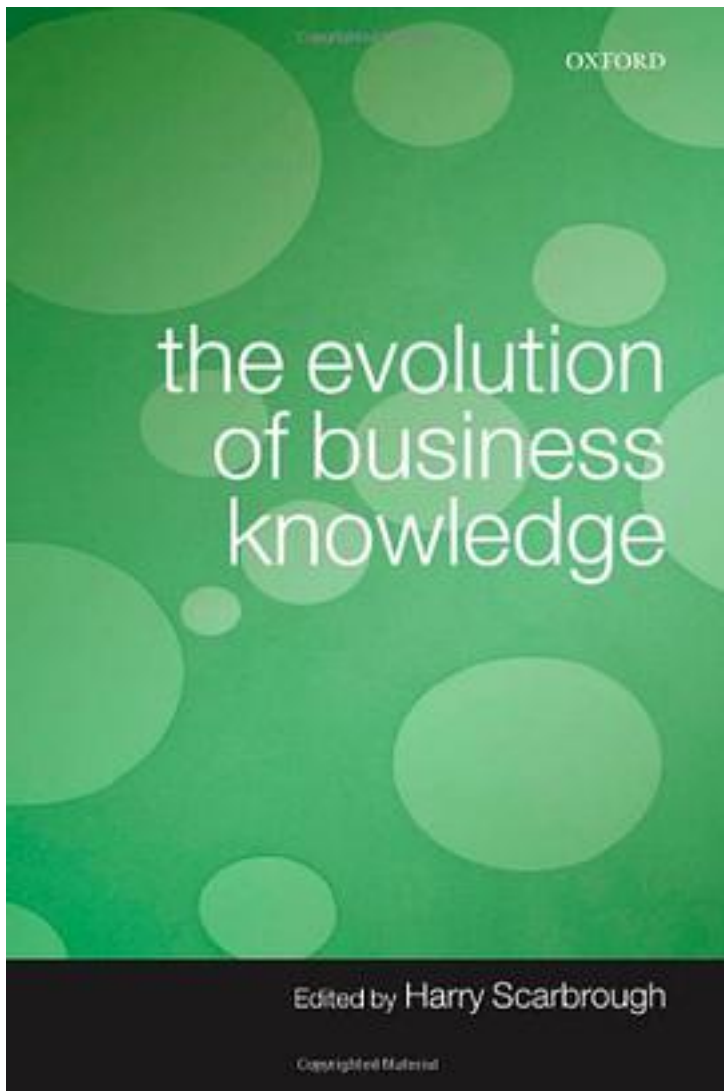


# The Evolution of Business Knowledge



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Top executives increasingly see the competitive advantage of their firms coming from their ability to exploit knowledge and learning. Policy-makers likewise see the fate of national and regional economies being determined by the emergence of a knowledge economy. These views place great importance on the way in which knowledge evolves within business. However, to date, our understanding of that evolution has been limited by a tendency to see knowledge as simply a resource or input to be transformed into outputs. This R&D-centred view of business knowledge has recently been challenged by other views which emphasize the contribution of organizational learning, social practices, and management structures to its evolution within and between organizations. Competitive success is seen as dependent on the firm's ability to mobilize all of these different kinds of knowledge. Based on the findings of a major research programme funded by the UK's ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) and DTI (Department for Trade and Industry), this book makes a major contribution to this emerging picture of the evolution of business knowledge. The detailed empirical studies contained within it have been undertaken by some of the UK's leading management researchers. They cover a variety of sectors ranging from overtly knowledge producing institutions such as business schools and the scientific professions, through intermediary groups such as consultants and lobby groups to the creation and application of knowledge by firms, large and small. This work highlights the impact of different institutional contexts, social networks and technological artefacts on the way different groups share and exploit knowledge for business goals. Its findings challenge the idea that knowledge and learning are simply a resource or input to be directed by managers and policy-makers. Instead, they show how knowledge evolves through its embedding and disembedding within different business contexts - as much despite of, rather than because of, the efforts of management and policy-makers, who are often more concerned with the day-to-day pressures of their own roles.

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