

Salesian Common Sense

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The Salesian Congregation is a knowledge-intensive organisation. If we also consider its role in the wider vast movement known as the Salesian Family, that reality is even more true.

An aspect of knowledge-intensive organisations that has gained prominence in recent years is what is called ‘common sense’ knowledge. This refers not only to good judgement, but to knowledge that is often less explicit, carried in narrative, or database form, and includes the best practice of the organisation.

A threefold distinction can be made concerning Salesian Common Sense:

- a. knowledge which is critical, e.g. geo-location data, or other critical data often kept in databases;
- b. knowledge which is useful, e.g. data gathered from a particular Department, or other data, often kept in databases;
- c. knowledge which an individual has need of and that some other individual may possess, e.g. a particular skill.

Databases feature prominently in ‘knowledge’ today. Salesian Common Sense would suggest that we pursue standards that can reduce isolated knowledge ‘silos’, standards which include:

- a. Common data description standards (e.g. XML)
- b. Use of common metadata standards (e.g. Dublin Core)
- c. Database integration solutions (amongst which semantic web solutions)

Sdb.org sees itself as one instrument of Salesian Common Sense, and actively promotes a vision which includes the following elements:

- communities of practice: an example are the various groups that work within AGORA;
- digital resources (including resource persons), promoting the notion that exchange of knowledge includes, under the correct circumstances, the sharing of resource persons as well as material resources;
- an engine driving cultural change. Essentially this comes through interactivity;
- development of knowledge management tools, a current example of which is Salesian Termbase;
- approaches to linking database ‘knowledge’; an example currently being pursued is the introduction of linked data via the microdata standard.

Each of these elements of the Salesian Common Sense vision offers an ongoing challenge to the Salesian Congregation and the Salesian Family: the sharing of knowledge and its dissemination; the distinction between the value of sharing knowledge and the rights of individuals to certain aspects of that knowledge (e.g. copyright, but not only that); the focus on people rather than tools; the management of tools, including their development, to ensure best practice in knowledge management.