

## Frequently Asked Questions on Knowledge Management

### 1. **What is “knowledge”?**

Knowledge is capacity for effective action. Examples of knowledge assets (=intellectual capital) are those factors that help a team do its job well, such as expertise or skills, intranet, computer with all needed functionalities, professional magazine, manual, network of stakeholders, membership in a professional association, office equipment, etc.

#### 1-1 **What is the difference between information and knowledge?**

Information is “*know what*” while knowledge is “*know-how*.” Information is “*what is*” while knowledge is “*what works*.” Information that helps perform an action better is knowledge. To a doctor, most of the contents of a typical daily newspaper is simply information – interesting but not useful for effective action as a doctor; however, an article from a medical journal in her field of specialization that improves her ability to diagnose or detect a newly discovered disease is knowledge. If a knowledge worker answers “yes” to the question, “*does this help me do my job better?*” then it is knowledge.

#### 1-2 **What is tacit knowledge? Explicit knowledge?**

Knowledge that is not recognized, articulated, documented or encoded is called **tacit knowledge**. The most common example is your expertise. Another is a proven work process that has not been documented. Knowledge that is documented in print or audio-visual material or encoded in databases is **explicit knowledge**. In general, the amount of tacit knowledge in any organization or individual exceeds that of explicit knowledge. What enables a surgeon to do good surgery, namely his skills and accumulated experience of what works best, is much more than can be obtained from mere reading of a book on surgery.

### 2. **What is “knowledge management”?**

Knowledge management (=KM) is sourcing and deploying knowledge assets for better work performance. It includes providing the knowledge worker the right information she needs at the right time so that she can do her job well. A portal she can search with a search engine and a community of practitioners (=CoP) she can ask professional questions are examples of KM tools for this purpose. A community of practice is a formal or informal grouping among workers involved in the same profession or practice, through which members socialize and benefit from sharing/exchange of knowledge in the form of latest gadgets and findings, “tricks of the trade,” new “tips” about what works, etc.

#### 2-1 **What is the difference between KM and information management?**

KM focuses on information that is useful for effective action. KM is concerned with both explicit and tacit knowledge, while information management deals largely with explicit knowledge. While information management largely uses information/communication technologies (=ICT), KM uses both behavioural/social tools and ICT.

## **2-2 What is the advantage of KM over information management?**

KM is a management perspective that is broader than information management because it pays more attention to tacit knowledge. Computer Associates estimates that only about 5% of total knowledge in an organization is captured in (explicit) ICT-mediated repositories; the rest is tacit knowledge in the heads of employees and executives that cannot be reached by information management.

## **2-3 How do we know we are doing good KM?**

If the result is greater efficiency, effectiveness and/or innovation then you are doing good KM.

## **2-4 Who started KM? How did it evolve?**

KM started in the 1980s in US and Scandinavian countries where earliest KM practitioners noted that private companies' market value or capacity to generate income is increasingly due to their (intangible) intellectual capital (=knowledge assets) more than their tangible assets (=book value or net worth). Something is tangible if it is entered in the accounting system of an organization, or, it is measured in money units and traded in the market. Among the earliest KM practitioners is Karl Erik Sveiby from Sweden. At around the same time, organizational learning as a discipline started in New England in the US by people like Peter Senge and Chris Argyris. When personal computers appeared in the early 1980s, ICT as a tool of KM evolved rapidly. The people side of KM was recognized more through the work on tacit knowledge by Ikujiro Nonaka of Japan. The push towards KM gained momentum with the growing realization that knowledge is the most important factor for value creation in the global knowledge economy. Three-fourths of Gross World Product is produced by intangible assets.

## **2-5 What is organizational learning?**

Organizational learning is the set of individual, team and organizational processes and skills for creating new knowledge (e.g. work improvement, improvisation, process or product innovation) at all levels and units in an organization and for sharing or transferring knowledge across an organization to those who need it.

## **2-6 Is KM suited for a particular type of organization?**

KM is suited more to organizations that rely or use knowledge resources heavily. As a general rule, organizations in the services sector (such as government) are more suited for KM but any organization can strive to improve its learning and knowledge transfer processes. Learning process thrive better, as a general rule, in horizontal or egalitarian organizations (such as NGO networks and professional associations) than in vertical or authoritarian organizations (such as ideological or religious organizations). However, the fact remains that practically all organizations use knowledge, and use a mix of horizontal and vertical organizational configurations.

## **2-7 What is a knowledge worker?**

A worker who uses expert judgment and tacit knowledge more than muscular effort or routine actions to perform his or her work is a knowledge worker.

# **3. Why do KM? What are its benefits?**

### **3-1 What is the benefit from KM?**

Good internal KM helps knowledge workers perform their job better; good external KM enables customers or stakeholders to perform desirable actions. The primary beneficiaries of KM are the organization and its members, and eventually, the customers or stakeholders served by the organization.

### **3-2 How will KM improve work performance?**

One of the purposes of a KM assessment is to identify knowledge assets most needed by a division, office or work team that are short in availability and quality. Sourcing and promptly supplying the right knowledge assets would improve performance.

### **3-3 How does KM translate into savings/expenses for the organization?**

Improving work performance translates to savings. As an illustration, a responsive intranet can reduce the time wasted by the average knowledge worker in hunting for needed information. If the time saved is equivalent to one month, the financial impact is equivalent to one month payroll plus the extra productivity gained from one additional month of productive work.

## **4. How do you do KM?**

### **4-1 Where do you start in applying KM?**

Some organizations start with small KM initiatives with likely positive impacts based on other organization's experiences; thus the most popular KM initiatives are: exchange of best practices, set up of an intranet and organizing a CoP. Other organizations start systematically by conducting a KM audit or assessment as input to designing a KM system.

### **4-2 Is KM better implemented bottoms-up or top-down?**

KM is basically an organizational perspective with organizational applications therefore it is better started top-down, that is, with resource as well as policy support from the top (=executive sponsorship). It can also be started from the upper-middle management provided there is support from the top. However, because KM basically involves people, it is difficult to sustain if KM does not successfully engage and recruit the interest and participation from the rank and file.

### **4-3 What are the difficulties or challenges of KM?**

KM involves a new and different management perspective, and requires understanding of new concepts and terminologies. The more common managerial mindset is focused on ICT. ICT is a good starting point but the shift from ICT to KM among managers' mindsets can be slow, or worse, some may wrongly think that KM is the same as ICT/information management.

### **4-4 What will ensure the success of KM in an organization?**

Many factors can ensure success of KM in an organization. Firstly, technical appreciation, policy and budget support, and personal encouragement from top managers are important. Training of middle-level managers is needed for the planning and execution of KM initiatives to be successful. Early successes, no matter how small, that demonstrate that KM is beneficial and doable can reinforce the sustainability of a KM initiative. The presence and recruitment of internal "KM

champions” from upper managerial levels can also help.

## 5. **What is the “knowledge cycle”?**

The following steps constitute the knowledge cycle or knowledge value chain internal and external sensing → knowledge creation (=innovation) or capture → organizing and storing knowledge → tracking and measuring knowledge and its impacts → retrieving, transferring and sharing knowledge → and using/reusing and applying knowledge.

### 5-1 **What are some KM tools and techniques?**

	ICT/technically-oriented tools	Behaviorally-oriented tools
Internal and external sensing	Market analysis, KM audit, competitive intelligence, surveys	Complaints desk, social network analysis, FGD, interview
Creation or capture	Data mining, R&D, work templates, buy IPR	CoP, team learning, documentation, mentoring
Organize and store	Portal, intranet	Expertise locator, Who Knows Who Directory
Track and measure	Balanced Scorecard, intellectual capital accounting	Learning history, process documentation
Retrieve, transfer and share	Search engine, e-group, e-learning	CoP, transfer of best practice, cross-visit, story telling
Use/reuse or apply	Role-based portal, work templates	Help desk, action learning

### 5-2 **What is “knowledge translation”?**

Knowledge translation is the last two stages of the knowledge cycle: transferring and using knowledge. It usually includes the transformation of knowledge into more usable form. This is needed if the institutional and cultural context of the knowledge source is different from that of the knowledge user.

### 5-3 **Is transfer of knowledge (such as feedback conferences, reports, training, etc.) KM?**

Knowledge transfer is part of KM, although people managing conferences, preparing reports and conducting trainings may not be aware they are doing KM. Conscious KM implies the knowledge transfer is managed in such a way that it deliberately results in more effective action by the receiver.

### 5-4 **How is KM related to information filing or resource center?**

Organizing and storing knowledge is part of the knowledge cycle. As in 5-3, consciously doing KM means information is prioritized according to what is needed for more effective action by the user(s).

### 5-5 **Does going into KM means/needs being techy and computer savvy?**

KM without computers can be done (see last column above), but KM with computers is better. The best KM is one that is “both high-tech and high-touch.”

6. **Is there any personal benefit from KM?**

Good KM entails paying attention to what works well or what works better (performance improvement, improvisation, creativity and work innovation) and to continuously reflecting about and learning from work (self-improvement, continuous learning and professional advancement). If a person values productivity, innovation and learning, then he or she will derive personal satisfaction from organizational KM. Using any KM tool that shortens work time or learning curves, reduces chances of mistakes, or enhances quality and productivity of work outputs can be personally satisfying.

6-1 **Will KM disrupt my normal work process and habits?**

The effort of designing and setting up new KM systems, such as a portal or a resource center, distracts from normal work processes and habits. But done correctly and well, the subsequent benefit of KM systems is easier and faster performance of work. Abraham Lincoln said, *“if I had eight hours to cut down a tree, I will spend the first six sharpening my axe.”*

6-2 **What is the link between personal learning and organizational learning?**

Personal learning is part of organizational learning. An organization that had adopted policies and procedures towards organizational learning will develop a culture and various habits of personal learning. The initial stages of learning new habits can be personally challenging and demanding. As an organizational learning culture set in, the personal habits of examining what went wrong, accepting and learning from mistakes, suspending judgement and listening, open inquiry to re-examine personal and group assumptions, disclosing doubts and one's ladder of inference, etc. – are worthwhile personal skills and attitudes that can serve the knowledge worker well in his/her personal career.

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Suggested further readings:

Jürgen Kluge, Wolfram Stein and Thomas Licht: “Knowledge Unplugged: the McKinsey & Company Global Survey on Knowledge Management.” McKinsey & Company, 2001.

Chris Collison and Geoff Parcell: “Learning to Fly: Practical Lessons from one of the World's Leading Knowledge Companies.” Capstone, 2001.

Carla O'Dell and C. Jackson Grayson, Jr.: “If Only We Knew What We Know: The Transfer of Internal Knowledge and Best Practice.” Free Press, 1998.

Georg von Krogh, Kazuo Ichijo and Ikujiro Nonaka: “Enable Knowledge Creation: How to Unlock the Mystery of Tacit Knowledge and Release the Power of Innovation.” Oxford, 2000.

Talisayon, Serafin: “Apin Talisayon's Webog”: <http://apintalisayon.wordpress.com/>

Thomas H. Davenport and Laurence Prusak: “Working Knowledge: How Organizations Manage What They Know.” Harvard Business School Press, 1998.