

CHAPTER 6

Implementation of Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is based on the fundamental concept that one of the most valuable assets of an organization is the experience and expertise that reside in the heads of its officers, managers and employees. In order to derive the maximum benefit from this intellectual capital, ways and means must be devised to manage this knowledge, capture it and share it with others, particularly the coworkers. If executed and implemented in a proper manner, knowledge management is expected to create a more collaborative environment, cut down on duplication of effort and encourage knowledge sharing. In the process, there will be considerable savings in terms of time and money.

However, in most organizations, employees are reluctant to share their knowledge freely. In fact they feel that their special knowledge is the very reason why they are important to the company and why the company keeps them employed. By keeping the knowledge to themselves, they become valuable to the company resulting in employment security. But such an attitude of hoarding knowledge leads to duplication of work, turf wars, inefficiencies and high costs.

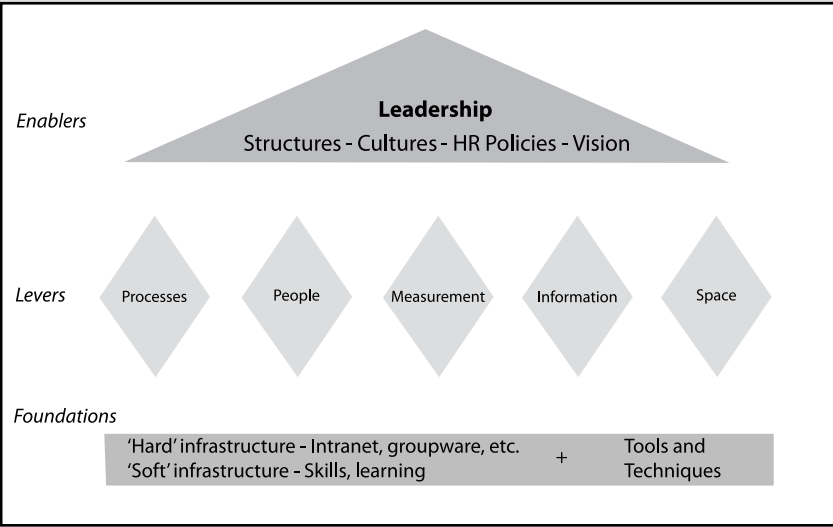
One of the biggest challenges, therefore, to successfully implementing KM is to properly address the cultural change issues. The KM efforts must be focused on this aspect of organizational change and must develop programs to reach out to individuals involved. The programs must include, among others, advocacy, communications, training, policies and procedures, and incentives. They must also include knowledge proficiencies, a comprehensive measurement system, and the creation of an organizational team to lead and support the knowledge management effort. The leadership of an organization must be combined with a culture based on sharing. From an economic point of view, knowledge management should be considered not as expenditure but as an investment in the efficiency and competitiveness of an organization.

A framework for the implementation of a knowledge management system is described in Box 6.1. This framework envisages three layers comprising enablers (as the topmost layer), levers (as the middle layer), and foundations (as the bottom layer).

Box 6.1 A Framework for Implementing Knowledge Management

At the top layer of the framework are the enablers. The key factor here is organizational leadership. There is a senior knowledge champion. The senior management team understands that knowledge is strategic and clearly articulates its contribution to the organization's "bottom line". The organization's structure, culture and environment encourage knowledge development and sharing. Without these enablers most knowledge initiatives drift or stall.

The second layer of the framework comprises a set of levers that amplify the contribution of knowledge. These include processes that facilitate knowledge flows, the effective handling of information, and measurement systems (e.g., for intellectual capital). An important point here is the distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge, since their management is quite distinctive.



Box 6.1 A Framework for Implementing Knowledge Management

Explicit knowledge is that which is written down or expressed in some tangible form, such as in a procedure manual, document or computer database. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is personal, in people's heads and is difficult to articulate. It includes insights, experience, judgment and many other aspects of know-how and know-why. Managing explicit knowledge draws heavily on systematic processes for handling information, such as information resources management, as discussed below. Managing tacit knowledge, on the other hand, has more to do with managing people, and particularly the environment in which they operate. Hence design of space that encourages knowledge sharing, such as at British Airways new headquarters at Waterside near Heathrow, is an important lever. So, too, are ways in which people can interact to learn from each other, whether through knowledge sharing events, the conduct of meetings, secondment to other work groups or personal coaching and mentoring.

Thirdly, the foundation layer provides the capacity and capability that embeds knowledge into the organization's infrastructure. It comprises two complementary strands - a 'hard' information and communications infrastructure that supports knowledge collaboration, and a 'soft' human and organization infrastructure that develops knowledge enhancing roles, skills and behaviors. In this layer, the fast moving world of technology is providing an ever increasing number of useful tools for knowledge capture, organizing and sharing. There are now knowledge management suites, such as Open Text's Livelinks, that combines document management facilities with functions that help create 'communities of practice', whereby people in different departments who are pursuing similar interests can be connected into electronic conversations.

An effective knowledge management programme should therefore take a holistic view of the field and ensure that there is suitable balance between the various layers and strands. As far as information professionals are concerned, there are several ways in which they can make a valuable contribution to a knowledge program. Creating knowledge bases and developing knowledge centers are two of them.

Source: Skyrme, D. J., "Knowledge Management: Making it Work", Resources, <<http://www.skyrme.com>>, (Dec 2004).

However, the actual implementation of a knowledge management system in an organization may generally involve five distinct stages:

Stage 1: Advocate and learn

Stage 2: Develop strategy

Stage 3: Design and launch KM initiatives

Stage 4: Expand and support initiatives

Stage 5: Institutionalize knowledge management

An examination of many knowledge management initiatives of large organizations shows the presence of these five stages of implementation.

Stage 1: Advocate and Learn

The first stage in the development of a knowledge management system comprises the following elements: (a) introducing knowledge management; (b) identifying the KM team and focal points; (c) learning about the experiences of other organizations; (d) identifying advocates of knowledge management; and (e) promoting wide-ranging support to the KM initiative.

The introduction of knowledge management may be initiated at the highest level, for example, the organization's chief executive officer or it may be an initiative of the human resources department or the IT department. Regardless of where the initiative comes from, the organization is more likely to be ready to get started in knowledge management when one or more of the following situations are present: (a) knowledge management has emerged as a topic of interest; (b) at least a few employees have explored the benefits of KM for the organization; (c) someone has had a personal stake in developing interest in KM; (d) some members of the organization have learned about KM through participation in consortia or conferences; (e) the organization has created a high-level rationale or vision for pursuing KM.

Advocacy is the very first task to define KM, make it known to others in the organization, and develop an initial small group of KM supporters. Opportunities should be provided to the staff to learn more about KM through

activities such as in-house seminars and workshops and to share stories of how KM helped other successful organizations. It is also important to make everyone realize how KM could be aligned with other current initiatives of the organizations. During the advocacy and learning stage it is essential to make the concepts of KM real for others in the organization. This means that the advocates should create a clear, tangible picture of the benefits of KM as they relate to goals in the organization. To make KM attractive to a wider audience, it is important to use simple definitions and simple language to explore real problems, opportunities, and the potential value that KM addresses.

The second step is to identify the members of the KM team and focal points that will support the development of KM and serve as advocates of knowledge management. To help identify these people, one should look around the organization for activities that might already be related to KM. In addition, there might already be small groups or communities that are sharing knowledge in some way either formally or informally. It is important to make connections with these people and recruit them as possible focal points or members of the KM team. Finally, the KM team should report to as high in the management as possible in order to get top management support. And recruiting well-respected, influential people within the organization is always a good idea.

The third step is to learn from the experiences of other organizations and constantly look for windows of opportunity to introduce the benefits of knowledge management. In pursuing this, there is need to capitalize on the Internet and seek the assistance of the IT department to provide the necessary tools. Efforts should be exerted to find out what KM possibilities are available with existing and available technology and where KM would be most valued. By talking to people involved with strategic initiatives, it might be possible to translate some of the experiences of other organizations into concrete policies and actions that could prevent repeating earlier mistakes.

The final two steps involve finding advocates of knowledge management and getting wider support to the KM initiative. These are crucial steps and the probability of success is enhanced by making the proper choices. For example, the people from the IT department are potential advocates and

catalyst for emerging KM support technologies since they are already familiar with the technology aspect of knowledge management. Wide-ranging support may be obtained if the KM team can clearly and convincingly explain to the staff what the KM objectives are, what issues are being addressed, how KM can help the organization meet its objectives, and how it will benefit the staff and help them perform their work more efficiently and effectively.

Box 6.2 Challenges of KM Implementation

What are the challenges of KM?

Getting Employees on Board

The major problems that occur in KM usually result because companies ignore the people and cultural issues. In an environment where an individual's knowledge is valued and rewarded, establishing a culture that recognizes tacit knowledge and encourages employees to share it is critical. The need to sell the KM concept to employees shouldn't be underestimated; after all, in many cases employees are being asked to surrender their knowledge and experience — the very traits that make them valuable as individuals.

One way companies motivate employees to participate in KM is by creating an incentive program. However, then there's the danger that employees will participate solely to earn incentives, without regard to the quality or relevance of the information they contribute. The best KM efforts are as transparent to employees' workflow as possible. Ideally, participation in KM should be its own reward. If KM doesn't make life easier for employees, it will fail.

Allowing Technology to Dictate KM

KM is not a technology-based concept. Don't be duped by software vendors touting their all-inclusive KM solutions. Companies that implement a centralized database system, electronic message board, Web portal or any other collaborative tool in the hope that they've established a KM program are wasting both their time and money.

While technology can support KM, it's not the starting point of a KM program. Make KM decisions based on who (people), what (knowledge) and why (business objectives). Save the how (technology) for last.

Box 6.2 Challenges of KM Implementation

Not Having a Specific Business Goal

A KM program should not be divorced from a business goal. While sharing best practices is a commendable idea, there must be an underlying business reason to do so. Without a solid business case, KM is a futile exercise.

KM is Not Static

As with many physical assets, the value of knowledge can erode over time. Since knowledge can get stale fast, the content in a KM program should be constantly updated, amended and deleted. What's more, the relevance of knowledge at any given time changes, as do the skills of employees. Therefore, there is no endpoint to a KM program. Like product development, marketing and R&D, KM is a constantly evolving business practice.

Not All Information is Knowledge

Companies diligently need to be on the lookout for information overload. Quantity rarely equals quality, and KM is no exception. Indeed, the point of a KM program is to identify and disseminate knowledge gems from a sea of information.

Who should lead KM efforts?

Since KM is not a technology-based concept but a business practice, enterprise-wide KM efforts should not be led by the CIO. (The CIO is a suitable choice to lead KM efforts within the IT department, however.) Some companies have dedicated KM staff headed by a chief knowledge officer or other high-profile executive. Other companies rely on an executive sponsor in the functional area where KM is implemented.

What technologies can support KM?

KM tools run the gamut from standard, off-the-shelf e-mail packages to sophisticated collaboration tools designed specifically to support community building and identity. Generally, tools fall into one or more of the following categories: knowledge repositories, expertise access tools, e-learning applications, discussion and chat technologies, synchronous interaction tools, and search and data mining tools.

Source: Santosus, M. and Surmacz, J., "The ABCs of Knowledge Management",
<<http://www.cio.com/research/knowledge/edit/kmabcs.html>>,
(accessed 24/09/04).

There are a number of challenges and possible roadblocks to success at this stage. These include: (a) ignoring the current practices and existing corporate culture and history; (b) overlooking and not addressing issues that might delay the acceptance and hinder implementation of the KM system; (c) creating too much unnecessary hype and attempting to sell an enterprise-wide approach without first building confidence; and (d) asking for an unreasonably large budget before creating a convincing proposition that can create value for the organization.

Stage 2: Develop Strategy

During the second stage of the knowledge management roadmap, there are four activities that should be implemented. These are: (a) identify and characterize the knowledge assets of the organization; (b) develop an overall KM framework with clear goals and objectives; (c) conceptualize and prepare preliminary design of some strategic KM pilot projects; and (d) prepare an indicative budget and find the resources to support the selected KM pilot projects.

As in the first stage of implementation, there are some indicators that could help decide if the initiative is ready or not to proceed to the next stage. For example, if several or all of the following conditions exist, then the organization is ready to proceed to the second stage of knowledge management implementation:

- The organization has established a KM exploratory group or steering committee for KM and it has successfully met a few times;
- An executive sponsor or champion, high enough in the hierarchy of the organization, supports further exploration of KM;
- A group, a section or a division within the organization is looking for successful, internal grassroots efforts related to KM that are already underway;
- The IT section or division of the organization is interested in actively supporting the KM initiatives;
- There are stories or records of how knowledge sharing has helped the organization in the past;

- Some pilots have been identified allowing the demonstration of how KM will benefit the organization; and
- Ownership of the proposed pilots has been identified and their possible funding has been secured.

The overall objective of this stage of implementation is to formulate a KM strategy that fits the organization's business model. From this KM strategy, business opportunities can be identified and initialized as pilot initiatives. A task force should then be established to take charge of these activities on behalf of the organization.

At this stage, the organization has reached an important turning point. Perhaps a personal vision of capturing, sharing, and using information and knowledge has become an organizational exploration of business potential. With the support of an executive sponsor or champion, it will now be possible to explore specifically how KM will work for the organization. The key actions at this stage, as well as some helpful hints, are summarized below.

The first action is to form a task force for the implementation of the pilots. In forming the KM task force, it is important to use as a base the core group that has already been formed during the advocacy stage of implementation. This task force must also be cross-functional coming from as many different divisions or sections of the organization. The diversity of the task force members is important because it will identify opportunities for pilots and set the standards for methods to be used across all initiatives. Some members of the task force must be high enough in the organizational management ladder in order to facilitate support from top management as well as from the staff directly under them.

The second action is to carefully select the pilots or, if possible, identify current initiatives that could be classified as pilots or modified slightly to constitute a pilot. If there are current initiatives that are already funded and staffed that can be subsumed under the new framework of knowledge management, these should be identified and gradually placed

under the KM framework. Identifying and undertaking too many pilots should be avoided. Three or four pilots are recommended and these pilots should be designed to show demonstrable and relevant results. New strategic pilots or current grassroots efforts already underway can be selected but it is best to have pilots that address issues important to the business. Pilot sponsors with available resources should be selected to help the pilot initiatives along.

The third action is to meet and coordinate with the relevant division or section to identify and allocate the resources to support the pilots. The proposed pilots will never move unless resources, both human and financial, are provided. The resources of highest priority and importance are the skilled and interested staff members who can facilitate the initiative. It is important that these staff members be given authority and permission by management to focus their time and efforts on the proposed pilots. The other needed resources are the information and communication technologies, both hardware and software, to run the pilots and produce tangible and visible results. Some of these infrastructure requirements may already be in existence and can be used without modification. Others may need to be created or purchased while still others may be produced by modifying existing facilities.

Stage 3: Design and Launch KM Initiatives

At this point of project implementation, the task forces have been formed, pilot projects have been identified and designed, and manpower and financial resources have been allocated. The project is now entering the third stage, which involves the successful launching of pilots and gathering of initial results. With the KM pilot projects provided with adequate funding for full implementation, it is necessary, at this stage, to develop methodologies that can be replicated and implement measures to capture and share the lessons learned.

As in the earlier stages, it is important to take note of the presence of certain indicators. If one or more of the following elements or activities are

present or underway, then the organization is ready to proceed to the third stage of KM implementation:

- The pilot projects have been fully conceptualized and designed, including the detailed implementation strategies and procedures.
- Communities of practice have been organized and launched or an interactive KM intranet site or other KM-related initiative is operational.
- The task force team leaders have been enlisted and pilot facilitators and implementers have been trained.
- Pilot measures and indicators have been established and a system for tracking and reporting results has been developed.
- Policies and strategies for learning from the KM initiatives have been created and disseminated to all relevant players.
- Strategies and procedures for expanding the pilot initiatives have been mapped out and desired outcomes from the pilots have been clearly described.

At this third stage the benefits of capturing, sharing, and using information and knowledge have begun to take definite form. This is the time to harness the momentum from the first two stages and focus on details, such as a formal budget. Leadership now needs to see the potential for measurable gains and ROI from successful pilots.

The overall objectives of this stage are to conduct successful pilots, provide tangible evidence of the business value of the knowledge management initiative, and capture lessons learned. To attain these objectives, specific actions will have to be implemented as listed below.

Box 6.3 Phased Implementation of KM at Asian Development Bank

2002

- Reorganization created the Regional and Sustainable Development Department with a mandate to advance the Bank's knowledge agenda internally and externally

2003

- Created a new vice presidency for knowledge management to raise the profile of knowledge activities and improve management oversight
- Launched the Center for Learning, Information, Communication and Knowledge (CLICK) initiative
- Established the Knowledge Management Center

2004

- Taxonomy
- Dumb templates
- Identify operational activities and stages where preparation of "knowledge summary" is considered most valuable
- Corporate taxonomy developed and managed
- Skills and experience databases

2005

- Knowledge management activities integrated in PER exercise
- Improved post-evaluation system of KPS in place
- Develop and apply smart templates for extracting key information from documents produced by staff and consultants, and issue staff instructions
- Adopt a content management system
- First-phase intranet and Internet harmonization

2006

- Introduce personal homepage
- Smart templates for extracting data from information systems and document repositories
- Implementation of content management application

2007

- Full harmonization of intranet and Internet
- Virtual Workplace

Source: ADB, *Knowledge Management in ADB*, <<http://www.adb.org>>, (June 2004).

The first action is to release the money to fund the pilot projects and to assign a KM oversight group, such as a steering committee or cross-unit task force, to reallocate organizational resources, such as money and time, for KM initiatives. The formation of this oversight group must take into consideration the membership of the KM task force formed during the earlier stage of implementation. Nearly all successful KM initiatives, including those at the World Bank, Chevron, HP Consulting, Xerox, and Siemens, reported having formed a KM oversight group and/or task force to provide supervision and support for the reallocation of organizational resources.

The second action is to develop methodologies that can be replicated and to avoid building knowledge collections without an active community to contribute to the effort. There will be need to combine knowledge providers and knowledge users in a seamless community of practitioners and allow these active communities to form voluntarily from natural groupings that span boundaries. It is important to encourage active participation of the entire organization in the KM process with face-to-face networking and community-driven websites. However, as contributions to the KM system proliferate, it is necessary to establish a process for screening, filtering, and validating shared knowledge from the sites before presenting it as organizational knowledge.

The third action is to capture and record lessons learned. The oversight group must discuss lessons learned at regular meetings and provide a common space for sharing the results. To complete this most crucial last step, adequate answers should be provided to questions such as: What made the pilots most successful? Are the results worth investing in for expansion? How can the pilots be expanded?

Once the implementation of the pilot projects are underway and the outputs have been evaluated and assessed, the knowledge management initiative will follow one of the following three possible paths: (a) the KM efforts will be expanded to include new initiatives; (b) the existing initiatives will be further enhanced and improved; or (c) the existing initiatives will maintain the status quo. The rate of growth and the pace to maturity of the knowledge management initiative will depend on which path the initiative will follow.

Stage 4: Expand and Support

By the time the fourth stage is reached, which could take a few years, the organization would have gained quite a bit of expertise on managing knowledge. At this point, the pilots would have been launched and results gathered, some important lessons would have been learned and captured, and the further continuation of the KM journey would have been already decided.

Stage 4 will involve expanding and supporting the KM initiatives throughout the organization. Again it will be necessary to examine the presence of indicators. If some of the following elements are present, then the organization can proceed to launch stage 4 of the KM implementation:

- Other departments in the organization are expressing a desire to actively participate in the KM system as a result of successful pilots.
- The promotion and marketing of KM throughout the entire organization has started to show positive results.
- The entire organization has been made aware of the existence of the KM initiative and the results of the pilot activities.
- An expansion strategy for the KM initiatives is in place, supported by a number of top executives in the organization.
- Adequate resources have been identified for expanding the KM efforts and the finance and budget departments are supportive of these efforts.

The overall objectives of stage 4 are to develop and market an expansion strategy throughout the organization and to effectively manage the growth of the KM system. Once the green light to expand the KM system is obtained, there will be the added pressure of subjecting the system to the same formal evaluation methods and ROI justification that other organizational initiatives are normally subjected to. In order to get through this highly visible stage of the KM implementation, it is important to demonstrate that the system can meet the ROI criteria. This further requires skillful management

of the KM growth since at this point KM is on its way to being considered a necessary organizational competency. This demands the implementation of specific actions.

The first action is to develop an expansion strategy. For this purpose two approaches are available: first, the pilot selection criteria for programs in other departments can be applied; or second, an all-at-once strategy to universally apply KM can be developed. Regardless of the selected approach, appropriate resources, such as a group of core facilitators, communities of practice leaders, a corporate KM group, or a chief knowledge officer, will need to be provided. It will be necessary to ensure that the needed technology is in place and that appropriate user support is available. In addition, there will be need to address possible cultural challenges. For example, there will be need to deal with language issues and the “silo” mentality that may exist among the employees. To address these issues it is essential to obtain active support from senior management.

The second action is to communicate and market the KM strategy. This can be done through a variety of means such as widely disseminating information about the KM initiatives throughout the organization; incorporating KM training into new-hire orientation; training managers and quality coordinators on the principles and practice of knowledge management; holding an open house, knowledge fairs, or regular meetings in connection with the KM initiative and pilots; or advertising the KM initiative on the intranet or through brochures and pamphlets.

The third action is to manage KM growth by, among others, controlling the confusion from the expansion of KM initiatives that normally happens at this stage. One way of achieving this is by providing a transparent and consistent online policy that can keep KM resources organized, consistent, and easily accessible. For example, during the implementation of KM at the World Bank, a technology group spent about 50 percent of its time on technology issues related to KM and in managing information on the internet and external Web.

Box 6.4 Microsoft's Six Quick Ways to Implement Knowledge Management

1. Create a threaded discussion to discuss your KM strategy. A threaded discussion is a public collection of messages connected by topic. You can create threaded discussions in *Outlook* and also on the web with *FrontPage*.
2. Use public folders in *Exchange* to store documents such as your standard operating procedures. Moving them to *Exchange* provides two immediate benefits: they are stored independent of the file system from the user's point of view and they may be replicated for offline use. Workflow processes such as an approval process may be needed to validate information. *Microsoft Site Server* contains an approval process that can be customized to suit special requirements, and has facilities for managing content type and attributes. Approval processes can also be built with *Exchange* and *Outlook*.
3. Build a portal to corporate data with the *Outlook 2000* digital dashboard. Start by downloading the *Digital Dashboard* starter kit form. Portals, such as *Microsoft's Digital Dashboard*, consolidate views of data to simplify navigation and show data from heterogeneous sources side by side.
4. Create incentives for people to document best practices. Offer a reward to the person who submits the most documents and for the most innovative practices.
5. Install *Index Server* and create an index for all your *Office* documents. This will provide intranet users with the fast full text searches of all documents. Even without categorizing the documents, users will find files more easily than in the file system. *Microsoft Site Server* provides a great toolset for managing large communities of users and building personalization into knowledge management solutions.
6. Implement *Outlook Team* folders.

Source: Knowledge Management Implementation, <<http://www.infostrat.com/ISI/Home/default.aspx?pgID=60>>, (accessed 02/12/2004).

To help ensure that the implementation of the KM initiative will remain successful throughout stage 4, it is recommended that the following steps should be taken:

- Establish a central cross-functional KM group that will be tasked to create an expansion strategy; identify the required manpower, financial and material resources; and address any confusion that may arise from rapid growth.
- Obtain or develop from other units of the organization the resources that will be needed to successfully support the expansion of KM initiatives.
- Communicate the KM strategy and the successful results of the pilot projects throughout the organization using vigorous promotional and marketing methods.

In order to advance to the next and final stage, it is crucial at this stage to make a comprehensive assessment of the KM efforts and to identify and address the possible weaknesses in the KM strategy. For example, at this stage of implementation of their KM initiatives, Chevron deployed an internal corporate KM group to undertake a comprehensive assessment and address weaknesses. On the other hand, World Bank engaged an outside team of KM practitioners to undertake the same task while Xerox embedded KM evaluation into its Xerox Management Model assessment process.

Stage 5: Institutionalize Knowledge Management

The final stage involves making knowledge management an integral part of the organizational processes. At this stage, the organization has to redefine its strategies, review its organizational structure, and revisit its performance assessments. Once again, it will be necessary to look for indicators. If one or more of the following conditions exist in the organization, then it is ready to embark on the fifth and final stage of KM implementation:

- The KM system is now directly linked to the business model.
- A number of KM initiatives are widely deployed throughout the organization.

- All executives, managers and employees are trained to use KM tools and technologies.
- The KM strategy is methodically assessed, gaps are being identified, and methods to close the gaps are available.
- A formal support structure is in place to maintain the operation of the KM system.
- An employee compensation and rewards program is in place and aligned with the KM strategy.
- Sharing knowledge is now the norm in the organization and communities of practice are actively operating.

At this final stage of KM implementation, the organization is already aware that KM is a business strategy and not just an elaborate database. It is already convinced that KM must be an integral part of the business model and that it is a necessary organizational competency with unlimited potential to benefit every unit in the organization. In order to fully institutionalize knowledge management the following actions will need to be undertaken.

The first action is to embed KM in the business model. This action is necessary to obtain CEO and senior executive support. At this stage, KM needs to be incorporated into the organization's mission statement, management model, or assessment process. It is expected that at this point there will be increasing financial pressures related to the implementation of the KM system. On the other hand, KM barriers such as "functional silos" will have almost disappeared.

The second action is to realign the organization's structure and budget in accordance with the KM strategy. At this stage, it is essential to reorganize budget and departmental responsibilities to accommodate the wide development of KM as a business strategy. For example, at this stage of implementation, the World Bank shifted KM leadership to operations from the chief information officer, as KM evolved from a database to an all-encompassing strategy. The budget increased from \$13 million to \$57 million in two years and included a formal consolidation of budgets from activities

that had been contributing to KM. At this stage, the organizational structure will, to some extent, naturally evolve to better fit this new way of working.

The third action is to constantly monitor and evaluate the health of the KM system. To ensure that the KM systems stay healthy, it is necessary to take the pulse of the KM initiatives at regular intervals. For this purpose, an external KM evaluation panel may be employed, or an internal KM maturity evaluation may be conducted, or a KM feedback on employee surveys may be included. Based on the results of these evaluations and surveys, corrective actions and measures should be immediately undertaken.

The fourth action is to align performance evaluation and rewards system with the KM strategy. In most organizations, performance appraisals are the basis for promotion and pay. It is necessary at this point to include KM standards with performance appraisals and reviews in order to convey to all employees a dramatic message about its important role in the life of the organization. In addition, recognition awards may be given to people who exemplify the ideals of the KM strategy.

The fifth action is to balance the organizational KM framework with local control. Implementing this action will require linking organization-wide business goals to local KM activities to provide necessary consistency. At the same time, the organization must allow individual groups in various divisions to develop KM resources that meet their specific local needs. In other words, the organization must allow business needs to drive the KM strategy, policy and implementation.

The sixth and final action is to continue the KM journey. As the organization becomes a true knowledge-sharing enterprise, the demand for knowledge processes will continue to increase. At the same time, there should be measurable savings of time and money and tangible improvement in business competitiveness resulting from the KM initiatives. In order to sustain robust KM implementation, it is crucial to maintain senior leadership support to help the organization keep pace with demand.

In the final analysis, the knowledge organization will find that the critical success factors for keeping the KM spirit alive include the following: the ability to maintain the full and active support of a committed and involved leadership; the presence of a motivating and consistent vision to make the organization a learning one; the application of an evolutionary KM development process rather than a “big bang” approach; the care taken to ensure that KM initiatives are started only when and where people are ready; the ability to identify role models; and the use of effective means to communicate constantly and effectively about KM initiatives and business needs.

Box 6.5 The Human Element: KM’s Secret Ingredient

A KM initiative that overemphasizes aggregation and indexing can overlook the human side of knowledge management. Central to understanding knowledge in human terms is identifying knowledge that is truly shareable by people. Shareable knowledge - knowledge that people can reuse and apply to novel situations - isn’t contained wholly in the documents and email messages of an organization. In fact, unless a stand-alone document is specifically produced to serve a knowledge-sharing purpose, it typically represents only part of the understanding required to apply that document to a business problem. For example, stand-alone documents often provide only clues about how a colleague tackled a business problem. Merely providing access to documents through a KM system creates an experience much like a typical archeological exhibit in a museum that displays ancient artifacts with basic information about their age and composition but leaves visitors to rely on their imaginations to draw conclusions about the application and significance of the artifacts.

Box 6.5 The Human Element: KM's Secret Ingredient

A similar strategy leads to KM applications that resemble warehouses or repositories, which place a heavy burden on the end user to find relevant expertise and to determine how knowledge should be applied. To minimize that impact on productivity and to maximize the return on KM investment, KM applications must make an effort to capture the context of such business artifacts as documents, charts, videos, and so forth. To achieve this, KM as a discipline must shift its emphasis from aggregating artifacts to cultivating expertise. Currently, this shift in emphasis is made up of a few key misconceptions about KM implementation. By examining these misconceptions and discussing strategies to humanize how knowledge is represented, organizations can realize knowledge management objectives that improve productivity, increase organizational competency, and foster innovative thinking.

The big tradeoff

Knowledge managers face an investment choice as they consider the development of KM applications: technology vs. content. Obviously, you need both, but too often the emphasis is on technology. Consider the alternative approach: a simpler KM application that provides access to a lower volume of higher quality content, transformed and tailored to the needs of its audience.

Trade in a portion of your investment in sophisticated indexing and search technology for the resources and time required to interview experts in your organization on an ongoing basis. Ultimately, knowledge management needs to be more than facilitating knowledge management, which is what happens when you implement a self-service portal without addressing content issues. KM efforts need to be about managing (or leveraging) knowledge, which can only be achieved by paying attention to the source of knowledge - people.

Adopt a technology-focused approach to KM, and you're likely to build KM systems that are easy for the IT department to install and maintain. Adopt a human-focused approach and you're likely to build KM systems that make it easier for your knowledge workers to capture and share knowledge. For most, the latter is a much wiser investment.

Source: American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), "The Human Element: KM's Secret Ingredient", <<http://www.learningcircuits.org/2001/ded2001/visioncor.html>>, (accessed 24/09/2004).