Federal Knowledge Management Initiative Committee

Federal KM Working Group

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Is “American know-how” disappearing from the Federal Government?

In recent years, Federal failures to share knowledge have resulted in disasters, preventable by a “word to the wise.”\* The Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, 9/11 and the impaired response to Hurricane Katrina all could have been averted. Government must improve its ability to communicate, to share and utilize information and knowledge. The **Federal Knowledge Management Working Group**, over 700 Federal employees and contractors, have mounted a campaign to restore “American know-how” to the Federal Government by instilling knowledge management in Government.

**Knowledge Management (KM)**, a discipline that uses management tools along with culture change, has worked in the private sector. Some agencies have succeeded at KM, including **NASA** and the **US Army**, but there is **no formal Federal program**. There is no policy, standards or direction. There is no central clearinghouse of lessons learned or “what works.” So Agencies and Departments must spend scarce consulting dollars to find their own way, “reinventing the wheel” in a wasteful duplication of effort. To fill this leadership void, the Federal KM Working Group presents an **Action Plan** calling for formal KM governance, with these goals:

1. **Establish a Federal Knowledge Management Center** to serve as a centralized resource for agencies in carrying out their own knowledge management efforts. The center will provide consulting and serve as a clearinghouse of Federal KM resources, such as software, expertise, and lessons learned.
2. **Establish a Federal CKO Position.** This person, the face of Federal KM, will coordinate with Federal departments to explain the benefits of sharing and collaborating across agencies.
3. **KM Governance.** Enact Government-wide Policies, Standards and Practices that specify the general direction and intent of Federal knowledge sharing efforts.
4. **Awareness Campaign and Web Presence.** To communicate the serious need for KM and distribute content “from those who know to those who need to know.”
5. **Build a Knowledge Sharing Culture in the Federal Government.** Change the Federal mindset from “need to know” to “need to share.”
6. **Train Federal Workers in KM Skills.** By learning KM competencies, they will also acquire a deeper understanding and appreciation of the value of knowledge sharing.
7. **Meet the Challenges of the Retirement “Age Wave.”** KM includes “knowledge retention,” an effort to reduce “brain drain” due to thousands of retiring baby boomers. The other side of the coin, today, is the Federal challenge in recruiting Generation Y employees, who have been raised on Web 2.0 and social computing tools.

\***An Epidemic of Avoidable Error.** The Space Shuttle Challenger: NASA engineers already knew the dangers of freezing the O-ring that failed, leading to the loss of the Space Shuttle Challenger. Hurricane Katrina: The Federal response to Hurricane Katrina was marked by now infamous failures to communicate. 9/11 attacks: The FBI was already investigating foreign students learning to fly, but not land, large jet planes.

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