KM4Dev Community Notes

In this section of the KM4D Journal*, members of KM4Dev reflect on past discussions. In this Issue, Michael Gruber, Knowledge Networking Programme Manager at the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), looks back at the discussion thread he started on where to best locate knowledge networking responsibility within an organization.*

Where to put knowledge networking?

Michael Gruber

The question of where to place knowledge management (KM) functions and responsibilities within an organization is not always easy to answer. Back in February 2005, I started a mini survey on KM4Dev to find out how this issue is dealt with in other organizations in order to better inform our decision here at UNOPS.

The question
The question was to name one of the following departments as the best home for KM and content management:

- Directorate/Executive Office (Chief Executive Officer and Deputy)
- Legal
- Finance (Chief Financial Officer)
- Human Resources
- Procurement
- Information and communication technologies (ICT)s/information technology (IT) (Chief Information Officer)
- External Relations/Public relations/Marketing
- Operations
- Sales

Responses
Altogether 24 responses were received. The responses could be grouped in three different groups:

1. The first group (2 responses) generally considered 'put it into IT and then it gets done'. These responses emphasize the 'can do' mentality of IT and stress the importance of the IT systems in the backend of any KM project.
2. 'Put all KM activities to the place where the knowledge is' is the motto of the second group (7 responses) of responses favouring sales, any other part of the operations and marketing as ideal place for knowledge networking activities.
3. The last group (8 responses) wants to place knowledge networking in Directorate/Executive Office to ensure that corporate strategy is influenced accordingly.

Gruber, M. 2005. Community Notes: Where to put knowledge networking?
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My reflections

The discussion showed that there is no ideal department and that the place for KM is determined by a number of different factors. There are advantages and disadvantage to any location. Individual assessment of the situation is needed to balance IT capabilities, business needs and strategic requirements. Generally speaking, colleagues warned not to over-emphasize IT since IT is important to set up the systems but not for everything. A respondent wrote:

> *One location we worked hard to avoid is the Information Management-IT Branch, for fear of being assimilated with knowledge capture and technology.*

This is because users need intense training and perfectly personalized customization in order to work effectively with the systems.

Thus knowledge networking is much more than installing a knowledge base as it involves people. It became clearer over time that one of the best solutions might be to place knowledge networking in the Directorate/Executive Office, installing a Steering Committee that supervises the work of the Knowledge Networking Programme to ensure that all aspects of networking are covered and no department decides solely on its own.

It was definitely useful for me to get the community's feedback on this question. I was really impressed by the number and depth of the replies I received on the above subject, both via the list and directly.

About the author

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