KM4D Journal, Volume 1, No. 2, September 2005

Approaches to promote knowledge sharing in international development organisations

Guest Editors: Allison Hewlitt, Doug Horton, Nathan Russell and Simone Staiger-Rivas with Lucie Lamoureux

Editorial
Approaches to promote knowledge sharing in international development organisations

*Allison Hewlitt, Doug Horton, Nathan Russell and Simone Staiger-Rivas
with Lucie Lamoureux*

The Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community of practice (www.km4dev.org) has recently launched this peer-supported e-journal in the field of knowledge sharing for development. Whilst the journal's first issue was about tools and methods to support communities in development, this second one deals with a*pproaches to promote knowledge sharing in international development organisations*.

The decision of our group to guest edit this issue grew out of our involvement in the Knowledge Sharing (KS) Project of the Information and Communication Technology – Knowledge Management (ICT-KM) Programme of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Through that experience we became excited about the potential of KS to help international development organisations and their partners shift to a more demand-driven, interactive and collaborative approach that centres on social learning, innovation and capacity development.

We have come to believe strongly in the benefits of communities like KM4Dev, and we are happy to join in its effort to create spaces for sharing knowledge on KS.

About this issue

International development organisations and their national and local partners are creating a wealth of knowledge that can help the poor build sustainable livelihoods. However, this knowledge, for one reason or another, is often retained by individuals and groups and is not widely shared within or among organisations.

A great deal has been written about approaches to promote KS and KM in general within the private sector – particularly in multinational corporations. In contrast, there is much less documentation on approaches that have been developed or adapted and applied in public and non-governmental organisations. This issue of KM4Dev presents papers on experiences with KS in international development organisations, with the goals of highlighting strategies and approaches used to foster KS in diverse settings and presenting their results.

This issue contains three papers, four case studies, an interview and a story. The article by Jaap Pels and Frank Odhiambo describes how KM is being introduced to project partners in Africa and India through a distance-learning module. It provides

the rationale for the module – to transform information on KM into action - and
describes the main activities within the module.

Kim Henderson shares practical experiences that the United Natons Development
Programme (UNDP) has gained in establishing and implementing communities of
practice, or CoPs (referred to as knowledge networks within the organisation). It
describes how knowledge networks have contributed to cultural change within UNDP.

Somya Joshi, Geoff Walsham, Michael Barrett and P. Fryatt offer a critical review of
the benefits and limitations of global knowledge strategies and consider the
implications for new ways of working at the World Health Organisation.

In our case study, we discuss the opportunities offered by major meetings for
introducing KS attitudes, methods and tools into development organisations. This
paper draws on our experiences with two pilot initiatives to introduce KS into major
meetings in research centres affiliated with the CGIAR. It outlines the approaches
employed, the challenges faced and the results to date. The value of 'yellow pages', or
'know-who directories', has been widely discussed among KM practitioners. In a case
study, Mark Winslow provides insights into how potential users of such a tool
evaluated it in a large, complex and highly dispersed organisation, the CGIAR.

Daan Boom leads us through the process of establishing a KM framework at the
Asian Development Bank (ADB) as a crucial part of its effort to become a learning
organisation. Andreas Jensen from Danida introduces us to Train4dev, which provides
a framework for discussion of KS by donor agency staff involved in the transfer of
best practices or in training and competence development. The case study takes stock
of this initiative and outline trends and ways forward.

Steve Song reviews an ODI (Overseas Development Institute) working paper by Ben
Ramalingam, which synthesizes research on knowledge and learning in the
development sector. The working paper also identifies key questions for examining
related strategies and systems in development agencies.

An *Interview* with Phineas Kadenge of the African Capacity Building Foundation
(ACBF) considers its KS strategy and looks at how the ACBF introduced KM into its
medium-term plan and at the focus of this strategy.

Finally, in *Community Notes,* Mark Steinlin summarises a recent discussion of the
KM4Dev community on designing knowledge sharing-friendly office spaces.

As guest editors, we hope you enjoy this issue of the journal, and we look forward to
the many fruitful discussions that will be stimulated by it.

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Design of and practical experiences with the Learn@WELL knowledge management module

Jaap Pels and Frank Odhiambo

Introduction

Learn@WELL (Water and Environmental Health in Developing Countries), also
known as WELL, is a resource centre network that promotes environmental health
and well-being in developing countries. Funded by the UK's Department for
International Development (DFID), the network is managed by the Water,
Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC), UK; International Water and
Sanitation Centre (IRC), The Netherlands; and the London School of Hygiene and
Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), UK, in collaboration with Southern network partners.
WELL's six Southern partners are the African Medical and Research Foundation
(AMREF), Kenya Country Office; Institute of Water and Sanitation Development
(IWSD), Zimbabwe; Centre for Health and Population Research (ICDDR),
Bangladesh; Network for Water and Sanitation (NETWAS), Kenya; Training
Research and Networking for Development (TREND), Ghana; and Social and
Economic Unit Foundation (SEUF), India.

One of WELL's objectives is to strengthen the network through capacity building so
that it may better provide services. This is accomplished through a series of modules
designated Learn@WELL, one of which deals with knowledge management (KM).
Other Learn@WELL modules focus on analytical skills, consultancies, writing and
dissemination. A 'know-your-client' module is in preparation. All these modules
have been developed in consultation with network partners so that the capacity
building meets their needs.

In this article we elaborate on the design of and experiences with the KM module.
First, we introduce the KM concept and describe how it is being introduced to WELL
partners through the Learn@WELL KM module. We provide a rationale for the
module and describe the main activities within it. We also present KM plans
developed by WELL partners.

Knowledge management

Knowledge management originated in management science. Perhaps, the strongest
influence was Nonaka's book *The knowledge creating company*, with its now famous
distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). The
KM movement gained momentum with the idea of sharing best practices through
intranet software and with the attempts of Accenture (ex-Andersen), Ernst and Young,
British Petroleum, Amoco and others to do so. KM has become a byword in the

development sector only since 1996, when the World Bank initiated its transformation into a 'knowledge bank' (Carayannis and Laporte 2002), although many development organisations claim to have practised KM before it was labelled as such.

KM aims to facilitate the supply of the right knowledge to the right person at the right time. This is something most organisations aspire to, so it was not surprising that all six WELL partners requested a module on KM within Learn@WELL. A number of factors have driven this widespread interest in KM in recent years. First, the development of electronic media has offered new tools, including e-mail, the Internet and intranets, and these have made it easier to find, accumulate and transfer information within an organisation. For an overview of KM applications and enabling technologies see Binney 2001. Second, in the development sector, many staff spend a large proportion of their time outside the office on field trips. As a result, the office environment has been extended and no longer exists only at one's desk. Third, the job for life is no longer a given. It is not unusual to work an average of three years for an organisation and move on.

So, why do these factors make KM necessary? KM refers to the effective use of an organisation's knowledge. This knowledge is found largely in people (Sveiby 2001). Thus, printed documents and databases offer only limited access to the total knowledge resource of any organisation. Given the three factors outlined above, it is increasingly difficult to access knowledge because the people who have it are either unavailable, have left the organisation or do not package and store information in such a way that other people can find and digest it, thereby creating knowledge appropriate to their context. Knowledge has become a transient asset. In this context, development organisations now seek to employ KM in their fight to retain their comparative and strategic advantages, which are under threat in this new competitive environment. In other words, development organisations are using KM to achieve their goals through a structured and inclusive approach.

Information management versus KM

We have discussed the origins of KM and explained why it has become important. But we have not defined the term. There are numerous definitions of KM and different understandings of its scope. KM is frequently and mistakenly equated with information management (IM). Definitions such as 'methods and tools for capturing, storing, organising and making accessible knowledge and expertise within and across communities' only contribute to the confusion (Walker and Millington 2003). There is an important distinction between the two concepts. In information management, one is concerned with documents and in particular with information access, technical handling, security, storage and delivery. KM, on the other hand, is concerned with the human aspect of information utilisation. As such, KM is about developing systems and processes that leverage information and knowledge in an organisation to promote originality, creativity, intelligence and learning. According to Ackoff, the content of the human mind can be classified into five categories (1989):

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Category	Provides answers to
Data: symbols	
Information: data that are processed to be useful	'who', 'what', 'where' and 'when' questions
Knowledge: application of data and information	'how' questions
Understanding: appreciation of 'why'	'why' questions
Wisdom: evaluated understanding	

The above is an elaboration of the frequently encountered data-information-knowledge continuum. To avoid academic discussion of what knowledge is, we have defined it for the purposes of the module as 'information in use'. In this way we bring together two main interpretations of KM, with one emphasising 'information' and the other human resource management (HRM) or 'capacity to act' or 'use'. KM is about knowledge-friendly organisations (KFO), that is, improving knowledge-sharing mechanisms and practices in organisations or networks (Weggeman 2000). In other words, KM is concerned with establishing environments for people to create, leverage and share knowledge (Sveiby 2001)

Communities of practice

Most people in an organisation obtain their information from face-to-face meetings or in conversation. What is often lacking in an organisation, though, is a supportive culture that encourages openness and knowledge sharing. It is a challenge to get professionals with a common interest to interact, share, create and update information where this is not the norm. Perhaps for that reason, and because it is relatively easy, many organisations centre their KM strategy on building information repositories. In fact, a clear indicator of a non-supportive knowledge sharing culture is a decision to put the IT department in charge of KM. Whilst repositories have their place, they can never be a substitute for what is contained in people's heads. Knowledge is context-related, re-created or re-invented. Communities of practice (CoPs) are therefore an essential strategy for any KM programme. CoPs are groups of people who share an interest and interact to learn with and from one other. This goal of learning marks the difference between CoPs and pure socialising. The more colleagues interact, the less time they will spend re-inventing the wheel. Several studies show that 20-30% of an organisation's resources are wasted reinventing the wheel (Boshyk 2000). KM should, therefore, be people-oriented and technology-enabled but not technology-driven.

Scales of KM

KM can be practised at three levels. First is the personal level, at which individuals acquire and create knowledge, manage documents, share learning and collaborate with colleagues (Richardson 2001). Ideally, each and every person in an organisation should take responsibility for what he or she knows, does not know or wants to know. This makes it easier to implement KM initiatives at the organisational level, with a focus on creating, capturing and re-using knowledge to attain the organisation's objectives (Weggeman 2000; Sveiby 2001). We stress once again that efforts at this

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level should be directed at establishing a culture of openness and knowledge sharing
as well as encouraging face-to-face and interpersonal communications
(http://www.eknowledgecenter.com). Finally, KM can take the form of networking, as
in WELL. At this level, staff come together to leverage information, skills and
experience, sharing among themselves to achieve common objectives. For this to
succeed, solid communications and regular (exposure) visits between partners are
crucial.

The learn@WELL KM distance learning module

In July 2002, WELL partners expressed interest in having a KM module under
Learn@WELL. Consequently, the authors were designated to develop the module,
with IRC taking the lead. Following e-mail communication and a face-to-face
meeting, we adopted Weggeman's 'knowledge value chain' as the main conceptual
tool for the module (Weggeman 2002). Our aim in doing so was to give the module a
practical rather than theoretical orientation.

The model consists of a matrix (see Figure 1), which provides a framework for
analysing activities in relation to a given KM goal. The matrix consists of knowledge
processes: creation, sharing, application and evaluation. Each of these is analysed
using McKinsey's 7S framework (Peters and Waterman 1995), which includes the
following variables: strategic considerations, management style, organisational culture
(shared values), organisational structure, personnel (HRM, staff) and ICT-related
issues (systems). It is a powerful model that provides an easy-to-use framework for
analysing KM goals or objectives. Experience shows that translating an organisation's
vision and mission into practical organisational goals can be a challenge. When this
model is applied, all crucial questions for formulating a practical goal are brought to
the table. This includes questions without answers or with political overtones. For
example, the model considers management style as a key variable. Internal political
considerations are often a key factor influencing management style.

In terms of delivery, the KM module is different from its sister modules.
Learn@WELL modules usually consist of 'books'. A typical module book introduces
concepts, uses case studies and includes a number of exercises. The KM module, in
contrast, is built around a series of practical activities, with the authors providing
support as mentors. For example, the first activity within the module is to develop a
basic plan stating the organisation's KM goals. Our reason for adopting this approach
is that KM is essentially a personal activity, focused on improving knowledge-
sharing mechanisms and practices in organisations and networks. It would, therefore,
be inappropriate to design a one-size-fits-all module. We believe that a module aimed
at structured self-development through the implementation of a KM plan better
satisfies each organisation's unique needs.

A second feature of module delivery is that it involves a mentoring (as opposed to a
lecturing) approach, founded on the understanding that partners signing up for the
module take full ownership of its implementation. So, for example, the partner
organisation rather than the mentors formulate the goal for the organisation's KM

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plan. Likewise, all resources for implementing the plan are underwritten by the partner. The mentors simply initiate, advise and instigate in accomplishing the tasks listed below:

- Introduce KM as a concept and its underlying principles (initiating);
- Provide assistance in developing KM plans (advisory);
- Share lessons learned from WEDC's and IRC's own experiences in this area (advisory);
- Facilitate local workshops hosted by the partners (instigating); and
- Provide guidance on appropriate literature (instigating).

Figure 1. Weggeman's knowledge value chain model.

Mission		Create		Share	Apply	Evaluate
Vision	Needed	Available	Develop			
Goals	Knowledge			Knowledge		
Strategy						
Culture						
Management style						
Personnel						
Structure						
Systems				Web site		

Source: Weggeman 2000

The model used in the Learn@WELL KM distance-learning module is the knowledge value chain, taken from Weggeman (2000). It consists of four main steps to achieve operational goals (for example, running an inquiry service in water supply and sanitation), as shown in the top shaded rows of the table: create (what is needed, what is available and what knowledge needs to be developed), share, apply and evaluate. This is also referred to as the 'knowledge lifecycle'. The lifecycle is fed by operational goal(s) flowing from the organisation's mission and vision (non-shaded portion of the first column).

The **processes** are planned in detail, using McKinsey's 7S Framework. These are referred to as organisational design variables (ODV) and are listed in the shaded portion of the first column:

- Strategy: direction and scope of the organisation over the long term;
- Shared values: culture, values and beliefs of the organisation, which, ultimately, guide employees towards 'valued' behaviour;
- Style: management style; refers to the leadership approach of top management and the organisation's overall operating approach;
- Personnel: capabilities and competencies within the organisation; what it does best; the organisation's human resources and how they are developed, trained and motivated;
- Structure: basic setup of the organisation, its departments, reporting lines, areas of expertise, skills and responsibilities and how they inter-relate; and
- Systems: formal and informal procedures that govern everyday activity, covering everything from management information systems, through to systems at the point of contact with the customer.

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KM is about organising the processes in such a way that they contribute directly to the competitive edge of an organisation. From the model, it is clear that information technology is not the only means to improve KM. A Web site (see Figure 1), for example, is just a system to share knowledge and information. Strategy, structure and systems are easily influenced. The other organisational design variables – skills, shared values, staff and style – are far more difficult to change.

Module activities

The foregoing gives background to the content of the module. In this section, we have a look at some of the activities under the module.

The first step is to decide the focus of the KM initiative. Under the module, it is envisaged that the KM initiative will be implemented over time in blocks. The mentors support the implementation of the initial stage of the KM initiative, based on a KM plan. It is hoped that, by going through the process of developing and implementing a plan, the partner's KM team will learn how it is done and go ahead to implement the balance of the initiative.

One key activity is to create a personal KM map of one's own information behaviour (skills, experience and attitudes) (see Figure 2). Data to construct the map are collected through a questionnaire, which can be modified, where necessary, to suit each organisation. The map addresses KM at the personal scale. The main questions are:

1. Who are you working with?
2. How do you obtain the information you need?
3. How do you share information and knowledge?
4. How do you document what knowledge you have?
5. What do you need to learn?

The aim of personal mapping is to get people to think and talk about their information behaviour in a systematic way and to take steps to modify it, where necessary. Group discussions of individual KM maps provide opportunities for suggestions to be made about how individuals may modify their information behaviour to contribute to effective knowledge sharing within the organisation. Personal knowledge mapping need not be tied to a KM initiative. It could be adopted as a function of the organisation's human resource department, for example.

Figure 2: Sample data for personal knowledge mapping.

Who are you working with?	
Aids control society	Government departments
Community groups	Local self-government bodies
Different government departments	Other NGOs
Donor agencies	Professional and religious institutions
Educational institutions	School children
External agencies	Women groups

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How do you share information and knowledge?	
Face-to-face discussion	Staff meetings
Newsletters	Telephone conversations
Project reports	Trainings
Reviews	Web site

What do I need to learn?	Self-assessment by staff: 1 = no 10 = yes			
Source	Staff 1	Staff 2	Staff 3	Staff 4
Computer use	10	9	-	9
Writing skills	10	8	3	9
Training skills	8	5	5	7
Communication skills	8	8	5	8
Language skills	10	10	5	10
Attitude to learn, write and share	10	7	2	8

Another activity involves constructing an organisational profile (see Figure 3).
Individual staff members fill in a standard questionnaire designed to build a KM
profile of the organisation. The answers to the questionnaire are discussed and
combined to provide an overall profile. This final profile should demonstrate the
degree to which the organisation's KM initiative (if one exists or is labelled as such)
is understood. This activity addresses KM at the organisational scale.

Figure 3: Questions for developing an organisational profile

Mission of the organisation or mission statement
Vision of the organisation or vision statement
Strategy of the organisation
Organisational goals
Who is the KM champion in the organisation?
How many staff work directly on KM?
What are the key sources of inspiration that guided your KM strategy? Who influenced you?
Does the KM strategy have links to other strategic initiatives within the organisation? Describe.
What are your indicators of success?
General narrative description of the KM initiative at the organisation.
An anecdote.

Source: Selection adapted from organisational KM profiles at http://www.km4dev.org

The KM scan[1]

The purpose of a KM scan is to provide a baseline assessment of staff perceptions
with regard to the position of KM in the organisation. The scan we use for the module
consists of a series of four questionnaires. The first (how good are we at KM?)
examines perceptions of processes in the knowledge value chain referred to above:
creation, sharing, application and evaluation. A second questionnaire (how
knowledge-oriented is our organisation?) deals with issues around the 7S framework,
which includes the following: KM strategy, management style, culture, systems,

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[1] For a free trial of the KM scan, see http://www.provenbenchmark.nl/custom-scans/kmscans

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structure and personnel. The remaining two questionnaires address issues having to do with the importance of knowledge in the organisation and the organisation's vision and mission. It is a good idea for as many staff as possible to take the KM scan, as this leads to more representative results.

The KM scan is based on the KM model by Weggeman. Figure 4 gives a sample of the results of a KM scan.

Figure 4. Sample results of a KM scan, based on the Weggeman model.

	Knowledge needed	Knowledge available	Develop / acquire knowledge	Share knowledge	Apply knowledge	Evaluate knowledge
Overall average	66					
Maximum	71	72	70	71	70	62
Minimum	66	66	64	65	65	57
Strategy	66	66	64	65	65	57
Culture	68	69	67	68	67	60
Management style	70	70	68	70	69	61
Personnel	71	**72**	70	71	70	62
Structure	66	67	65	66	65	58
Systems	66	67	65	66	65	58

The above table shows the outcome of the KM scan on a scale of 10 to 100. The figures are a straightforward average of all answers (on a scale of 1 to 5, in which 1 is poorly and 5 excellent) by individual staff. The questionnaire is filled out anonymously. A more elaborate analysis could filter out deviant answers. The weakest links, as perceived by participants in the example above, are evaluation, strategy, systems and structure. After interventions in these aspects, the KM scan could be repeated to measure effect.

Using the KM module

As noted above in the discussion of 'module activities', KM should be introduced to an organisation in an incremental fashion and in short bursts. There are three advantages to this approach. First, the benefits of a KM initiative are seen more quickly if the initiative is implemented block by block, with each block designed to show benefits (quick wins, low-hanging fruit[2]). This makes it easier to gain commitment for further action. Second, KM is about people. It is simpler to introduce change in small steps rather than cause a major upheaval within the organisation.

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[2] Sveiby 2001. Because KM is so diverse, so are the KM approaches proposed. Some common themes emerge: enthusiastic champions, building on existing core competence, addressing an urgent strategic imperative, firm commitment from the top and early quick wins to neutralise the nay-sayers.

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Third, implementing the initiative in blocks avoids the danger of an ambitious plan getting lost in generalities, with the result that nothing happens and the plan ends up in a drawer.

Thus, the KM initiative should be based on modest and achievable KM plans. The knowledge value chain described earlier provides a framework for developing the plans. Following are examples of KM plans developed using the WELL KM module. The main characteristic of these plans is that they are modest. Our advice is to keep the plans simple to increase the chance of their being implemented.

KM plan – SEUF
SEUF (http://www.seuf.org and http://seuf.watsan.net) has a coordinating office, four regional offices, one technical support wing and seven project offices. Its ambition is to become a leading resource centre in the region. Partners identified a lack of information sharing in SEUF as a major obstacle to achieving this ambition, and they have developed two plans to address this problem.

KM Plan 1: Information sharing through the SEUF Web site:

- Use skills gained through the Learn@WELL writing skills module to provide quality material for the Web site;
- Repackage existing outputs to serve different online target groups; and
- Develop an inventory of staff skills, attitudes and experiences and use these to allocate responsibilities for Web site management and to inform organisational human resources needs.

KM Plan 2: Internal information sharing through improved project documentation:

- Make results and experiences from projects more explicit, thereby creating leverage for information sharing;
- Document proposal development;
- Create central project files; and
- Document project activities and outcomes.

These two plans were developed during a workshop attended by staff from two SEUF regional offices. Some workshop participants in turn facilitated a second workshop with colleagues in the four remaining regional offices to introduce them to KM concepts and acquaint them with the KM plans developed. Implementation of these plans will cut across all six regional offices. Meanwhile, SEUF has plans to change its Web architecture and develop an intranet under an initiative of IRC and Resource Centre Development (RCD). These two measures dovetail with the KM plans developed. When implemented, they will represent a major step towards SEUF becoming a resource centre. Additional KM plans were drawn up in the second workshop to complement the two indicated above.

KM plan - AMREF
AMREF is a large organisation (http://www.amref.org/departments.htm). The module was used at the AMREF Kenya country office (KCO) in the water and health department. The workshop was also attended by some staff from AMREF

headquarters, also based in Nairobi, Kenya. It was revealed at this workshop that the headquarters had a KM initiative, which had been under way for a while. After the workshop, the KM scan was administered to 35 respondents drawn from a heterogeneous group of technical staff at KCO, comprising members of the senior management team, programme managers and zonal coordinators, project managers and officers who had been selected to participate in the 18th KCO Programme Meeting. They also compiled their personal knowledge maps, as described above. These maps revealed that information in KCO is shared using various methods. Most respondents said they use reports and electronic communication as a way of sharing information. Other methods include newsletters; consultative meetings; verbal communication in workshops, seminars and conferences; and published materials.

Various obstacles to information sharing were identified. These were time constraints (24%), poor feedback on information shared (15%), limited access to ICTs (15%), poor understanding of audience information needs (15%) and inadequate funds to support information dissemination (15%). Other issues identified included a lack of a reading culture by staff, lack of relevant skills related to information sharing, lack of moral support, limited opportunities to share information and lack of a strategic focus on information sharing.

KM plan - IWSD
The aim of the KM workshop at IWSD (http://www.iwsd.co.zw) was to provide an understanding of how KM can be used to leverage corporate knowledge to meet the organisation's vision, mission, and goals. A major exercise in the workshop was the development of KM plans. Fortunately, high workshop attendance by IWSD staff made it possible to develop four KM plans. The topics of each plan are detailed in the box below.

Figure 5: IWSD's KM plans

Thematic groups	Strategic issues/KM plan
Research	Resource generation/acquisition
Information and marketing	Positioning/branding IWSD, profile raising, Web presence
Technical/training	Product development, new work
Administration and finance	Resource allocation/transparency/compliance

Our interpretation of these topics reveals a common thread in the four proposed KM plans; they all address key strategic issues for the organisation. Our interpretation of these issues is detailed in the second column of the box above under the heading 'strategic issues'.

Our observations on the module

KM, as has been stated, involves organisational change. It is well known that organisational change often meets with resistance. Fortunately, this has not been the case within the organisations we have worked with. This may be in part because the idea for the KM module came from the partners themselves. They also took responsibility for organising the workshop and creating its terms of reference.

Consequently, even though partners did not fully understand exactly what the module
would entail, they have shown a commitment to seeing it through (organising a
workshop, completing the exercises mentioned above, drawing up KM plans, taking
ownership and implementing plans). Thus, partners had pre-established incentives to
adopt the KM approach, and there was no need to put in place an incentive structure.
Nonetheless, we have emphasized in the workshops some of the benefits that accrue
from implementing a KM plan, together with commitment from management, to
provide further incentives. In Figure 6, we offer our assessment of the situation of the
three organisations, based on the five lessons from pioneers, as mentioned by Sveiby.

Figure 6: Assessment based on lessons from the pioneers (Sveiby 2001)

Lesson	SEUF	AMREF	IWSD
Enthusiastic champions	Yes	Yes	Yes
Build on existing core competence	Yes	No/HQ yes	Yes
Address an urgent strategic imperative	Yes	No	Yes
Firm commitment from the top	Yes	Yes/HQ?	Yes
Early quick wins neutralise the nay-sayers	N.A.	No	N.A.

The delivery of the module has had both problems and successes. First, a lack of
resources meant that there was no opportunity for face-to-face meetings. A direct
consequence of this was that it was inordinately difficult to effectively communicate
KM concepts by e-mail. This led to a situation in which, for several months, little
progress was achieved. In the event, a financial allocation for workshops was made
available in the 2003/2004 financial year. These workshops provided a forum for
communicating KM concepts, learning through exercises, undertaking the KM scan
and the creation of KM plans.

Second, although the workshops have largely been successful, it was inevitable that
the momentum achieved during workshops would diminish. To counter this tendency,
we have made the case for continued support to the organisations in implementing
their KM plans. Preliminary indications are that this strategy has been successful.

On the positive side, introducing the module and KM concepts through workshops has
been very successful. This is attributable to facilitators being on hand to explain the
KM value chain and answer questions relating to the matrix. The workshops have also
been an ideal forum for explaining the logic underlying our approach as well as an
opportunity for us to gain an understanding of both individuals' and organisations'
expectations of the KM module.

Allowing each organisation to determine its KM priorities proved effective. This was
possible because the KM value chain, our main planning tool, is flexible and
applicable to any situation. As a result, our role as facilitators in the workshops has
been simply to explain what a KM approach is and to give examples of situations that
are amenable to KM solutions. A vast number of examples are available in the
literature and have been categorised by Binney (2001). It is easy to choose and adapt
these. The discussion of examples provides a great opportunity to discuss the 'not-
invented-here' syndrome. Participants are then in a position to identify situations and
problems in their own working environments, which they can then analyse using the
value chain, and to plan an appropriate intervention to improve the situation.

Assessing progress

As far as we know, an approach like that described here has not been tried before. We were keen therefore to have a number of indicators in place to monitor progress in the implementation of KM plans. For this purpose, we decided to use milestones in the initial round of the module, working with AMREF and SEUF. However, our monitoring revealed that this in itself was not enough, as the agreed milestones were not tied to a timeline. As a result, in the third round of the module, working with IWSD, we changed the planning process to link milestones to a timeline. We hope this facilitates an objective assessment of progress in the implementation of IWSD's KM plans. At present, IWSD have not reached any of their milestones, so we cannot report how well this is working.

A second indicator we hope to use, albeit in the medium term, is the KM scan previously referred to. Each organisation undertook a baseline scan at the start of the module. We intend that each partner organisation will repeat the scan a year after they start implementing their plans. The results of this second scan should show improvement in staff perceptions of the organisation's position with respect to KM. This will serve as a triangulating tool for assessing progress.

The module delivers concepts (what is KM), tools (personal knowledge map, organisational profile and KM scan), examples and a structured approach (the Weggeman knowledge value chain) to determine which processes need improvement to achieve organisational goals, based on the organisation's vision and mission. Important signs of progress are an awareness that KM is more than knowledge sharing, that KM differs from IM, that KM may entail IT and, most important, that KM starts in the personal realm.

Lessons learned

Our experience with the module so far has been, on the whole, positive, and we have drawn from it the following lessons learned. First, KM is about people working together and not necessarily about IT. Only one of the three plans developed in the organisations we worked with has included a major IT component. Second, implementing a KM approach requires staff time. There is, therefore, a cost attached to KM, which has to be factored into one's planning. Apart from staff costs, implementing a KM approach does not necessarily lead to expenditures on IT-related equipment.

Third, implementing KM in an organisation is a long-term endeavour. It cannot be done in the short term. For that reason it is important to define ways of maintaining momentum before results become apparent. The character of an organisation defines what works and what does not. For example, AMREF is a large organisation, so winning support from the top takes time and effort. IWSD is a relative small organisation, so solutions based on face-to-face interaction can be implemented

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easily. SEUF is dispersed over Kerala, India, and thus has to rely more on the
exchange of explicit knowledge (information) in its KM initiative.

Fourth, SMART milestones (simple, measurable, applicable, realistic and time-bound)
are needed to objectively assess progress in meeting KM objectives. For example,
running a bi-weekly communications meeting as a means of sharing knowledge can
be traced by SMART milestones.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Academics, consultants and publishers are pouring out information, both online and in
print, on knowledge management (KM). Only an experienced KM practitioner is able
to separate fads from applicable information and transform that information into
action. KM is essentially about managing activity aimed at improving knowledge-
sharing mechanisms and practices in organisational networks or communities of
practice (CoPs). This article introduces KM and describes how it is being introduced
to partners in WELL (Water and Environmental Health in Developing Countries)
through the Learn@WELL KM module. The article provides the rationale for the
module and describes the main activities within it. Some KM plans prepared by
Southern partners are described.

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The knowledge sharing approach of the United Nations Development Programme

Kim Henderson

Knowledge networks or communities of practice (CoPs) were established in 1999 in some of priority thematic areas of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). They were originally set up to serve as a capacity-building mechanism for staff, as a bridge between headquarters and the field, to connect UNDP's country offices and to promote South-South exchange. Knowledge networks subsequently became institutionalised as part of the UNDP business plan and have formed the basis of UNDP's knowledge management strategy.

UNDP is organised according to five 'development practices', each corresponding to one of its five strategic goals outlined in the 2004-2007 Multi-Year Funding Framework (UNDP 2003). This document describes the strategic goals and service lines to be pursued by the organisation, and details the organisational strategies that will be followed. In addition, management is recognized as a functional practice, and we have additional knowledge communities supported by knowledge networks.

The five development practices bring people from different regions, across all bureaus and offices, into voluntary, flexible communities, based on common professional interests, so they can share and learn from each other's knowledge and experience, develop new ideas as communities and bond together to build a common identity. These communities have a horizontal make-up, which breaks down structural hierarchies and builds a greater sense of community within the organisation. Members are primarily UNDP staff, though some of our communities (e.g., the Human Development Report Network and the Millennium Development Goals Network) are open to external participants.

The networks work as internal, global exchange forums to inform practice members of the new and upcoming regional, national and global activities and resources available within each community. The networks also serve as a tool for sharing experiences and good practices, and for discussion of substantive issues related to each thematic area. Each network or community is linked primarily by an electronic network, or moderated mail list, but they are also supported by regular face-to-face meetings and other community-building activities which are outlined below. One of the unique features of UNDP's networks is the use of a standardised product provided across networks, called the 'consolidated reply'. When a question is posed or a discussion held via an electronic network, not only do people share their experience from around the world, but this is supplemented with information about what is already known and published on the topic at hand. Within an average of 10 working days, a consolidated reply is shared with network members that synthesises this expertise and experience.

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UNDP has 20 knowledge networks, including six practice networks (five development practices and one functional practice – management); four knowledge networks open to other UN agencies and external partners; two cross-cutting networks and seven sub-practice networks. The experience of the Crisis Prevention and Recovery network has been described in more detail elsewhere (Swamy 2005).

Table 1: UNDP knowledge networks by type and membership

Network name	Type of network	Membership type	Number of members (as of 30 June 2005)
1. Crisis Prevention and Recovery	Development Practice	Internal UNDP staff	1,236
2. Democratic Governance	Development Practice	Internal UNDP staff	1,348
3. Energy and Environment	Development Practice	Internal UNDP staff	1,117
4. HIV/AIDs	Development Practice	Internal UNDP staff	806
5. Poverty Reduction	Development Practice	Internal UNDP staff	1,244
6. Management	Functional Practice	Internal UNDP staff	2,403
7. Gender	Cross-cutting (MYFF driver)	Internal UNDP staff	763
8. Evaluation Network	Cross-cutting	Internal UNDP staff	758
9. Millennium Development Goals	UN wide	Internal UNDP staff and External partners	2,340
10. Human Development Report	UN wide	Internal UNDP staff and External partners	1,013
11. Human Rights Policy	UN wide	Internal UNDP staff and External partners	601
12. UN Co-ordination GlobalNet	UN wide	Internal UNDP staff and External partners	289
13. Small Enterprise and Microfinance	Sub-practice (under Poverty)	Internal UNDP staff	680
14. Information and Communications Technology for Development	Sub-practice (under Democratic Governance and Poverty)	Internal UNDP staff	555
15. Decentralisation, Local Governance and Urban Development	Sub-practice (under Democratic Governance)	Internal UNDP staff	817
16. MPN-Human Resources	Sub-practice (Management Practice Network)	Internal UNDP staff	983
17. MPN-Finance	Sub-practice (Management Practice Network)	Internal UNDP staff	1,301
18. MPN-Procurement	Sub-practice (Management Practice Network)	Internal UNDP staff	1,076
19. MPN-Project	Sub-practice (Management Practice Network)	Internal UNDP staff	1,287
20. HDR-Stats	Sub-practice (under HDRO)	Internal UNDP staff and External partners	556

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The total number of subscriptions to these networks is approximately 21,000 (as of 30 June 2005). The graph below represents the enormous growth in membership since the global networks were established in UNDP in 1999. A number of other regional and in-country networks are also supported by UNDP.

**Graph 1: Membership of UNDP knowledge networks 1999-2005**
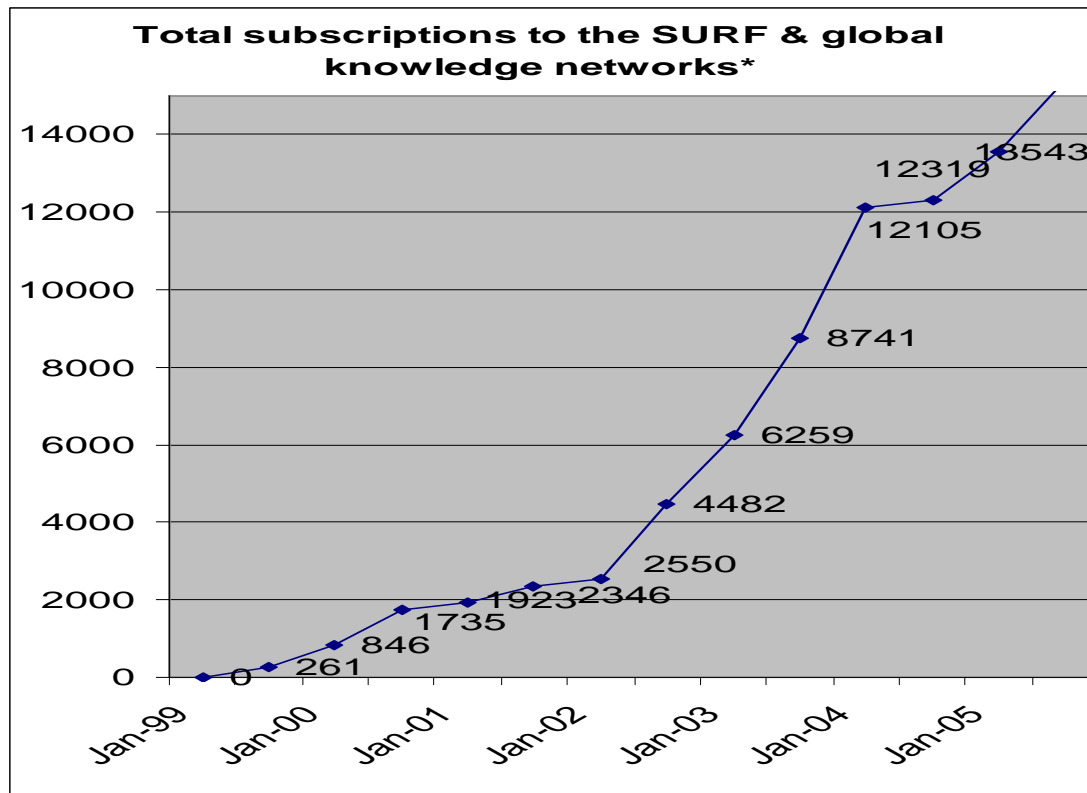
UNDP is supporting the expansion of its successful model UN-wide in order to enhance the knowledge management capacity of the UN system as a whole through an inter-agency model for knowledge sharing. Support is being provided to both the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in establishing their own knowledge networks according to the UNDP model. In addition, UNDP has taken one of its own sub-thematic networks, the Human Rights Policy Network (HuriTALK), and expanded it to function as the UN system's knowledge sharing and capacity building tool for human rights mainstreaming. These initiatives began only in 2004 and are still in their infancy.

Paula Souverijn-Eisenberg of DPKO's Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit had this to say about their experience in setting up a knowledge network:

> *We're setting up our own network, for which we're using every document you've ever produced. We're practically applying UNDP's approach in setting up our own network relying on your experiences and adapting them to our own organisation....In learning from UNDP's experience, DPKO has changed its approach to establishing its own networks and communities.'*
> (UNDP 2004, p12)

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In India a prototype model of in-country networks, based on the UNDP model, is being piloted through a UN country team project. The pilot began in January 2005.

Qualitatively, UNDP's networks are assessed through an annual Headquarters Products and Services Survey, which asks country offices to rate all products and services provided by headquarters' units. Ratings for the networks have improved every year since their inception, with the highest ratings ever received in the 2004 survey. Some 92% of staff members surveyed stated that participation in a practice or other network benefited their office, and 86% noted that participation benefited their own professional development. Each network was rated in terms of the quality of information and facilitation, with the ratings ranging from 70 to 93% favourable. This suggests a significant impact not only on organisational change but also on organisational learning.

Graph 2: Ratings of staff of networks (2004)
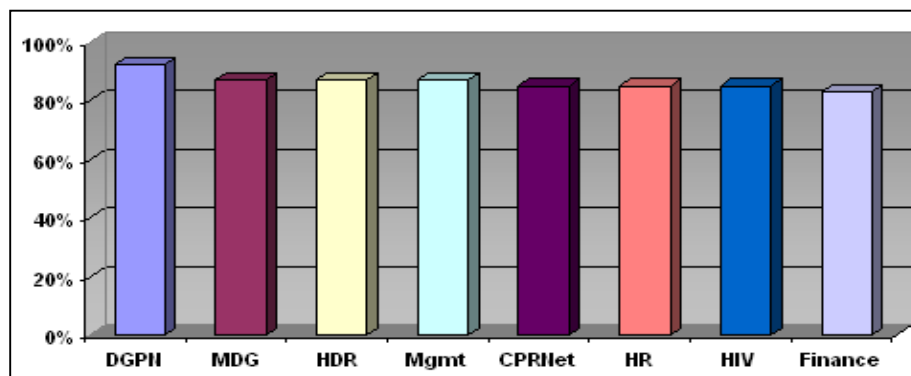
The impact of UNDP's networks

UNDP's networks have provided an entry point for the organisation's focus on knowledge management. UNDP's approach has centred on 'connection' (connecting people who have knowledge and want to share it), as opposed to 'collection' (compiling knowledge in online repositories). Many other organisations – the World Bank, for example – have developed their programmes in the reverse order. Whilst UNDP has been very successful in establishing its communities and connecting people to one another and to knowledge through communities, maintaining the focus on connection, while increasing our capacity for collection, remains the challenge for future development of our programme. There is also still room to grow in terms of mainstreaming knowledge management processes, such as participation in communities, into our business processes, such as the programming cycle.

CoPs or knowledge networks have, however, been a key element in the strategy to move UNDP from the role of programme manager to its current role as 'the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life' (UNDP Annual Report 2002, p6). The networks have resulted in significant organisational change. They have also delivered on their promise, outlined above, to serve as a

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capacity-building mechanism for staff and as a bridge between headquarters and the field, and to connect UNDP's country offices and promote South-South exchange.

In terms of capacity building, the figures quoted above from the 2004 Headquarters Products and Services Survey, regarding professional development, highlight the significant impact of our CoPs on individual and organisational learning. A staff member of the UNDP Bratislava Regional Service Centre commented as follows: 'I gained a lot of knowledge from the network, and it helped improve my professional qualifications, but also the quality of work I have been doing.' (UNDP 2004, p31)

UNDP's CoPs have also improved connections between headquarters and the field, and between one country office and another, contributing to a leveling of the hierarchy within UNDP and enabling inputs from the bottom up into both policy and practice. Now any staff member can communicate across country offices, regional bureaus and headquarters units to obtain the best information for providing a country with a development service. As recently as 1998, staff were required to clear message content with senior managers before sending out e-mails. Today thousands of staff members communicate with one another daily across global, regional and country boundaries, units and hierarchical structures. This has also assisted in linking policy and practice, a challenge faced by all development organisations. Not only do we all face the challenge of linking community activities to policy, but we also must find ways to demonstrate where this link has occurred and the impact it has achieved.

The following mechanisms have been used in UNDP to ensure these linkages:

- Analysis of contributions and members/network activity
  This can be done to demonstrate the nature of the content being discussed, knowledge gaps, characteristics of the community and areas where policy guidance is needed or is already clear.
- Using the CoPs as consultation mechanisms
  For example, in UNDP all policy positions and 'practice notes' (a product that guides field office staff on how to implement programs in a particular thematic area) are discussed on our electronic networks.
- Bottom-up definition of policy issues
  For example, we have built into our policy development processes various means (such as e-discussions) of generating policy from the field. Commonly received queries on the e-networks can define the demand for a practice note or policy position and trigger the development of one.
- Agenda setting via practice meetings or e-networks
  As a community, we undertake periodic agenda setting for our activities and directions. This process can influence policy development.

How does this work in practice? In 2004 the Democratic Governance Practice Community held an e-discussion via its electronic network on whether or not UNDP should engage with political parties through our programmes. The e-discussion was prompted by an analysis of the content of network queries, which identified this as a recurring issue in country offices but one for which there was still no clear guidance. It was the most active and lively e-discussion in the networks' history, with 79 contributions from 45 countries. Capitalising on the outcomes of the successful

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discussion, a mapping of UNDP's engagement with political parties has recently been completed. In addition, a short book, entitled *Opportunities in political party programming*, will be produced later this year to provide a coherent account of the challenges and opportunities identified through this discussion.

In relation to promoting South-South exchanges, the flexible and timely sharing of knowledge and information within communities, across hierarchical and unit boundaries, and from one country office to another, translates into a significant increase in South-South exchange. It provides a new opportunity for 140 or more country offices, staffed predominantly with national programme staff, to communicate directly with one another.

The UNDP's CoPs have facilitated a new way of working, in which we share knowledge amongst ourselves, across 'silos' and between country offices and headquarters on a daily basis. Our organisational culture now values and rewards the sharing of knowledge rather than rewarding those who 'own' knowledge. This is still rather informal, with rewards and recognition being based on visibility in the networks, acknowledgement of contributions and scholarships for active participants to attend training and workshops. However, work is under way to mainstream knowledge-sharing skills into UNDP's competency framework and to incorporate these formally into UNDP's performance management tool, the Results Competency Assessment. Some supervisors are already assessing staff contributions to knowledge sharing and networking through the results assessment, although this is not yet a formal requirement.

In October 2004, UNDP's CoPs were reviewed by an independent panel of knowledge management experts: Tom Davenport, Steve Denning, Geoff Parcell and Larry Prusak. In their review report the panel noted:

> *The group was particularly impressed with the energy and responsiveness of the networks. Indeed, we believe UNDP has something unique going on....Overall, the system is remarkable, and indicative of a culture that cares passionately about development issues and knowledge.* (Davenport 2004, p.1)

However, the most convincing statements of impact come from community members themselves:

> *It is comforting to know that my query is going out to over 1,000 eyes who could potentially respond. This gives me a greater sense of confidence in communicating with government counterparts as I can tell the government with more conviction what UNDP policy and experience on the given issue is.* (UNDP 2004, p. 14)

> *[The consolidated reply to a query] was 'brilliant' in terms of saving time as it could have taken 'months' to get the included information, useful contacts and documents.* (UNDP 2004, p. 14)

Following the 27 June general elections in Mongolia, where no party or coalition won a clear majority of seats in the new parliament, the Mongolia country office sent a

query to the DGPNet. On the basis of the consolidated reply and their own research, the Mongolia country office presented a package of advisory materials to the key party leaders and members of the working groups of both parties involved in the negotiations. UNDP's resident representative to Mongolia, Pratibha Mehta, noted that 'the materials are being highly appreciated and the demand from both parties is growing. Most key people have read all the materials back to back and they often quote from some papers!' She also said, 'it was fantastic to receive detailed responses from colleagues within a matter of…days through these two networks' (UNDP 2004, p. 21).

CoPs in UNDP: successes and challenges

Key ingredients for healthy CoPs
UNDP's experience has demonstrated that a key ingredient for well-functioning CoPs is to have moderated or facilitated communities. Some argue that facilitation can inhibit community participation. However, in UNDP's experience, it has enhanced participation. The nature of the facilitation is important here. Our approach has been to use moderation, not as a form of censorship, but rather as a means to enhance participation by:

- Maintaining quality, which has maintained demand for membership;
- Balancing participation with quality of contributions;
- Getting to know community members, i.e., who they are, their level of interest and understanding of the issue, its relevance to their work and needs, their areas of expertise (this enables us to follow up with active solicitation and targeting of contributions from particular members to particular initiatives); and
- Sequencing and managing the flow of traffic on our electronic network and scheduling and co-ordinating community-building activities.

Other essential ingredients of well-functioning CoPs are less controversial but equally important and include the following:

- Trust, built on familiarity and shared experience, is crucial in developing an active and healthy community. CoPs and networks must be safe spaces for practitioners to share experiences and seek answers to questions in order to build their own knowledge and capacity.
- Building community identity beyond the electronic exchange of information is important. Face-to-face exchange is the most effective form of knowledge sharing and should be utilised strategically and built on via electronic and other forms of communication. These meetings and other forms of interaction should set the tone for the communities' interactions, emphasising respect and common ownership of the community.
- Bottom-up as well as horizontal and vertical lines of communication should be established. Top-down approaches quash participation. The community should be responsive to members' demands.
- Clearly defined objectives and a mandate for the community are essential, and they should be linked to specific outcomes and tasks that can be collaboratively developed. Objectives need to be flexible, however, in order to respond to

dynamic circumstances and evolving needs.
- Quality of products should be emphasised over quantity.
- Leadership and sponsorship from senior management and bottom-up support are both critical.

Successful operating modalities
Some operating modalities are also 'key ingredients' and have been discussed above: for example, moderation/facilitation and a bottom-up versus top-down approach. Other important modalities include the following:

- A combination of tools and technologies should be used to facilitate community interaction. As mentioned above, face-to-face exchange is the most effective form of knowledge sharing and should be utilised strategically and built on via electronic and other forms of communication, including e-networks, telephone and Web-based collaborative tools. There should also be a mix of responsive and proactive mechanisms. For example, members may be led to participate in an e-discussion of an area, in our case, where the organisation wants to develop policy further, rather than respond to questions/queries from field-based colleagues.
- Recognise that operating as a CoP requires cultural change, a different way of working, and strategies to facilitate this should be built into the operating modalities of CoPs.
- Networks should be voluntary and flexible.
- Link the community to expertise outside as well as inside the community.
- Provide carefully tailored products and services to meet members' needs. In UNDP, for example, a number of specific products, common across our networks (such as the consolidated reply), have been developed and refined over the life of the CoPs, based on member needs.
- The community should provide a link to access codified knowledge.
- Sponsoring research on issues raised via community interactions and/or providing resources and funds for community-building activities has been successful at UNDP as a means of fostering community identity.
- Some form of recognition for community members' contributions should be institutionalised.
- Appropriate incentives are key for motivating members to participate.

Pitfalls
Many of these are the converse of elements already identified as strengths above:

- Top-down direction;
- Control by one entity of the organisation or section of the community;
- One-way communication;
- Lack of incentives;
- Too many interactions on process and a lack of substantive content;
- Lack of direction;
- Lack of proper boundaries;
- Presumption that the CoP can do everything and takes the place of organised project mapping or knowledge gathering;
- Reliance on one tool or mode of interaction, e.g., the e-network alone;
- A weak facilitator or no facilitator;

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- Failing to recognise member contributions;
- Lack of follow-up – i.e., dismissal of a query if contributions are not forthcoming;
- Unfocused queries;
- Lack of leadership;
- Overwhelming traffic;
- Lack of a sense of belonging to the community (too big); and
- Launching initiatives and not following up.

Promoting participation

A key issue in relation to facilitating active involvement of community members is balancing quality and participation. Maintaining the quality of the content of the CoP is important to encourage membership and participation. However, if the bar is set too high, members can be intimidated about providing contributions. Maintaining balance is an ongoing and delicate task. UNDP has developed some products and mechanisms that enable us to recognise all contributions but to leverage and highlight to a greater degree those with more substantive value.

Many of the elements of a CoP that facilitate active participation have been discussed as 'key ingredients' or 'operating modalities', and conversely, those that can quash participation have been listed under 'pitfalls'. For example, see the comments above on trust, hierarchy, moderation/facilitation, combining face-to-face events with other tools, appropriate incentives and recognition of contributions, quality of content and lack of direction.

Other elements include:

- Making the benefits of membership and participation clear to community members. Internal advocacy strategies can be important for maintaining active participation. External advocacy strategies can also be of benefit to reinforce value from an external perspective.
- Showcasing good practices. If members understand that their good practices will be recognised by the community, this can motivate them to strive to develop good practices and share them.

The communities are vehicles by which we undertake peer review and identification of good practices, which can then feed into policy development.

In terms of challenges, other than those discussed above, which may be common to any organisation establishing CoPs, UNDP operates in a particular context and environment given its unique organisational mandate and structure. UNDP is a highly decentralised, multi-polar, multi-locational organisation, and it operates in an incredibly complex cross-cultural environment. This has given rise to a number of challenges particular to our environment, including language, cross-cultural communications, the need for a diverse infrastructure and additional challenges in building trust within communities.

Although we have five official languages, our global networks and communities primarily operate in English. We have yet to secure the necessary resources to provide ongoing translations into the other official languages and provide ad hoc

translations for queries or responses that come into the network in other languages, based on the language skills of our team. In relation to cross-cultural issues, we have overcome this to a certain extent, not only by bringing communities together on the basis of their common substantive interest, but also through emphasising a shared organisational culture and the need to respond to common, or similar, organisational imperatives and incentives, although there is much more to be done in this area.

These two elements also make it more challenging to build trust among community members. Within UNDP, we have tried to overcome this through emphasising the key role of the facilitator in building relationships with community members and linking them with one another, personalising our community news updates and providing ways to focus the spotlight on community members and initiatives. We also continuously monitor community members' feedback and try to track their fears and concerns regarding knowledge management, building this into the development of our communities and related products and services. In addition, we use a range of technologies, including face-to-face meetings where possible, telephone communications, video conferencing and e-mail.

Implications for future efforts to mainstream knowledge management

As noted above, UNDP's CoPs have been the entry point for the organisation's focus on knowledge management. However, the CoPs alone cannot accomplish the shift to an organisation with mainstreamed knowledge-based systems. They represent part of the whole, with networking as a mainstream activity and with successful 'connection' systems established but not yet sufficiently complemented by systematic 'collection'.

In response to this, in 2004, a formal knowledge management strategy, entitled *The knowledge management roadmap*, was developed. This strategy aimed to build on the successes of UNDP's CoPs by enhancing quality and participation through a number of initiatives, including mainstreaming knowledge management into human resources approaches, such as performance assessment and career tracks, and expanding UNDP's model within the UN system and to in-country networks. In addition, the Roadmap aimed to complement the connection strategy with improved content management systems supported by improved systems and tools. The Roadmap also sought to mainstream responsibility for knowledge management across the organisation (previously it had been led by the Bureau for Development Policy) and set corporate standards for future knowledge management initiatives.

The new strategy represented a shift away from a 'bottom-up', 'stealth' approach, through which the CoPs had successfully been developed, to a formal 'big bang' approach. With greater attention being given to this initiative across the organisation, a lively debate has ensued, and a number of issues have emerged, for which solutions have yet to be found. In order to move forward and build on UNDP's successful establishment of CoPs, we have to find a consensus within the organisation on the following issues:

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- Should our knowledge management strategy continue to operate within the current paradigm or include the development of a new one?
- Should our strategy focus on knowledge management within the organisation or look outward?
- Should we encourage linear evolution in the development of knowledge management systems and tools or allow more organic evolution?
- Should we set standards for knowledge-management initiatives corporately from the top down or allow continued evolution form the bottom up?
- Should we rely on individuals or 'champions' to move the process forward or on work units?
- Should we set goals within our strategy or target specific work processes and tools?
- Should we focus on one knowledge management model or be eclectic?
- Should we focus on connection or collection, or both?
- Should we start at the centre or at the periphery?
- Should we manage the initiative or allow for innovative approaches to flourish where they develop?

Conclusions

CoPs can be an excellent entry point for knowledge management initiatives within development organisations. The bottom-up approach on which they are based is consistent with UNDP's development approach. In our experience, however, CoPs on their own can take the organisation only so far. Efficient systems for collecting information are required to complement knowledge sharing through connection and communities. In addition, whilst a bottom-up approach is essential for generating the organisational change necessary for development organisations to become knowledge enabled, at some point in the evolution of any knowledge management initiative, it will have to have the spotlight shone on it. Then, some of the thorny issues outlined above must be tackled in order for knowledge management to be mainstreamed into business processes. The timing of this debate can have a crucial effect on the outcome.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are personal views of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UNDP.

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Abstract

This paper shares practical experience gained in establishing and implementing communities of practice (CoPs) – referred to as 'knowledge networks' within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – as entry points for our knowledge management initiatives. The paper outlines the history and evolution of CoPs in UNDP, placing them in the broader framework of knowledge management and practice architecture. The paper also describes how CoPs have generated cultural change within UNDP, taking the organisation from a situation in which staff could not send e-mails without clearance by senior management to one in which staff today are rewarded for sharing rather than owning knowledge. In addition, the paper identifies the ingredients of a healthy CoP, successful operating modalities, methods to promote participation and ways to link CoPs to policy outcomes. It also looks at what has not worked: pitfalls to be avoided in establishing and managing CoPs. Finally, the paper examines our experience with adding new procedures and tools to this initially successful approach, such as enhanced collection and codification, which have yielded mixed results.

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Building bridges between local and global knowledge: new ways of working at the World Health Organisation

Michael Barrett, Bob Fryatt, Geoff Walsham and Somya Joshi

Over the last decade, capturing knowledge in organisations has been a key concern for practitioners across a wide range of sectors of the knowledge economy. Despite this continued interest, surprisingly little research has been carried out in globally dispersed organisations, or in terms of examining issues of managing knowledge in a global context (Desouza and Evaristo 2003). International development agencies are one such example of global institutions that have recently turned to knowledge-based development strategies. For example, the World Bank has been reframed as the 'Knowledge Bank' (Stone 2003), and has distinguished between global knowledge and local knowledge institutions. Whilst there is a growing literature in this area, further research is needed to understand and address the challenges development agencies face in managing knowledge in a global context. Earlier work has sought to provide insights for corporate executives from the problems of learning and knowledge-based transformation experienced by the World Bank (Ellerman 1999). In this paper, we examine knowledge initiatives at the World Health Organisation (WHO) and consider implications for new ways of working.

We start by conceptualising some key concepts on the nature of individual and organisational knowledge in global organisations. We then review knowledge strategies of multi-national product and service firms along four key dimensions: utilising local knowledge, building knowledge capacities, local-global knowledge sharing, and the transition to knowledge-based organisational forms. We subsequently describe our case study of the WHO and discuss some of its recent knowledge management initiatives over the last two years. Our case analysis draws on the four dimensions to examine the benefits and limitations of the WHO's global knowledge strategies and includes a comparative analysis with other multi-national product and service firms. We conclude with some key implications for knowledge brokering strategies at the WHO.

Part I: Conceptualising knowledge in global organisations

The rise of objective, codified knowledge
Knowledge has always been central in the functioning of society. However, in today's 'knowledge economy', organisations are increasingly aware of the need for a 'knowledge focus' in their organisational strategies as they respond to changes in the environment. For many organisations this has meant that the character of knowledge has changed (Bell 1999) towards a more objective, theoretical knowledge with a focus on the codification of knowledge into systems. Over the last decade, this focus on codification and 'explicit' knowledge has led to the widely misunderstood view that the knowledge creation process (Tsoukas 2003) merely involves the 'capturing',

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KM4D Journal 1(2): 31-46
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'translating', or 'converting' of 'tacit' knowledge into 'explicit' knowledge, facilitated increasingly by IT (Nonaka 1995). Such a conceptualisation of knowledge as an 'object' is reliant on science and explicit ideas, which may be overly representative of an erroneous Western rationality (Nicolini et al. 2003). The development of evidence-based medicine with its reliance on objective, generalised forms of knowledge is one such example (Sackett et al. 2002). In contrast, we develop a personal view of knowledge which suggests that knowledge can be differentiated by the capacity of individuals to exercise judgment, presupposes values and beliefs, and is closely connected to action (Tsoukas 2003).

Knowing-in-practice
While global organisations are making significant use of codified forms of knowledge, we agree with others that the tacit or personal character of knowledge is *inseparable from* (and not in opposition to) explicit knowledge (Walsham 2001). That is, individuals themselves are knowledgeable, but their tacit knowing cannot always be 'captured', or 'transferred' as explicit knowledge in any strict sense, as it is not necessarily connected to explicit forms of knowledge.

Building on the view that our knowing is *in* our action (Polanyi 1969), the concept of 'knowing-in-practice' argues that knowledge and practice are closely linked:
As people continually reconstitute their knowing over time and across contexts, they also modify their knowing as they change their practices. People improvise new practices as they invent, slip into, or learn new ways of interpreting the world. (Orlikowski 2002)

Furthermore, since knowledge is personal and depends on our own initial dispositions and unique life experiences, sharing of knowledge should not be misconstrued as two people coming to the exact same understanding. Rather, they can have the same access to (or share) the same flows or 'stocks' of knowledge but these are always individually interpreted (Boland 1996). These concepts have been operationalised to some extent in regular assessment of knowledge, attitude and behaviours when assessing the success of health promotion campaigns.

Organisational knowledge
For knowledge-based organisations operating in a dynamic environment, organisational knowledge and organising knowledge is a critical part of what organisations do (Seely Brown and Duguid 2001, Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001). Though the personal view of knowledge, as reflected in knowing-in-practice, considers individuals and their practice in an organisation, another important dimension recognises the collective level of knowledge within communities of practice (CoPs) In inexplicable ways, organisational knowledge in CoPs is more than the sum of the individuals' parts (Seely Brown and Duguid 2001, Storck and Hill 2000).

Furthermore, it is increasingly accepted that large global organisations can be usefully conceptualised as a 'community of communities of practice' (Seely Brown and Duguid 2001, 1991), a hybrid group of overlapping and interdependent communities or a 'network of practice . The latter emphasises practice, and recognises the global organisation as having several CoPs not only across the

organisation but beyond it. Organising knowledge across these hybrid communities is the essential activity of organisational management. However, hierarchical relations and divisions of labour within organisations can lead to organisations wrongly esteeming knowledge solely at the top of the hierarchy which can lead to barriers between groups, and ineffective coordination and transfer of organisational knowledge across CoPs.

Architecture for organising knowledge
Given the inherent community of CoPs within global organisations, these firms must therefore rely on 'inter-communal negotiation' between quasi-autonomous communities. Seely Brown and Duguid (2001) identified an enabling architecture for organisational knowledge and spreading knowledge between communities that includes the use of *translators, brokers* and *boundary objects*.

Translators mediate negotiations between members across different communities. To be effective, they need to develop trust amongst members of different communities and also be sufficiently knowledgeable about the work of different communities. Knowledge *brokers*, on the other hand, are participants of overlapping communities and are inherently more likely to be trusted in their efforts to facilitate the flow of knowledge between them. B*oundary objects* are often defined as technologies, techniques or processes that have the potential to forge coordinating links among communities and facilitate negotiation. Through boundary objects, a community can both self-reflect and better understand another community's practices, attitudes and world-view, and facilitate inter-communal negotiation. Common examples are business processes, such as planning, which can enable productive cross-boundary relations by different communities who negotiate and propagate shared interpretations. A darker interpretation is evident in coercive organisations where business processes may impose compliance through 'frozen negotiation'.

Part II: Knowledge dimensions in multi-national firms

In this section we examine knowledge strategies deployed by multi-national product and service firms. Doz and Santos (2001) identify what they call 'meta-national' firms as a particular set of multi-national product firms that have learnt to operate effectively in a knowledge economy. Table 1 summarises the strategies of meta-national and global professional service firms across the dimensions of utilising local knowledge, building knowledge capacities, local-global knowledge sharing and transitioning to knowledge-based organisational forms.

Utilising local knowledge
There are some interesting parallels between the strategies of meta-national and global professional service firms concerning the role and use of local knowledge. To operate effectively, Doz and Santos (2001) suggest that meta-national organisations must harness diverse and specialist local knowledge from multiple peripheral locations, including developing countries. In accessing such context-dependent knowledge, firms need to plug into local networks and build external alliances with customers, distributors, suppliers and other entities.

Table 1: Knowledge dimensions across meta-national and global professional service firms

Knowledge dimension	Meta-national firms	Global professional service firms
Utilising local knowledge	Harness diverse local knowledge Build alliances & local networks	Respect local professionals Learn from diverse local knowledge
Building knowledge capacities	Sense and process complex knowledge globally Mobilise & facilitate transfer across countries Operationalise into day to day activities	Achieve multi-dimensionality across three axes: Country firm Services and products Industry insight
Local-global knowledge sharing	Co-location ICTs, models and templates as carriers of knowledge	Professional networks Central knowledge centres Firm methodology ICTs and knowledge repositories
Transitioning to knowledge-based organisational forms	If global projector… • Show benefit of local innovation to global players If multi-domestic… • Show benefit of global knowledge to local players	Use of overlapping task forces and 'bumble bee' approaches Utilise existing professional associations and networks

In a similar vein, literature has suggested that global professional service firms have to 'learn from their environment, especially their clients' and 'deliberately access multiple and diverse sources…. often in corners (of the world) far removed from central decision-makers' (Greenwood et al. 2003). Along with this sensitivity to locality, and valuing unique local knowledge, their distinctive professional culture respects local partner autonomy in using their discretion to manage clients.

Building knowledge capacities
The meta-national firms rely on three distinct knowledge capacities in leveraging unique local knowledge from multiple locations, namely sensing, mobilising and operationalising. First, organisations learn how to sense and process complex knowledge globally by identifying new sources of relevant technologies and capabilities. Second, meta-national organisations mobilise local knowledge using new 'magnet' structures to attract, 'meld', and transfer geographically dispersed complex knowledge into the network of day-to-day operations. Third, knowledge is operationalised by configuring and managing its operations for successful growth and profitability.

Global professional service firms build knowledge capacity by accessing diverse sources of information across three axes (or dimensions) of differentiation: country, service and industry. First, the 'country' or national firm has historically been the building block of the global firm and therefore the value of 'country level' knowledge is deeply established. Second, lines of service such as assurance and tax represent the

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core products and services delivered to clients, and global firms have developed methodologies around these lines of service. Third, global professional service firms structure along industry lines to develop deeper capacities and capabilities in specific industries and related market sectors. These three diverse knowledge capabilities are synthesised, in a multi-dimensional manner, to enable decision-making across the firm.

Local-global knowledge sharing

In contrast to one-way sharing/transfer of knowledge of new products and services by global organisations from headquarters to the local subsidiary, the meta-national recognizes two-way sharing between the local and the global in harnessing and 'melding' knowledge from multiple diverse locations. Knowledge sharing takes place through 'carriers', which imperfectly embody knowledge in the form of a co-located worker, blueprint, tool, template or model.

For example, global organisations invest heavily in tools such as intranet, video-conferencing and ICTs to manage information flows and to facilitate the moving and sharing of knowledge. However, carriers such as ICTs do not manage and meld complex context-dependent knowledge that is key to the competitive advantage of the meta-national firm. Instead, this requires reinterpretation by the recipient in their context.

Knowledge sharing in global professional service firms, facilitated by overlapping professional memberships, multiplies the possibility of local innovations from dispersed corners of the firm being recognised and communicated to central locations; enabling local knowledge to become global. Global professional service firms have long used IT and common audit methodologies to spread global generalised knowledge, and to facilitate global integration and coordinating of work (Gendron and Barrett 2004). This initial knowledge focus has been a technical one involving the creation and maintenance of large knowledge repositories without concomitant organisational design elements of structure, human resource practices and culture. For example, busy professionals are often not adequately stimulated to enter lessons in the knowledge repositories. One the contrary, their performance measurement continues to be largely focused on billable hours and building client relations.

Transition to knowledge-based organisational forms

Doz et al. (2001) suggest that the key transition challenge for traditional multinational corporations as 'global projectors' is to reverse one-way knowledge flow from their home base to 'teach' dependent overseas subsidiaries, and instead to facilitate 'learning from the world'. To do so, global projectors need to build unique local knowledge as subsidiaries and 'plug' themselves into the local external environment.

A second transition challenge for firms with 'multi-domestic' characteristics is their geographically fragmented knowledge base. These entities often have a lot of 'imprisoned' local knowledge in subsidiaries as they are solely plugged into local environments and can only 'meld' diverse sources of local knowledge. They find it difficult to mobilise complex knowledge from global contexts, not only because they lack global networks of knowledge but because independent-minded subsidiaries may jealously guard what they see to be their source of power.

Global professional service firms utilise a number of organising mechanisms to support knowledge generation and sharing in the transition to a knowledge-based organisational form. First, there are teams and task forces assigned to each axis of differentiation, but whose memberships overlap to form a mosaic of lateral structures. These organisational forms are expected to facilitate formal and informal interactions between members of the global firm. Through these overlapping memberships, service professionals can be members of one or more teams across more than one axis within the firm. They also move across and within the three axes with 'bumblebee' effect doing, learning and exchanging new ideas and so providing a 'crosspollination' of knowledge. Furthermore, professionals are members of multiple professional networks outside the firm (Gendron and Barrett 2004) which allows for wider organising and sharing of knowledge.

A critique of the knowledge perspective in meta-national and global professional service firms

The dimensions of knowledge highlighted by the meta-national and the global professional service firms literatures are helpful in exploring opportunities and challenges in managing knowledge in other global organisations such as the WHO. However, these literatures largely neglect a personal view of knowledge, which we consider crucial in developing knowledge strategies. For this reason, we now critically assess the strengths and limitations of these literatures along each of the dimensions of knowledge.

First, both literatures rightly emphasise the need for global organisations to value and utilise diverse types of local knowledge. However, a functionalistic view of knowledge is evident in the discourse of the meta-national firm. Harnessing diverse local knowledge suggests a 'disembodied' view of knowledge and 'plugging' into local networks seems to underplay the embedded nature of CoPs and the learning and identity change needed in becoming a participating member of new 'networks of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998).

Second, the practical viewpoint of the meta-national as 'sensing', 'mobilising' and 'operationalising' knowledge using 'magnet' structures to build knowledge capacities adopts an 'object' view of knowledge as discrete, disembodied and easily 'melded'. We suggest this largely explicit focus of knowledge does not adequately appreciate tacit knowing, and instead largely adopts a functionalist view that knowledge can be attracted through 'magnet' structures, and then 'transferred' and 'inserted' into operational practices. Global professional service firms focus on sophisticated codification strategies and an informational perspective in building knowledge capacities across multiple axes. However, we suggest the need to go beyond this synthesising of information, and to focus more on the ability of individuals to effectively use this complex information given their backgrounds and experiences.

Third, concerning local-global knowledge sharing, the meta-national literature is thoughtful on the issue of knowledge 'flows' and presents the useful concept of 'carriers of knowledge' for understanding processes of sharing and 'moving'

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knowledge. This literature also demonstrates a subtle appreciation of recontextualisation of local knowledge, which challenges the ideal of knowledge transfer as moving knowledge smoothly across national, cultural and disciplinary boundaries. Concerning the role and use of IT, the meta-national recognises its limitation for sharing simple knowledge or information. The global professional service firm literature also usefully highlights the need to go beyond the use of IT in developing knowledge repositories and take account of organisation design issues in understanding low levels of use. However, this explanation does not adequately explore the limited extent to which IT can aid sharing knowledge. Attempts to make explicit people's experiences of best practice will always be at best partial, and the ability of users to use knowledge repositories will depend on their prior experiences and individual dispositions. Whilst the professional service firm literature recognises the role of professional networks as CoPs or knowledge communities, they do not adequately develop the social dynamics of learning of individuals in these networks that facilitate local-global knowledge sharing processes.

Fourth, the meta-national and global professional service firm literatures are thoughtful on the problems of existing global organisational structures (projector and multi-domestic characteristics) and the need to set up new organisational structures. However, the literatures are silent on the role of translators, brokers and boundary objects as facilitating 'inter-communal negotiation' and providing an enabling architecture for organisational knowledge so as to facilitate new ways of working. We will come back to these points of critique and their implications, but first we provide a case description of the WHO along the four knowledge dimensions.

Part III: The case of WHO

The WHO is the key United Nations' agency addressing global health issues. It is governed by its member states, through its executive board and constituent World Health Assembly, and at the regional level through its regional committees, consisting of all constituent ministries of health. Regional directors are elected by their constituents, as is the Director General in Geneva.

WHO and its management of knowledge: two basic approaches
WHO has numerous global programmes and partnerships to help generate the knowledge required by member states to deliver their national health objectives. Broadly speaking it does this in two ways. First, by working with global expert networks, typically non-government actors such as academic communities and practicing public health practitioners. Using science and the dissemination of 'good ideas' through expert panels, global alliances and collaborating centres, these networks seek to agree on standards and global guidance, advocate action for vulnerable populations, mobilise resources for health, draft legislation to promote and protect health, and increase access to global public health goods. This is often formalised as a World Health Assembly Resolution, which aims to provide a global consensus that all member countries should follow.

Second, working directly with ministries of health and other government institutions, the WHO seeks to bring global standards to national public health policies and

programmes, strengthen public health institutions and networks, increase coverage of public health services and build demand for better health.

We now use the four -dimension knowledge framework (utilising local knowledge, building knowledge capacities, local-global knowledge sharing and transitioning to knowledge-based organisational form) to describe how WHO currently manages its knowledge so as to carry out these two roles.

Utilising local knowledge

Local health data
Central to much of WHO's work is the collation and dissemination of data on health situations in-country. The focus of WHO's efforts, and this is particularly the case of the Geneva headquarters, is to develop global knowledge using data which has been validated using internationally agreed norms and consensus, and thereby allowing for comparisons across countries. Meanwhile, in a given country, the same problem may be assessed using other measures, even if they do not fit with WHO standards. These measures retain local credibility because they come from existing information management systems and are locally 'owned' by government and the institutions it uses to gauge population health.

WHO country cooperation strategies
The WHO has recently introduced strategic planning exercises at the country level to better define where WHO's efforts should be focused to address local knowledge needs, and which partners should be involved in its production and delivery. This has also helped WHO better understand its capacity requirements (e.g., competences and resources) at the country level, and to determine how resources at different levels can work better with national agencies to meet individual country needs.

Building knowledge capacities

Capacities within member states
Given that WHO is a membership organisation, most of its efforts at building knowledge capacities are focused on the needs, rightly, of member governments (Task Force on Health Systems Research 2004). Some national institutions need to have similar capacities and functions in many countries, making it easier for WHO to focus on developing similar services and products in different settings. For example, WHO works with Ministries of Health to ensure that internationally accepted standards to improve and maintain a population's health are adapted and used in all countries, and national capacities can be assessed to see if this is the case (Yach and Ruger 2005).

Capacities within the WHO secretariat
The first priority, however, has overshadowed the need for the WHO secretariat itself to better recognise knowledge as one of its key assets; it has not always learned the lessons from effective knowledge management systems in other global organisations. This has been compounded by loss of knowledge through inadequate human resource strategies as well as inefficient and overlapping internal systems for management of knowledge. Sensing local knowledge in country offices has been limited due to

insufficient human and ICT capacity, with some noteworthy exceptions, such as Polio eradication or Tuberculosis control. Another constraint currently being addressed concerns the insufficient integration of internal knowledge management systems and standards, such as intranet and document management, leading to large areas of duplication and inconsistency across the different parts of WHO.

Local-global knowledge sharing

Application via science, technology or models
At headquarters, global knowledge tends to focus on accepted good practice, which in recent decades has meant 'evidence' coming from scientific studies and other mechanisms for gaining an intellectual consensus on what works and what does not. At the local level, where WHO focuses on influencing government policy through direct engagement, the reliance on science and international consensus is not assured, as ideas often come from local practice. Further, scientific evidence from national institutions, even if at odds with globally agreed knowledge, will tend to be more influential. Where professional practice is linked to science, such as medical and nursing care, or international law, as in trade agreements on drugs, headquarters is in a better negotiating position than local country offices. On the contrary, in work areas related to 'macro' policies, such as how financial and human resources can be mobilised and managed to deliver services, local or regional experience is often more powerful. These local-global negotiations are sometimes influenced through headquarters' relationships with international funding bodies, which may link the use of their funds to internationally agreed 'evidence' of good practice. Clearly, however, the success of programmes must be sensitive to local knowledge, which is culturally and contextually specific, and may quite rightly be at odds with generalised global knowledge.

Similarly, technology or models are often developed along with global knowledge for application at the country level. Quite often, however, even new technology that has been proven to be successful elsewhere will require local studies to validate whether it is really useful in that context.

Challenges to WHO's working: the global and local divide
One key element that can block the flow of knowledge is the different use of language, both formal language systems (e.g., English and French) and the types of wording used within a language. The UN officially has six languages, although the WHO global networks are dominated by three: English, French and Spanish. Locally, the indigenous language is the most influential, and can even be multiple in a certain country (especially in Africa, where national borders were not set up to respect original 'tribes' and languages, as in Europe or Asia). In contrast, global knowledge is generally codified using the language of those places where its generation is financed; where this causes problems of communication, it can be translated into local languages. For local languages however, there has been little effort to translate the local storage of knowledge (national journals, etc.) into the global languages. For example, the China WHO office needs a translator to assist in the translation of a high volume of research in Chinese as well as to facilitate interactions with government officials who may only speak Chinese.

Local-global professional networks
WHO's work has traditionally been dominated by certain professional groups, in particular medically qualified epidemiologists and public health physicians. However, in recent years, other professional groupings, such as those working on health economics and pharmaceuticals, have also developed as the WHO has had to negotiate with different global stakeholders; for example, global commercial institutions involved in influencing international health capture knowledge for reasons of profit and future investment in knowledge creation. Global players (e.g., drug firms) use the international patent system with great effect, and with strong legal backup, to ensure their investment in knowledge creation, or in buying of knowledge, leads to maximum commercial success. Whilst this may seem fair from a commercial standpoint, it does sometimes prevent local players and beneficiaries from benefiting from the knowledge because of barriers to access or because of cost. With the increasing move towards global institutions capturing knowledge through the use of patent laws, WHO is having to enter into the international legal sector in order to ensure its global knowledge networks can still be used.

Transition to knowledge-based organisational forms
In recent years, WHO has put a lot of effort into considering how it could improve its management of knowledge. We now discuss constraints to management of knowledge and attempts to build CoPs for local knowledge sharing.

Systemic constraints to the management of knowledge in WHO
WHO has missed opportunities in-country to influence national health improvement by having too much of a focus on global knowledge and paying insufficient attention to local knowledge. WHO has been a leader in the development of global norms and guidance, often centred in Geneva or its regional offices; this knowledge is often 'projected' at countries, with those based in country offices complaining about the volume produced, often at a rate that makes it difficult to properly disseminate in country. With the change of the Director General in 2003, a new department was set up to address some of these systemic constraints. Of particular importance was the move to combine future strategies for knowledge management and information communication strategies. In addition, the deficits in WHO human resource management are being addressed, through more robust contracts, development of core competencies that include knowledge sharing, and more attention to promoting rotation and mobility of personnel. There is still a long way to go, however, and WHO has not made the kind of investment in knowledge management strategies, such as using ICTs to facilitate CoPs, that others such as the World Bank have made in this field.

Part IV: Case analysis and discussion

Changing processes of knowing at the WHO
Historically, the WHO, working with global networks, has focused on the development of global generalised public health knowledge, which it has subsequently projected for use in local countries. Hierarchy and divisions of labour across this global organisation have typically privileged academic public health knowledge over local health care delivery knowledge. However, the rapid growth of

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international organisations into this sector has put significant competitive pressure on the WHO and eroded its dominant reputation of health leadership. These pressures have led to a rethinking of the role and use of local knowledge and its interaction with global knowledge at the WHO, and emphasised the inadequacy of its 'global projector' nature. The organisation has increasingly focused on complementing its global expertise and knowledge with a broader focus on local country knowledge needs, facilitating 'joint working around country'.

Tensions between global and local knowledge
Global networks, along with WHO headquarters, develop a number of different types of global generalised knowledge, such as tools, methodologies and science/ideas for potential use in member countries. These global networks legitimise the prioritisation of the value and use of such global knowledge over local knowledge by drawing on their associations with networks of medical professionalism and associations of donor networks who provide the funding. On the other hand, national institutions develop indigenous knowledge using alternative indicators and measures collected in locally developed information systems. These institutions are able to prioritise the value and use of this local knowledge over global generalised knowledge in some work areas. Local-global tensions develop which require sensitive inter-communal negotiations on key issues such as: 'what is the appropriateness of generalised data or science generated elsewhere?' and 'what is its relevance in a culturally specific local context?'

Representatives in the in-country WHO office are challenged in managing these tensions between global and local knowledge in their work practice. Whilst knowledge can 'leak' between the local WHO office and the wider network of practice involving national institutions such as the ministry of health, knowledge sharing between the local office and the global headquarters at WHO is often 'stickier' due to political and organisational design issues between the local, regional and global levels. A key challenge for WHO representatives is therefore to work across these boundaries as knowledge brokers to facilitate inter-communal negotiations.

WHO compared with other global organisations across knowledge dimensions
We now compare WHO with other global organisations along the four knowledge dimensions: utilising local knowledge, building knowledge capacities, local-global knowledge sharing, and transition to knowledge-based organisational forms.

As in other global firms, a key issue for the WHO is the role and use of local knowledge, and new ways of working 'on the ground'. However, while staff in global service firms and health care workers are both professionals, the former are able to exercise local discretion and autonomy in using their local knowledge with respect to global knowledge as materialised in firm-wide technologies and methodologies. Whereas the WHO develops generalised knowledge in *global networks*, global service firms develop their generalised knowledge from their audit or consulting engagements 'on the ground', albeit in different locales. This approach reflects their historical sensitivity to locality and professional discretion given to local partners. In contrast, at the WHO, generalised knowledge is developed by public health researchers who rely on their global networks of practice and scientific

methods, such as evidence-based practice, which do not typically take the local context into account. This issue raises the long-standing challenge as to whether 'Western' science is able to appreciate traditional cultures and their indigenous knowledge, and respect the values and beliefs of local knowledge in the development and implementation of health programmes. For example, recent studies have demonstrated the need for health officials to more carefully appreciate the values and beliefs of local people in designing appropriate delivery of care of HIV/AIDS patients

There are also interesting differences at the country level between the WHO representative and the local partners of global service firms. First, in-country WHO representatives have different pressures of client service. WHO's clients are government institutions such as ministries of health rather than commercial clients. Unlike staff of global service firms, WHO representatives do not have a direct profit incentive, although they are experiencing other financial pressures. For example, institutional rivalry between themselves and emerging health institutions locally has led to a loss of power and a drop in budgetary income. Donors are channelling funding to other international institutions viewed as being more responsive in providing effective delivery of care on the ground. In response, WHO is attempting to better utilise local knowledge so as to take more seriously the 'working with countries' slogan.

Global service firms have led the way in using codification approaches to develop knowledge capacities, with a focus on the value and power of multidimensionality, allowing decision-making across a number of relevant axes. Whilst the WHO does have access to a lot of data, the large majority of this data capture comprises global knowledge along some key areas or axes, such as technical programmes and scientific evidence. Further development of knowledge capacity to include health and non-health data at the local level would better facilitate decision making across multiple dimensions of global and local information.

Political realities challenge local-global knowledge sharing. WHO's structure differs from that of global organisations in that regional leadership is voted in by countries in the region, and these contexts of power influence knowledge sharing between headquarters and other levels; this is further complicated by the fact that each region has a different institutional history and enjoys a somewhat unique relationship with headquarters and the country office.

Culturally, medical professionals, highly represented among WHO staff, do not tend to be as comfortable or experienced with the use of ICTs to support local-global knowledge sharing in their work. Medics tend to be autonomous and independent, typically limiting their sharing to other trusted professionals, often known to them on a personal basis or by reputation. These realities emphasise the need for more face-to-face forums and meetings across the organisation at headquarters and regions to work in parallel with ICT-supported initiatives in an effort to facilitate overlapping memberships on taskforces, as is common in global professional service firms.

As the WHO makes the transition to becoming an effective knowledge-based organisation, there are signs that it is following the path of other international

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organisations. First, the WHO has recognized the need for changes in mind-set if new ways of working are to be achieved. Traditionally, the organisation at headquarters has tended to operate as a 'global projector' working successfully at developing global public health goods at headquarters and then implementing programmes with a one-way flow for use at the country level. There has, however, been some movement towards recognising the need for two-way knowledge flows, using unique local indigenous knowledge.

Second, structures and processes need to accompany this mind-set change. There are plans afoot to increase the frequency of rotation of people from the centre, involving periods of co-location in the country office to facilitate sharing of knowledge and co-development of appropriate programmes for use locally. However, despite these good intentions, the reality is that people come with a different set of experiences and initial dispositions, and have an inherent bias in privileging different types of knowledge (e.g., professional medical/scientific knowledge, country level macro-level knowledge and indigenous knowledge) across these different communities. A key challenge, therefore, will be for WHO representatives to work across these boundaries as knowledge brokers to facilitate inter-communal negotiations between government, non-government organisations and the various internal communities at different levels of the WHO.

Finally, the fragmented knowledge base, typical of international organisations, is reflected in WHO's technical and organisational systems, structure and culture. For example, some regional entities, such as the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), have developed local knowledge that could be valuably shared with the rest of the global organisation and with partners. To stimulate such knowledge sharing, pilots could be started in country offices to work with these regional offices and headquarters in an effort to transition the organisation away from this multi-domestic structure. Successful organisational (re)design will be key in stimulating change in these deeply embedded historical practices of the organisation, allowing for more effective bridging of local-global knowledge and a new organising form.

Part V: Conclusions

Building bridges between local and global knowledge at the WHO is closely linked to new ways of working, and involves significant change in work practice. WHO local representatives need to be trusted in terms of knowledge provisioning and given more local autonomy and discretion. A key challenge will be for WHO professionals to decide how to develop and incorporate global-local knowledge sharing into their practice. In other words, how can they draw on globally produced knowledge alongside locally produced knowledge in their practice? To facilitate this change, more unified access to information systems and knowledge management systems across the organisation is necessary but not sufficient. Whilst technology and process play a role in managing knowledge to enable the shift in work practice, people and communities are central to changing processes of knowing. Local representatives of the WHO need to perform the challenging role of working with a wider network of practice across boundaries, and must be given adequate structural and political support in this endeavour. Establishing a new set of guidelines in this expanded

network of practice will be important to agree on standards accepted as legitimate and appropriate across different communities.

WHO representatives and their teams in country offices are central to the building of bridges between local and global knowledge systems. In addition to developing negotiation skills and effectively operating in a wider network of practice, these WHO representatives will need additional resources, such as information analysts and specialists at the local office, to facilitate information collection and analysis across multiple dimensions or axes for programme strategy and development. Indeed, it is this inseparable blend of technology, individual knowing-in-practice and organising knowledge in networks of practice that will be important to effectively bridge and build local and global knowledge, and so motivate new ways of working at the WHO.

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Abstract

This paper examines knowledge strategies of global organisations and considers the implications for new ways of working at the WHO. We analyse WHO knowledge strategies along four dimensions: utilising local knowledge, building knowledge capacities, local-global knowledge sharing and the transition to knowledge-based

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organisational forms, and conclude with some implications as to how the WHO might build bridges between local and global knowledge.

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Major meetings as entry points for knowledge sharing: a case from the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

Simone Staiger-Rivas, Allison Hewlitt, Douglas Horton, Nathan Russell and Gerry Toomey

Introduction

Economic globalization, environmental pressures and other forces are rapidly altering the face of tropical agriculture, placing new and changing demands on the 15 centres supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and on their many national partners. Through a broad agenda of multidisciplinary research, these organisations are creating a wealth of knowledge that can contribute to sustainable agricultural development. But they need to become more adept at sharing this knowledge through collaborative learning processes that steadily improve researchers' performance in helping rural people in developing countries solve problems and seize new opportunities.

Efforts to foster knowledge sharing amongst centres and partners have tended to focus on better management of information flows and on the capture of codified knowledge resulting from agricultural research. Though necessary and important, these activities are not sufficient for helping scientists deal with the complex challenges of sustainable agricultural development.

In search of more effective approaches, the centres have embarked on a significant new initiative to improve knowledge sharing (KS). Funded by the World Bank through the CGIAR's Information and Communications Technology-Knowledge Management (ICT-KM) Programme, the KS Project has adopted a practical approach that builds on previous efforts to enhance KS in the centres. An earlier project on this subject succeeded in bringing KS to the attention of a large audience in the CGIAR. It also provided KS training and orientation and led to the elaboration of comprehensive KS strategies in selected centres. They made little progress toward implementing those strategies, however, and project participants concluded that more commitment was required on the part of centre management, supported by human resources policies conducive to KS and further capacity building.

The new initiative described in this paper has pursued a complementary approach that involves incorporating KS principles and techniques into important centre events. The idea is that by creating opportunities for centre management and staff to experiment with KS approaches, the project can demonstrate the value of those approaches as means of facilitating organisational change and research collaboration.

The project has worked toward this end mainly through four pilot initiatives at the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), International Maize and Wheat

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Improvement Centre (CIMMYT), Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), and International Water Management Institute (IWMI), planned by groups of centre staff from 2004 to 2005, with strong support from the central project team. Other activities have included a study of human resource policies in relation to KS and to institutional learning and change, and a training course in facilitation skills.

This paper describes only the CIAT and CIMMYT initiatives, as the other two have not yet been completed and documented. The pilot initiative at CIAT resulted in a new way for the centre to organise and conduct its annual staff meeting, whilst the CIMMYT approach contributed towards the formation of a well-integrated team of scientists who share knowledge and information, and work towards common goals. On the basis of these two experiences, we draw some tentative conclusions about major meetings as entry points for KS in research and development organisations.

A new formula for CIAT's annual staff meeting

Like most other CGIAR centres, CIAT has a long tradition of annual meetings of professional staff. The format has typically focused on plenary sessions, in which researchers deliver formal PowerPoint presentations, followed by questions and discussion. In addition, time is usually allotted for project teams and other groups to review on-going activities and plan future work. Here, as elsewhere, many feel the time spent in annual staff meetings is not used as well as it could be. Too many hours, they say, are consumed by formal presentations, with little in-depth discussion of 'burning issues'. There are few opportunities for the more or less 100 people to get to know each other and establish the collegial relationships that are essential for creative scientific collaboration.

In an effort to address those concerns, the KS Project proposed to CIAT management a major overhaul of its annual staff meeting. The idea was to try an alternative formula that would help staff share knowledge, broaden communication, stimulate dialogue and strengthen personal relationships.

A five-member co-ordination team, with strong skills in KS, information management, communications, and monitoring and evaluation was established to work with CIAT management in planning and carrying out the meeting. The team included a consultant from Canada's Bellanet International Secretariat, which is a key partner in the KS Project. One of the co-ordination team's first tasks was to help management define the meeting's objectives. The team then met with a range of other CIAT staff – in face-to-face meetings at headquarters and via telephone with outposted staff – to check the relevance of the proposed objectives and get reactions to alternative meeting designs. As a result, the week-long meeting (called 'KS Week') was organised around four objectives:

1. Developing a shared understanding of three major new initiatives at CIAT (referred to as 'research-for-development challenges') and contribute to their effective operationalisation.
2. Enhancing the integration of headquarters and regional staff and activities.

Staiger, S., A. Hewlitt, D. Horton, N. Russell and G. Toomey. 2005. Major meetings as entry points for knowledge sharing:
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3. Promoting effective work planning on the part of project teams and collaborators.
4. Demonstrating how KS techniques can help centre staff.

The gathering of the clan: an Open Space session on new initiatives
The co-ordination team selected well-known KS approaches and complementary measures to achieve those objectives. The Open Space approach was used to involve more than 80 staff in a 2-day session on planning how the centre should move forward to operationalise the research-for-development challenges. Open Space is a highly democratic method of group agenda setting, followed by small-group discussion, reporting and preparation of action plans. The session was held in an expansive open-air setting: the covered patio that forms the northern side of the CIAT campus quadrangle.

To end the first day's proceedings – or, in the lingo of Open Space practitioners, 'to close the circle' – each person shares with the group a word or phrase that captures her or his impression of the day's work. Here is a sampling of results from passing the microphone from person to person: 'provocative ... multifaceted ... confusing ... interesting ... unbounded ... challenging ... frank ... social ... fresh ... energetic ... hard work ... diversity ... listening ... learning ... opportunity ... intriguing'.

During the closing plenary session on day 2, participants commented on the extent to which the 2 days of Open Space meetings did or did not contribute to operationalising the three development challenges. Most of the comments were positive, as illustrated by the following:

- Holding the plenary sessions outdoors was a very positive change.
- Change requires participation: the Open Space sessions provided for a good experience in that regard.
- 'I appreciated the experimental, novel approach'.
- 'It is impressive that priorities were reached so quickly. We now need to put our money where our mouth is'.

In addition to this type of generally positive comment, there was, nevertheless, a recurring message: despite the progress made in formulating action plans, there was still considerable confusion about how CIAT's work should be integrated under the three development challenges. Whilst the meeting format was effective in bringing people together, the discussion did not fully focus on the theme of operationalising the development challenges as two participants noted:

> *I think we missed the target over the past couple of days.*

> *I had wanted to put meat on the development challenges, but we haven't done that.*

Peer Assists for regional and headquarters integration
The Peer Assist method – an approach for tapping the knowledge and experience of colleagues in problem solving – was one process used to address the meeting's second objective, namely that of integration between CIAT's headquarters and regional staff. Managers and staff members were invited to present problems that they personally had experienced, related to relations between headquarters and the regions. Seven individuals

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were selected to present their problem in a small-group setting. Examples of the problems include:

- What to do when you (a regional staff member) find out that a project has been developed at headquarters and now you're supposed to implement it?
- What to do (if you're the research director) when someone comes to your office to complain that they should have been involved in the development of a project that has now been approved?
- What to do when you (a regional staff member) find that you have three bosses, three work plans and no operating budget?

Like Open Space technology, the Peer Assist encourages interaction. Participants present a problem of their choosing and others may offer advice or analysis on the basis of their personal interest and experience with similar situations. Those who present the problem benefit from the collective wisdom of the group. Others frequently benefit from the interactions, as they realise they possess knowledge and experience of use to others.

A Knowledge Fair on research-support services
As a further aid to headquarters/regional integration, a Knowledge Fair was organised in the form of a 5-hour-long exhibition of support services available within CIAT and other scientific organisations that share the centre's campus. It was a bottom-up exercise: support staff designed the displays and were present to answer visitors' questions and provide services on the spot. The Knowledge Fair focused specifically on support services because of a perception that staff based outside of headquarters, many on other continents, have particular difficulty in accessing these services and in knowing who is doing what (putting faces to names).

As people moved from booth to booth along the outdoor walkways of the CIAT quadrangle, they were greeted by a wandering white-faced mime artist – a local performer well known for his antics on the sidewalks of Cali. The job of this Charlie Chaplin look-alike was to put a smile on the faces of those passing by and to stimulate their curiosity about the fair – all without a spoken word in Spanish, English or any other language.

One senior staff member from Asia reported having an enormously productive tour of the stands. At the Information Systems stand, staff helped him solve a computer problem; at the Human Resources stand, a contract was finalised; and at the Finances stand, a financial difficulty was successfully resolved.

But there is a glitch. A parallel event, running all day, monopolises the time of more than 20 staff members who might otherwise have been available to visit the Research Support Fair. A consultant has flown in to introduce the group to a KS technique known as appreciative inquiry and to help researchers apply it to one of the development challenges, the enhancement of rural innovation. The idea is to build a shared vision of this development challenge and to investigate ways to meet it, based on best practices and other assets already available within the organisation.

Evaluating KS Week

Whether centre staff find KS approaches helpful (thus fulfilling the meeting's fourth objective) and begin incorporating them into other activities depends obviously on the effectiveness of these approaches. The co-ordination team employed two techniques for gauging the utility of KS Week and identifying ways to improve it.

First, a 'barometer team' was formed to monitor the week's activities and recommend ways to make future meetings more effective. For this purpose, the team conducted After Action Reviews. The team consisted of five headquarters staff, four outposted staff, the meeting facilitator and one other communications consultant. Meeting three times during KS Week, the team made 48 recommendations related to the event's strengths and weaknesses, directly observed by team members or reported to them by other participants. In a particularly significant observation on the Open Space event, the barometer team recognised that many CIAT staff did not grasp the development challenges in sufficient detail to be able to design action plans. 'We should have done a better job of determining whether people understood the topic well enough to discuss it', commented one team member.

The second approach for judging the usefulness of CIAT's KS Week was a formal evaluation. Most KS Week participants surveyed were positive about it and felt the meeting had improved communication and relationships, and demonstrated the value of KS techniques. Whilst it is difficult to assess the usefulness of specific KS tools, apart from the usefulness of the sessions in which they were used, most participants indicated they had found the Peer Assist, Knowledge Fair and Open Space approaches useful. They also expressed interest in using these approaches in the future and felt they should be incorporated into CIAT projects. Moreover, they suggested that special attention should be paid to involving nationally recruited staff members more fully in KS activities.

When asked to compare KS Week with previous annual meetings, participants responded that the communication and interaction were more effective than in other years. They also appreciated not being confined to closed, dark rooms for lengthy PowerPoint presentations. Nonetheless, one aspect of previous meetings that participants preferred over KS Week was the exchange of scientific information on work in progress, results and impacts. They suggested that some mechanism be found to facilitate the exchange of such information, but without returning to the previous format of non-stop presentations with limited discussion.

Sharing knowledge on wheat improvement at CIMMYT

CIMMYT has a long tradition of world-class wheat science. The most recent embodiment of this legacy is the Wheat Improvement Group (WIG), a research team of some 30 members spread across seven countries. In the spring of 2005, the centre's wheat research station at Ciudad Obregón in northwestern Mexico provided the setting for a 3-day workshop, the first annual meeting of this newly reconstituted wheat group.

A number of problems have plagued past collaboration amongst wheat scientists. First, sharing knowledge amongst staff, who are scattered across the globe, has posed a number of logistical challenges. Second, budgets and other administrative matters have tended to dominate meeting agendas, pushing key scientific issues to the back burner. Finally, conventional meeting formats have not been conducive to creative participation and effective KS.

CIMMYT has a new strategic plan and recently reorganised itself into six multidisciplinary programmes to implement the plan. Knowledge management (KM) is highlighted in the centre's mission statement and is part of the mandate of one of the programmes. Complementing the programmes are several thematic groups, including WIG, whose job it is to ensure scientific rigour in CIMMYT's research and foster innovation.

The WIG meeting was planned by two meeting facilitators (the Bellanet consultant and the KS Project co-ordinator mentioned earlier) with the WIG co-ordinator and other CIMMYT staff, based on the following objectives:

1. Clarify how WIG can contribute to the centre's priority areas of work;
2. Contribute to the formation of a well-integrated team of scientists who share knowledge and information and who work towards common goals; and
3. Use the collective wisdom of the group to develop plans to solve some of the key science issues confronting wheat improvement.

A final objective was specifically related to improved KS:

4. To record lessons and good practices that can be shared within CIMMYT and the CGIAR.

Open Space: setting the agenda
On Wednesday morning, with 39 people sitting in a large circle in the *bodega* (a warehouse that serves as a site for sorting and packing wheat seed samples), the WIG co-ordinator formally opened the group's first annual meeting. He stressed that the meeting would be an opportunity to discuss wheat science, specifically how to conduct high-quality research for CIMMYT's programmes.

One of facilitators then explained the Open Space approach. During the facilitator's introduction, a scientist strongly objected to the process proposed and to the presence of the facilitators from the KS Project team:

> *Here we go again with a couple of management consultants who are going to waste our time and distract us from our own agenda.*

It was clear that he was not alone in this opinion. There seemed to be particular concern about the large amount of time allocated to the exercise, especially in the light of the brevity of the overall meeting. He preferred to have a more formal structure imposed on the meeting at the outset.

The objection stopped the flow of the meeting dead in its tracks. There was an

uncomfortable edge to the opening session. The facilitators offered further explanation of the process and the WIG co-ordinator asked the group for a measure of trust. The session then continued as planned. Participants with topics to propose wrote them down on cards. All the cards were posted on a wall – the 'marketplace' – with times and locations of discussion groups.

The topics identified by participants covered a broad scientific territory from wheat breeding strategies to training for national research systems and biotechnology applications. The small-group discussions were generally animated, focused and at times provocative. Over the course of the day, participants continued to add new topics to the marketplace. Space had been created to discuss all issues of importance and participants were now willing to take advantage of it.

By the end of the day, participants were engaged and requesting additional time the following day to continue their discussions. When participants were asked to share their impressions of the day in a phrase or sentence, their responses included the following: 'Where's the low morale?... I take my hat off to you all.... How can we put words into action?... Cross-fertilisation of ideas.... I can now put faces to names... Glad not to have regular presentations.... Hope we can get into the science tomorrow.'

Ranking topics and action planning
Most of the second day, Thursday, was devoted to discussion of selected topics and to drafting of action plans for those priority topics. This process began with a 20-minute period of reading, followed by quiet discussion of the brief reports that came out of the previous day's discussions.

Upon completion of a voting process, the WIG co-ordinator announced the five priority topics for further discussion and action planning. One of the facilitators then briefly ran through some of the necessities of a good action plan: concrete elements such as goals, who will execute the plan, in what time frame and with what resources. With those guidelines made clear, the participants broke into sub-groups. Once again, the discussions were lively, detailed and fruitful, resulting in five plans.

Peer Assists: colleagues helping colleagues
On the last day, 30 people including the KS Project team congregated in the bodega for the Peer Assist sessions. Here are two examples of the problems the peer 'assistees' elected to share with their peers: (1) how to cope with the logistical and security problems of running a CIMMYT office in a challenging location: Afghanistan; and (2) how to balance the need for product development with scientists' need to publish. After a first round of discussions, lasting about half an hour, peer assistees and their facilitators moved on to the next group, bringing their flip charts with them. Thus, each assistee benefited from the wisdom of another group, not just the initial subgroup of interested parties.

Assistees, facilitators and participants at large expressed a variety of observations on the sessions. A sampling:
• 'I liked the sympathy and appreciated the ideas.'
• A diversity of contributors favours a successful outcome.
• Clear specification of the problem is essential; doing this is half the work of

    identifying potentially useful solutions.
- 'I might use it [the Peer Assist method] again in technical meetings.'

After Action Review of Dgroups
To evaluate the WIG Dgroup, an e-mail-based discussion space set up several months earlier by Bellanet, an hour-long After Action Review (AAR) was conducted. The purpose of conducting the After Action Review was twofold. First, to find out how the Dgroup could be more effective in strengthening the WIG and, second, to introduce this tool as a learning process.

The After Action Review consisted of a plenary discussion focused on several simple questions: What is the purpose of the Dgroup? What has actually happened so far regarding its use? What has worked well and what has not? What should be done differently?

It was reported that Dgroup traffic was rather slow at first but that the discussion list is now well used. One director said he had been exploiting this channel to stimulate discussion of scientific issues. Other uses by Dgroup members include sharing scientific reports and articles, and circulating tables of contents of journals. Many aspects of e-forum operation were discussed, with participants particularly interested in Dgroup etiquette and procedures that promote efficiency. A clear message emerging from the discussion was that the Dgroup is extremely useful but that users need guidance and practical advice on how to make the most of this information service.

Closing the circle and participant evaluations
At the close of WIG meeting, participants were asked to reflect on the 2.5 days of sessions and the KS techniques employed. The task took two forms: the final closing of the circle and filling out a four-page questionnaire.

In the final few minutes of plenary, one participant noted that the ultimate litmus test of the meeting will be concrete follow-up of the action plans. Others mentioned that whilst discussion had been excellent, it might have been better to give the meeting a narrower focus.

The written evaluations, by 32 of the 36 CIMMYT staff in attendance, show that their overall reaction to the design and implementation of the WIG meeting was positive. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 signifies poor and 5 excellent, participants deemed the meeting 'good', with an average rating of 3.9. On the whole, most participants felt the meetings' objectives were accomplished, the average score for all three wheat-related objectives being 3.7 on the 5-point scale. Achievement of the team-building objective got the highest score: 4.0. This is fully consistent with participants' comments which point to the importance of face-to-face meetings, improved communication and enhanced team spirit.

On the down side, the evaluation results indicated that many participants felt there was too little time available to deal adequately with the entire meeting agenda, and they would have appreciated having more clear recommendations formulated.

In the evaluation, participants were also asked about the usefulness of the various KS techniques used to CIMMYT and to themselves personally. The After Action Review method, applied to evaluate the WIG Dgroup, proved to be the most popular.

Complementary activities

Through the two pilot initiatives described here and the others in process, the KS Project is exploring the potential of major meetings as entry points for promoting KS in the CGIAR. But this work must be accompanied by other initiatives as well, if we are to achieve the behavioural and cultural changes needed for mainstreaming KS. Three topics receiving particular attention are: training in facilitation skills; fostering KS through human resources policies and practices; and a 'toolkit' for KS practitioners in the CGIAR

Training in facilitation skills
Facilitation skills are essential for CGIAR staff, not only for organising better meetings, but also for working more effectively with partners in teams involving people from different organisations, backgrounds, disciplines, nationalities and cultures. For that reason, the KS Project joined forces with the CGIAR Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) Initiative to offer training on the facilitation of group decision-making. The objective of the course was to build participants' facilitation skills for conducting meetings, working with teams, managing conflict and building consensus.

The training proved extremely effective. Three months after the course, over half of participants had used their new skills to facilitate work-related meetings and had shared the skills with colleagues. One participant commented as follows:

> *Using the techniques I learnt at the course, I facilitated a very important 2-day meeting of CIFOR's senior management team on strategic staffing. I introduced the 'gradient of agreement', which was used throughout the meeting before making decisions. It was a highly productive and satisfactory meeting.*

Given the highly positive results of the first course, a second course on facilitation skills will be held in November 2005.

Fostering KS through human resource policies and practices
Management systems and practices may or may not be conducive to introducing or mainstreaming KS. To gain a better knowledge of this issue and to identify key areas for future intervention, the KS Project and the ILAC Initiative carried out a joint study on the role of human resources policies and practices in fostering KS and organisational learning. The study examined six CGIAR centres as well as six other organisations that are regarded as leaders in this task.[1]

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[1] For further information on the study, see Krista Baldini (2005) The role of human resources policies and practices in fostering knowledge sharing and organizational learning. *ILAC Brief* 11, IPGRI: Rome

All of the organisations studied, including the CGIAR centres, are promoting KS and organisational learning to some extent, generally in the context of broader organisational change efforts. Whilst some of the organisations studied have pursued comprehensive, integrated approaches, most have resorted to small-scale efforts, seeking incremental changes. It is sometimes assumed that CGIAR centres are far behind other research and development organisations in KS and organisational learning. Our findings indicate, though, that whilst most of the centres covered in the study lack comprehensive strategies, some are actively pursuing promising initiatives, from which others can learn.

Three key factors were identified that influence the success of efforts to foster change through KS sharing and organisational learning: (1) public support for such initiatives from top leaders; (2) an explicit recognition of the way in which the organisation's business strategies are reinforced by KS and organisational learning; and (3) effective policies and practices for internal communication that support KS and organisational learning.

KS Toolkit
The 'toolkit' for KS practitioners in the CGIAR, to be available on the Web, will present a selection of KS methods and approaches. Short descriptions of each tool will be cited from the most relevant sources and step-by-step guides will be provided for their use. The toolkit will also provide links and references to more information, as well as stories from experiences in the use of these tools. Finally, it will provide a list of possible contacts from peers who have used the tools and are willing to share their experiences. Users of the toolkit will be encouraged to enrich the content by contributing their own references, stories and contacts.

Lessons learned and future directions

The four pilot initiatives developed under the KS Project are based on the hypothesis that high-profile events, involving sizable numbers of staff and featuring the use of alternative or unconventional KS approaches, can be an effective entry point for promoting adoption of those approaches. The experience at CIAT and CIMMYT seems to bear out this hypothesis. Through these events, large numbers of staff gained direct experience with KS approaches, and when asked to evaluate that experience, the results were largely positive. Both meetings made significant progress towards their individual objectives, and many staff expressed enthusiasm about the new style of conducting meetings. Even so, it is also clear from the experiences presented in this paper that our organisation and planning of such events can be improved. Towards this end, we have begun a process of identifying lessons learned from the pilot initiatives which will culminate in a 5-day workshop (to be held in September 2005) encompassing all four pilots.

Some of the lessons we have drawn from the experience so far may seem rather obvious. For example, both the CIAT and CIMMYT pilots underscore the importance of involving as many staff as possible in planning the event. We thought we knew that, but evidently we did not put it into practice very well.

At CIAT, whilst the co-ordination team held extensive discussions with management and staff at headquarters, it consulted only the regional co-ordinators to gauge the views of the centre's numerous outposted staff. In reflecting on the Open Space session, we realized that many of the outposted staff did not have enough information about the research-for-development challenges to participate effectively in planning their operationalisation, a key objective of the meeting. Broader consultation with outposted staff may have brought this obstacle to light at an earlier stage and prompted us to organise the Open Space session differently.

In the course of such consultations, it is important to remain alert to individuals who show special interest and are prepared to invest time in experimenting with new ways of working with groups. These people are potential KS 'champions', and their support is vital for organising and conducting individual events and for achieving acceptance of KS approaches. Time and resources should be devoted to building their confidence and capacity.

Another lesson that emerged from both the CIAT and CIMMYT events is to be prepared for the unexpected. Knowledge sharing processes generate different reactions from those who experience them from enthusiasm and motivation to confusion and frustration and, in some cases, to anger. Attempts to ensure that KS will generate only positive reactions can be ineffective and, in the case of Open Space, a waste of time. Preparations for the first meeting of the WIG at CIMMYT provide the best example. Prior to the meeting of WIG members, a significant effort was made to contact members of the group to walk them through the agenda; to explain the processes to be used and why they were selected; and to solicit, and take into account, any feedback or issues among the members. Based on conversations with more than five of the WIG members, the KS Project team felt quite comfortable that there were no major issues with the planned processes. However, it became quite clear within the first 10 minutes of the meeting that there were indeed issues with the process, even from those who had individually spoken with someone from the KS Project team. After a shaky start, the group agreed to move forward as planned, and by the end of the day, the energy and motivation in the room were contagious. Whilst we had tried to prepare ourselves for the expected, being prepared for the unexpected worked in our favour, as we were able to deal with issues as they emerged.

Of course, we will never achieve flawless execution of KS events. And even if we could, we must bear in mind that these events are only part of an integrated KS strategy. They may arouse interest in KS amongst large numbers of staff. But to apply KS approaches, staff need new skills, reliable sources of continuing support, and clear incentives to pursue their interest in KS. Hence the importance of the above-mentioned facilitation training and the work on human resources policies and practices.

It remains to be seen how wider application of KS approaches can affect a centre's culture and performance or can improve the performance of the CGIAR as a whole; the ultimate goal of the KS Project. In the project, we assume that more dynamic communication and sharing of knowledge will lead to better decisions and more effective teamwork, resulting in greater efficiency and effectiveness. But it is really

too early to rigorously test this assumption by measuring the results of the KS Project at the level of CGIAR centres or the CGIAR as a whole.

Whether we are able to pursue this question depends on how the ICT-KM Programme, in collaboration with centres and others, follows up on the pilot initiatives and complementary activities described here within the CGIAR. Regardless of what transpires on that front, it is important for each of the centres involved in the pilots to devise their own action plans for promoting KS and for further developing in-house capacity to implement those plans. CIAT, for example, will continue to foster KS amongst centre staff by offering permanent training in KS approaches through its Communications Unit.

For future KS initiatives in the CGIAR, we believe an important next step is to begin applying KS approaches in our increasingly complex collaboration with a growing array of international, national and local partners. If we do ultimately succeed in demonstrating that KS can enhance the centres' contribution to development, then the impact of KS is most likely to come from its beneficial effects on collaborative arrangements. Recent experience at IWMI and CIAT in sharing KS with project partners suggests that KS for more effective partnerships is a highly promising avenue. We suspect that, as centre staff realise that KS is a powerful tool for facilitating research and development collaboration, they will be more committed to help promote KS within their own centres and in the CGIAR generally.

Abstract

Annual meetings are a long-standing tradition in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and an essential tool by which the international centres supported by the CGIAR plan and review their work. As centres have decentralised their operations, the costs of these events have grown, so both managers and staff have begun seeking ways to extract greater returns from the increased investment in international travel and staff time. One alternative is to exploit the opportunities that annual meetings and workshops offer for testing and demonstrating the value of knowledge sharing (KS) approaches. The idea is to move away from conventional presentations and plenary discussions to a dynamic process of face-to-face communication that is more effective at promoting KS.

Managers and staff of four CGIAR centres explored this alternative through pilot initiatives in which they used a variety of KS approaches, including Open Space, Peer Assists, After Action Reviews, Knowledge Fairs and collaborative tools, specifically Dgroups and an online meeting planner. Special attention was given to the crucial role of group facilitation and the need for modernizing management systems and practices. This paper, based on the authors' experience and participants' evaluations of the pilot initiatives, outlines the approaches developed by two of the four centres, describes the challenges they faced, and draws some conclusions about future directions.

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Staiger, S., A. Hewlitt, D. Horton, N. Russell and G. Toomey. 2005. Major meetings as entry points for knowledge sharing:
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A know-who directory for the CGIAR: what do users think?[1]

Mark Winslow

Introduction

Sustainable development requires a holistic approach and mutual learning that involves comparing different experiences and knowledge. But sharing expertise is difficult when experts are dispersed geographically, culturally and by subject-matter domain.

A prime example of an institution facing this challenge is the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR, www.cgiar.org). The CGIAR is a network of 15 independent centres that have some 8,500 scientists and staff stationed at more than 100 offices across the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. These centres work with a broad range of national and international partners in the public and private sectors and civil society to help reduce poverty, hunger and environmental degradation through sustainable agricultural development.

The three-month pilot study reported here examined the initial reactions of more than 170 CGIAR experts to an Internet-based 'know-who directory'. The purpose of a know-who directory is to help experts identify and exchange expertise with colleagues on relevant topics. This study focused on issues that would affect voluntary uptake of the directory by staff. The short time frame of the study did not allow realisation of the ultimate benefits expected from increased knowledge sharing (KS) through a know-who directory, such as increases in work efficiency and effectiveness, and the application of valuable new ideas resulting in impact towards CGIAR objectives.

In recent years, the CGIAR has recognised the need to improve knowledge sharing across its centres, and it has initiated exploratory activities[2]. In October 2001, the CGIAR's Organisational Change Programme[3] invited centre representatives interested in KS, referred to as 'KS champions', to a strategy workshop in Rome. The KS champions concluded that the dispersed structure and complex agenda of the CGIAR resulted in many staff simply not knowing who knows what. The group was intrigued by the potential of the Internet as a means to link these experts through a directory system analogous to the yellow pages of a telephone book.

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But the idea of a know-who directory on the Internet raised many questions. Would technology or web access be a barrier? Would staff be willing to make themselves available to a large peer group around the world through such an impersonal medium? Would they have concerns about time commitments or privacy? Would they share knowledge or withhold it, for fear of giving away their intellectual property and competitive advantage? What would motivate them to be more willing to share their expertise?

To explore such questions, the KS champions recommended the study reported in this paper.

> When the idea of testing a know-who directory was tabled, the consistent reaction from CGIAR leaders was that anything that could bring staff closer together would be valuable at this stage in the CGIAR's development.

Study process and methods

The know-who technology platform used in the pilot study

The choice of technology platform was influenced by the example of British Petroleum Corporation (BP), well known as one of the early adopters of KS in the corporate world (Collison 2001). BP developed and implemented the Sigma Connect know-who directory, currently offered by Addept Computer Services Ltd. in the UK (http://www.addept-solutions.com/esolution.aspx?CGID=63). The present study arranged to test Sigma Connect during April-June 2002. Sigma Connect allows implementing organisations to customise its appearance and content for their own purposes; the CGIAR version was dubbed 'CG Connect'.

Participation in the study

Participation was open to any CGIAR staff member assigned an @cgiar Internet e-mail box by a centre. Centres usually issue @cgiar e-mail boxes to staff that have reached mid- to upper technical or professional levels in the organisation and need to communicate internationally. This group of about 5,000 is most likely to derive value from international knowledge sharing.

Since this was a pilot trial, a smaller sample from within the total population of 5,000 was needed. E-mail invitations were issued selectively to individuals (such as coordinators of cross-centre task forces, projects and programmes) whose functions were presumed to require significant knowledge sharing. The KS champions also shared the invitation within their centres. The Directors General of all centres were informed and invited, and several relayed the invitation to their entire staff with encouragement to participate. CG Connect was also customised to accept close partners, when invited by CGIAR project coordinators.

Participation was voluntary. No high-profile campaign, top-management advocacy or rewards/disincentives were applied.

Since participation was voluntary and cross-centre groups were especially targeted by invitation, this CGIAR sub-sample may be biased in favour of individuals that have a more urgent need for or inclination towards knowledge sharing. This approach was taken rather than a random sample of the entire CGIAR population, because the survey intended to be forward looking to help inform the CGIAR's KS strategy and investment. It was believed that feedback from groups that were already grappling

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with KS problems and needs would be the most valuable in foreseeing the potential of the know-who directory and the challenges that might lie ahead.

Survey responses

User's impressions were gathered through surveys carried out using the SurveyMonkey online web service (www.surveymonkey.com) and e-mail.

Feedback was sought both from those who had participated in the know-who pilot study, hereafter referred to as the 'try-it' group (214 individuals), as well as those who had been invited but had not participated, called the 'no-try' group (134 individuals). The no-try group was included in order to understand factors that might inhibit staff from joining in KS initiatives in the future. The number of individuals who responded to the survey was higher in the try-it group (54%, or 115 people), although the response rate in the no-try group was still an acceptable 41%, or 55 individuals (including 14 who responded by e-mail because of lack of access to the Worldwide Web).

External partners (non-CGIAR staff) comprised 18% of the try-it respondents and 38% of the no-try respondents. For each of the two surveys, a filtering of the results by the internal versus external criterion yielded similar trends; therefore, CGIAR and external partner responses are pooled in the discussion that follows.

The try-it group was asked 20 questions about the rationale and importance of an Internet know-who directory, their impressions about CG Connect's performance, its design appeal, ease of use and related matters. Since the no-try group had not experienced CG Connect, and to increase the likelihood of a response from this presumably less-committed group, they were asked only four questions focusing on their reasons for not participating.

The response rate appeared large enough to reflect the prevailing views of the groups sampled. For example, the second week's input by try-it respondents largely paralleled the views of the first week (57 responses were received in the first week, and 42 in the second). The same consistency was observed in the later-arriving responses to the no-try survey. This consistency suggests that the views are representative of the larger population of CGIAR staff who are involved in cross-centre and knowledge sharing activities.

Is a know-who application needed in the CGIAR?
The survey began by asking whether an Internet know-who directory would be important for the CGIAR. Of the try-it group, 73% answered yes; 25% said it would be useful but not important; and 2% said it was not really necessary. The same question was posed to the no-try group. In response, 60% felt that a know-who directory would be important; 35% thought it may be useful but not that important; and 5% thought it unnecessary. Thus, a clear majority of both groups saw value in a know-who directory for the CGIAR.

Is staff willing to tell others about themselves?

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The first step in participating in the know-who directory was to fill in a personal web page, which described interests, expertise, contact details and other information, including a photograph. The time needed to complete a personal profile was 10-15 minutes (assuming a digital photo was readily available). A total of 222 people entered the CG Connect web portal during the pilot study. Of these, the following percentages carried out one or more of these tasks: 56% chose their expertise areas from the pre-loaded list of 'knowledge taxonomy' keywords; 45% described their expertise in their own words in a free-form essay; and 32% included their photograph.

Why didn't many of those who tried CG Connect fully complete their profiles? When the try-it group was asked this question, the predominant response was lack of time (68% of those who responded to this question, or 52 people). One fifth (22%) said they felt that some of the information asked for was not of the right type. Relatively few (6%) reported technical difficulties, most commonly with uploading their photo; and 6% expressed some concern about privacy as a reason for not fully completing their profiles.

Similarly, for the no-try group, lack of time, not a lack of priority, emerged as the prime difficulty (49%). 'Low priority for my time' was chosen by only 15% of the no-try respondents. Ten percent did not recall hearing about the trial. Login difficulties (16%) and problems with web access (14%) were also cited.

Reasons for not sharing knowledge
Experiences in other organisations have indicated a number of factors that constrain KS. Survey participants were queried about those factors and were also given the opportunity to describe their own reasons.

In response, 61% offered at least one reason:

- Half of those who did feel inhibitions (51%) indicated that they feared losing too much time due to being overwhelmed with requests for their expertise;
- Next in importance was a perceived lack of incentives in the CGIAR to motivate or reward efforts to share knowledge (37% of those who cited one or more inhibitions);
- Uncertainty about the credibility of others' claims of expertise (9%); and
- A worry that giving away one's expertise would reduce one's competitive advantage (4%).

Voluntary or not?
A crucial question that arose during the pilot study was how to gain critical mass when participation is totally voluntary. It became a chicken-and-egg issue. In order to be convinced to fill in their expert profiles, staff wanted first to see large numbers of other experts already represented inside. Yet the only way to get large numbers inside a know-who directory is for individuals to fill in their own profiles.

> *Connect may well have nurtured the culture in which it thrived.*
>
> Chris Collison, in an e-mail to the Learning-to-Fly Yahoo Group in October 2001, explaining how Connect both enabled and encouraged voluntary, self-motivated KS at British Petroleum.

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Some organisations take a compulsory approach to their expert databases for this reason. But others argue that KS can only be encouraged, not mandated. This may be particularly true in a research environment such as the CGIAR, where most staff come from an academic background in which intellectual independence is cherished. This voluntary KS view is strongly held by the BP knowledge management team that designed Sigma Connect (Collison 2001). Though they do not view technology as a substitute for face-to-face interaction to share knowledge, they believe that the voluntary design helps staff realise that KS must be driven by those who hold the knowledge – in other words, by themselves.

In the present study, try-it participants were ambivalent about the voluntary/non-voluntary choice. Forty-six percent felt that participation should remain wholly voluntary, while 48% felt that at least some of the information should be mandatory, leaving the more subjective information as voluntary. Only 6% felt that a fully compulsory approach should be taken.

Include external partners?
The CGIAR views partnerships as fundamental to its work and its partners as an extension of its own expertise and knowledge base. The inclusion of partners in CG Connect caused some to wonder about privacy risks, however, and about the criteria by which outsiders would be chosen for inclusion. Yet another worry was that including partners would create an open-ended environment, where thousands of additional accounts would need to be created and managed at high cost.

In the brief experience of this pilot, none of those difficulties materialised. Partners entered the system more slowly and in lower numbers than did staff. And the privacy issue turned out not to be a major concern for most survey respondents (see below).

There was, however, some difficulty in deciding how to restrict participation to 'close, active partners'. One criterion suggested was that no one should be found within the CG Connect community who was not personally known to at least one senior CGIAR staff member. This staff member would be indicated as sponsor on the partner's profile.

Security and privacy
Different centres had different institutional views about security risks of staff profiles on the Internet. Some had already made staff profiles publicly available on their own corporate web sites (which existed before this pilot study), while others did not.

Although CG Connect was accessed through the Internet, it was not available to the general public. A password was needed to enter the system. Additionally, all information was encrypted in transit using secure socket layer technology and 128-bit encryption.

Security of their CG Connect profiles did not turn out to be a major concern for the majority of respondents. Seventy-six percent were comfortable with the way CG Connect handled the security issue, although 19% expressed a moderate concern. Only 5% expressed a significant concern. Since the system was voluntary, staff were free to leave out any information they felt uncomfortable in sharing, such as addresses, phone numbers and photographs.

Can users conveniently access a web application?
If CGIAR staff and close partners, who work in some of the poorest and most remote areas of the developing world, have difficulty accessing the Internet, this could significantly inhibit the effectiveness of a web-based know-who directory. But the survey found this problem to be minor. Within the try-it group, 96% said they could easily access the web when they wanted to. In a separate question, 96% considered their Internet connection to be either fast (54%) or at least average (42%) in speed. And 81% appeared satisfied with the download speed of CG Connect web pages, compared to other web pages; another 15% even considered them as relatively fast to download.

Of course, people who had difficult or no access to the web would have been unlikely to participate either in the pilot study or in the web survey. While web access is not universal, most institutions these days do provide e-mail access to their principal staff. The no-try group was asked to respond by e-mail if they were unable to participate in the survey due to lack of web access. Out of 55 total no-try responses (41 via the web survey plus 14 by e-mail), only 9% (five individuals) cited difficulty in accessing the web as the constraint. Thus, even within the no-try group, a lack of web access did not appear to be a major limitation to participation.

Most CGIAR centres and centre offices are upgrading their Internet connections as local infrastructure, time and funds permit. National partners may find this to be a greater constraint, although Internet access and speed seem likely to improve over time. Thus, it appears that web access is already a practical reality for the majority of the CGIAR community, and the trend is toward wider access over time.

A related constraint is that staff may become less active in using a facility that requires them to visit a web site. CGIAR staff (like those of other organisations) receives large amounts of e-mail and have grown accustomed to respond to messages in their inbox rather than seek information on the web. A know-who directory would be more effective if it also reached staff by e-mail, so their attention would be drawn to it during the course of daily business.

Conclusions and recommendations

A major conclusion of this study is that a large majority of CGIAR staff engaged in cross-centre projects believe that a know-who directory is important. It is particularly interesting that even staff who chose not to participate in the study (the no-try group) mostly held this view. This conclusion is key because, for a voluntary know-who directory to succeed, users must see value in their participation.

Implementing a know-who directory
Whilst acknowledging the value of participation, staff also pointed out some reservations. The combination of lack of time to fill out the personal profile, worries about being flooded with too many requests for their expertise and a dearth of incentives to share knowledge seemed to be the most significant inhibitors.

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The large number of survey responses indicating 'lack of time' as the main constraint to fully completing their expertise profiles, even though this only required about 15 minutes, warrants further reflection. CGIAR employees, like those in many other organisations feel overloaded with work. They are constantly weighing one priority against another, setting many important tasks aside so they can complete those that are most urgent at the moment.

Leadership and impact: essential for success
The cultural transformation of any large institution takes time and top management commitment. Leaders must explain why KS and a know-who directory are important, and treat participation as a core job responsibility with accountability and incentive mechanisms, such as annual appraisals, awards, prestige assignments and other motivational methods.

To be sustained, a know-who directory will have to show tangible benefits within a few years. Once staff become active knowledge sharers, it is likely that expertise shared across continents and projects will yield benefits that will more than justify the effort.

Concrete evidence of benefits from KS were not measurable during this short three-month pilot study, because the expertise base was still relatively small (approximately 200 individuals out of a potential 5,000). Once a know-who system is adopted on a permanent basis and participation increased to include a majority of CGIAR professional staff, its impact could be investigated by asking participants

> *A decade ago, you used to keep your ideas to yourself at GE. Now, you're rewarded for how many ideas you exchange. We have changed the behavior system and the evaluation system.*
>
> Jack Welch, former CEO of the world's largest corporation, General Electric, quoted in Slater (1999).

after a few years whether and how the service had helped them form connections that led to significant on-the-job results.

A fully populated, actively used know-who directory would be expected to make cross-centre KS and collaboration easier and more effective. Project teams would be formed more quickly from a broader choice of experts and benefit from a wider range of advice, gaining insights more quickly and solving problems more expeditiously. There would be less 're-inventing of the wheel' and more original innovation. New staff would find their learning curve accelerated significantly, no longer requiring many years to build collegial networks. Accelerating the spread of a KS culture across the CGIAR would also contribute to greater cross-centre integration and cohesion − an objective that leaders of the CGIAR avidly seek, as is the case in many globally dispersed organisations.[4]

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[4] The CGIAR has not implemented CG Connect as described in Mark Winslow's article. Nonetheless, a feature called 'staff directory' is included in the software that the CGIAR has recently selected to serve as the platform for its new Virtual Resources Centre, or Internet site. And it is expected that this feature will accomplish much the same functions as CG Connect.

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Abstract

The CGIAR's agricultural research-for-development agenda is broad and complex, but the geographical and institutional dispersion of staff and partners constrains knowledge sharing. The Internet could help them find relevant experts and contact them to share knowledge. To test this idea, a web-based know-who directory system was tried by 214 staff and partners during April-June 2002. Participants were asked to fill in online profiles describing their interests, expertise and contact details and including a photograph. When asked for their impressions through a follow-up questionnaire, 73% of 170 respondents said that a know-who directory was important for the CGIAR; 25% said it was useful but not important; and 2% said it was not necessary. When asked about any reluctance to share knowledge, 39% indicated no reluctance. Of the remaining 61%, half identified a fear of time lost responding to requests for help; 37% saw no rewards/incentives for sharing; 9% said they would be unsure of other's expertise based merely on a web profile; and 4% feared losing their competitive advantage by giving away knowledge. Few expressed concerns about security and privacy. The results suggest that a CGIAR know-who directory would succeed if encouraged by top management, treated as a priority, articulated effectively to reassure staff about their concerns and supported through modest incentives.

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The Asian Development Bank's knowledge management framework

Daan Boom

Introduction

Defining knowledge management is not easy. What we seem to agree on is that knowledge is an intangible and, in some cases, even invisible asset. We define knowledge management as the process through which organisations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets. To get the most value from an organisation's intellectual assets, knowledge must be shared and provide the foundation for innovation in products and services, enhanced employee retention, process improvement, strategic decision making, improved client relationships and greater prosperity.

Organisations and people that develop, retain and manage knowledge effectively will prosper. Each of us lives and works in an information-rich and time-sensitive world. We confront this reality every day. Knowledge is information and expertise, but knowledge alone is not enough. It must be managed, organised, enriched, shared and applied for relevance, quality and feedback. The advantage of knowledge management is the capability to manage and share information better, faster and more reliably – using and sharing knowledge to learn and grow.

This article discusses why and how the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is moving forward in this critical area. To give you some context, I start with a snapshot of Asia and the Pacific, and our role within the region.

Regional developments

In the past few decades, the Asia Pacific region has experienced a truly spectacular economic and social transformation that has given it a position of significant importance in the world economy. Asia, including Japan, accounted for 25% of global GDP in 2000, up from 13% in 1960. Asia's rise was underpinned by several stunning transformations. The first was Japan's climb from an economy devastated by war to the second largest economy in the world in less than half a century. This remarkable success benefited the rest of Asia through the creation of both a major export market and a key source of foreign investment and exchange.

The second major transformation occurred in the so-called newly industrialised economies. The Korea Republic, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Taipei, China all rapidly developed from either poor agricultural economies or economies with few natural resources into modern, affluent societies. This remarkable accomplishment is often referred to as the East Asian miracle. Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia have also

managed impressive, sustained growth over recent decades. Today, we are witnessing two more significant transformations in Asia: China is accelerating its transition to a market economy, and another impressive push forward is under way in India.

The accumulation and efficient use of knowledge, whether it is technical, industrial or managerial in nature, has played a central role in each of these transformations. Whether it is the rapid expansion of Japan's electronics and manufacturing industries, the trade and banking efficiencies developed by Singapore and Hong Kong or the Internet and computer technologies driving parts of India, knowledge and innovation are key factors in each leap forward.

The advance of knowledge has great potential to raise the living standards of the poor, which is the primary objective of the ADB. Knowledge gives farmers the technical know-how to use information that raises productivity. It gives governments the know-how to draft policies that will enable business to prosper. Within the spectrum of the possible outcomes that can be envisaged when discussing the present knowledge economies, two extremes are worth highlighting. One is that knowledge economies allow developing countries to bridge the current wealth and capital gaps between them and developing countries (UN Millennium Project 2005). The alternative is that the knowledge economies will accelerate these gaps leaving developing countries languishing further behind developed countries without hope of catching up.

Knowledge for development

ADB, as its name implies, is a development organisation. And, in a sense, knowledge has always been part of development across the globe, underlying the everyday practices of development actors as they draw upon knowledge for their work. But the role of knowledge management in the development field was only made explicit in 1996 when the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) produced an influential report on the knowledge economy, and the World Bank declared that it would transform itself into a knowledge bank. Knowledge management was made a core theme of the World Bank management for organisational renewal.

One of the first tangible results of the World Bank's effort was the release of the World Development Report on Knowledge for development in 1998. The report started from the premise that the ICT revolution made developmentally useful knowledge potentially available for the poor people more quickly and easily than ever before. Much knowledge could be sourced from the North, but a mechanism was needed for national systems to apply this knowledge in the South and vice versa. The World Development Report concluded that 'knowledge has perhaps become the most important factor determining the standard of living' (World Bank 1998).

Building a learning organisation: the ADB experience

The importance of knowledge for reducing poverty is particularly relevant to ADB because, despite the recent successes we have outlined earlier, some 690 million people

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in the Asia Pacific region still live on less than a dollar a day[1]. Our work with developing member countries is aimed at reducing that number and raising the standard of living significantly across the region.

Our developing member countries rely on us not only for financing but also for capacity building in both financial and policy areas. With 45 of our 63 member countries situated in Asia and the Pacific, we retain a growing wealth of knowledge about all aspects of development in the region – through research and through design and implementation of our development projects in the field.

Every professional staff member at ADB who works in a developing country accumulates knowledge about a particular sector, region or activity. All too often, this knowledge remains with individuals unless specifically requested by another staff member, development partner or client. Think how much more valuable it would be if that knowledge were made available to every other professional staff member working on similar projects or issues. Then add the much greater benefit if that knowledge could be shared with others.

External demand for ADB to become an effective knowledge broker in the region is also growing. ADB's middle-income members – countries like China and India – are increasingly drawing upon the Bank's insights and experiences in pursuit of their development objectives. ADB is strategically placed to play this role. We already have a wealth of development experience and knowledge from across Asia and the Pacific, and we are well positioned to capture good practices and lessons learned from the rest of the world. ADB spends close to US$100 million a year to finance research and other analytical work. What we need to do is capture, share and disseminate our knowledge more effectively for the benefit of ADB staff, our clients and our partners in development.

Recognising this, ADB has committed itself to becoming a learning institution and a primary source of development knowledge in this region. Our Long-Term Strategic Framework for 2001-2015 (ADB 2001) clearly states that an enhanced role for ADB in knowledge generation and sharing is a pre-requisite for achieving our poverty reduction goal. The framework document says:

> *ADB must become a knowledge-based learning institution, drawing upon resources, skills and expertise both inside and outside the organisation. It must develop the capacity to learn quickly from its own experiences and those of other development partners, and to disseminate such experience in the form of best practice among developing member countries, ADB staff and the development partners.*

The knowledge management framework

In 2002, a reorganisation within ADB facilitated the first steps towards fulfilling that commitment. The Regional and Sustainable Development Department (RSDD), was created with a mandate to advance ADB's knowledge agenda internally and externally.

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[1] Poverty issues are discussed in ADB Annual Reports which can be found on www.adb.org

A knowledge management committee was established to oversee and provide strategic guidance for our knowledge activities. And in 2003, a new vice- presidency for knowledge management was created to raise the profile of ADB's knowledge activities and improve management oversight.

Early in the process, a small working group was established to engage our staff and management in consultations, review best practices and develop a framework for moving forward. This working group comprised several representatives from operational and supporting departments to discuss the concept of knowledge management and what ADB should do about it. The working group attended relevant seminars and conferences, and discussed pertinent issues with specialists from other development banks. Based upon insights gathered in this way, the working group organised in-house round table discussions to seek views from staff on knowledge management, especially on the question of which components a plan should have. Ultimately, that discussion resulted in a conceptual framework, which was discussed and improved in terms of relevance and financial viability. The outcome is the framework on knowledge management (KM framework), which was approved in June 2004 and focuses on five action plans or programmes:

1. Improving our organisational culture;
2. Improving our research agenda;
3. Updating our business processes and IT solutions for knowledge management;
4. Improving the functioning of 'communities of practice'; and
5. Expanding knowledge sharing with external stakeholders and other parties.

I will briefly touch on the highlights of each of these action plans.

Organisational culture
Fostering a knowledge-supportive culture is the key to managing knowledge. To ensure this, ADB's KM framework demands that ADB align its staff incentives to promote proactive knowledge sharing within the institution. Knowledge management is to a large extent about cultural change. Therefore, we must focus on behavioural changes: on creating a working environment where knowledge is seen as a common good and where staff are encouraged to contribute to knowledge activities as part of their core responsibilities.

ADB is a somewhat traditional organisation, and cultural change is one of our biggest challenges. For this to succeed, staff will need to be empowered and fully participate in the implementation of the KM framework. Thus, we have developed a new human resource strategy, which provides the necessary incentives for change. It is important for professionals to know what their organisation is trying to do and where it is going. Next, they are interested in personal achievements and personal responsibility. They often expect continuous learning and continuous training. Above all, they want respect, not just for themselves but for their areas of expertise. Professionals want to make decisions that influence the impact of their work. The new human resources strategy will articulate the importance of transparency, staff capability and management accountability to encourage more collaboration within the ADB environment.

Research agenda
The gradual transition of the ADB from a development finance institution to a broad-based development institution has called for increased emphasis on our knowledge products and services. On the basis of our country, sub-regional and inter-regional strategic programmes, knowledge-related activities are identified and harmonised with departmental, divisional and individual work plans. ADB's primary knowledge departments, which include all operational departments, the Economics and Research Department, the Asian Development Bank Institute and the Regional Sustainable Development Department, make in-depth contributions to these programmes. Ultimately, this will lead to a strategic forecast of our Knowledge Products and Services Programme for the next three to five years, closely aligned with our country strategic programmes

Processes and IT solutions
It is often said, 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink!' Neither can you 'force' knowledge management. It must be facilitated, not only through cultural change, but also through appropriate processes and IT investments. In June 2004, ADB approved a new IT strategy which includes funding for improved capture, storage and search facilities for information management. Apart from this technical investment, so-called 'smart templates' will be developed and implemented to capture knowledge through the development process, to help professionals at ADB in seamlessly sharing their knowledge. A skills database will be developed to capture ADB staff profiles and work experiences.

We have also created a portal committee to improve access to our information repositories and to empower end-users of our IT applications. Improved processes and systems for storing will reduce disincentives to change and facilitate knowledge sharing by making the search for information less cumbersome.

Communities of practice
ADB currently has 10 formal and 23 informal sector and thematic communities of practice. These communities will be provided with tools and resources that will allow better flow of information both internally and externally with our partners and developing member countries. Our communities already play a significant role in disseminating knowledge through the organisation of so-called brown or blue bag seminars, often during lunchtime. These well-attended seminars on specific development topics will be captured and made accessible through our website.

Expanding knowledge sharing with our clients
ADB works with some 300 external institutions on a formal or, in some cases, informal basis. We have identified gaps in knowledge sharing with these partners and are working to address them through our communities of practice.

We are also working on a new public information policy to further facilitate our knowledge sharing with clients. Approved in May 2005, the policy will become effective in September. It will enhance public awareness and understanding of ADB, improve the two-way flow of information and improve dissemination of our knowledge products.

As part of our knowledge framework, ADB also aims to be more open to identifying successes and failures in achieving development outcomes, and better able to extract lessons that improve the way we plan and deliver our services to clients. To reinforce this process, we have adopted a results-based management approach, or what we call 'managing for development results', as our principal management approach. With this approach, we will more proactively manage our resources and activities to deliver products and services to our clients that will contribute to development results. ADB has become a member of the MAKE (Most Admired Knowledge Enterprises) network, and our progress in knowledge management will be closely monitored and published through the MAKE reports.

One year into implementation

As anyone who has implemented knowledge management initiatives knows, success depends a great deal on how staff embrace the action plans. Apart from staff support, it is also essential that the relevant IT components be implemented. The KM framework has now entered its second year of implementation. What have we accomplished and what we would like to undertake next?

The most visible change for the KM Centre, implementing the KM framework, is the message we received in late June 2005 that five positions had been allocated to the KM Centre. This is not a net expansion because new tasks (such as ICTs for development) have been assigned to the KM Centre but, overall, it indicates support from management to propel knowledge management in the years ahead. The KM Centre determined in the last year that communication and awareness programmes should be reinforced. One of the observations of the MAKE assessment was that internal communication on KM should be improved, for example, through in-depth KM workshops for staff involved in KM activities.

The KM Centre also took responsibility for implementing a geographical information system (GIS). A business plan has been drafted, and the GIS application will be released in the third quarter of 2005. Implementing GIS in ADB will enhance development effectiveness through visualisation of statistical data, and it will allow users to make visual projections of the possible impacts of our programmes. The GIS application, though not yet fully implemented, has already provided useful information to our teams with maps on the tsunami-affected countries.

The information management activities of the KM framework are facing some delays, mainly due to lack of ICT resources. The issue is being addressed, however, and hopefully we will be able to speed up our activities in this area in 2006. One of the tangible impacts of knowledge management is, without doubt, changed staff perceptions of effectiveness in finding, locating and storing information.

Conclusion

Dissemination of the KM framework has been going well, although it is recognised that staff do not yet see tangible outputs. We are organising KM workshops in 2005 to raise

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awareness and commitment in our departments to develop KM initiatives such as After Action Reviews. The revised paper on our communities of practice will also propel staff participation in various knowledge activities. Only through supporting and enabling ICT tools and an effective change management programme can you change people's behaviour. We are only one year into our journey. From KM studies and surveys, we have learned that implementing a successful knowledge management programme usually takes five to eight years. At ADB we have created the pillars and laid a solid foundation on which to build a knowledge-based organisation.

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Abstract

Transfer of knowledge has always been an essential, catalysing element of the mandate of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Recognising the growing role knowledge plays in the advancement of its developing member countries, ADB committed itself, through its strategic framework for 2001-2015, to becoming a learning institution and a primary source of development knowledge in Asia and the Pacific. Based on this strategic framework, a knowledge management framework has been drafted and approved in June 2004 to guide ADB's transition to a knowledge-based organisation. This article reviews the changing context of ADB's role in catalysing knowledge for innovation and development. It discusses the action plans identified to improve information management and promote organisational and cultural changes which contribute to knowledge sharing, as well as barriers to implementation.

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A joint donor training approach to knowledge sharing

Andreas Jensen

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, knowledge sharing and knowledge management have been part of the development agenda, especially in the World Bank. Donor agencies have embarked on becoming knowledge centres instead of merely funding agencies – an organisational development similar to that of some private companies and based on the recognition that knowledge is a valuable asset. In the same period, many donor agencies have undergone organisational changes and moved towards a more decentralised arrangement, under which decisions are taken at the country level, often in collaboration with other donors and in alignment with national partner frameworks. This trend has been stressed in the joint donor declarations: the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation 2003, the Joint Marrakech Memorandum in 2004 (OECD 2004) and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005.

In a parallel development, satellite telecommunication technology has helped improve access to vast amounts of information available globally through intranets and the Internet to the extent of risking information overload of staff. The need to compare notes on how donor agencies are facing the knowledge sharing challenge, on procedures as well as on tools, is becoming evident as donor agencies proceed further down this path.

The Joint Donors Competence Development Network, known as the Train4dev forum, is a loosely defined donor collaboration established in Glasgow in 2003 to support donor harmonisation. It now consists of more than 17 donor agencies meeting once a year. Activities are organised in sub-groups and include development of joint training events, staff exchanges and e-learning. The work presented here has been developed in the Train4dev sub-group on Technology-Based Learning[1]. For more information see www.train4dev.net.

In recent years, there has been a convergence of knowledge management and training in donor organisations. The aim of this joint donor approach for improved knowledge sharing is to explore how the Train4dev network can create synergies between knowledge management, knowledge sharing and training. The intent is to present key knowledge sharing issues related to the core business of funding and implementation of development projects and programmes. The target group of this strategy is primarily donor agency staff working with the transfer of best practices or involved in

Endnotes

[1] The group members were Isobel Simonsen and Thore Hem (Norad), Maria Melbing (Sida), Renate Mengler (Inwent), Kirstine Schjermer (Danida) and Stephane Phong (Europe Aid), among others.

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training and competence development. Hopefully, it will also be inspiring for policy departments engaged in overall knowledge management at a corporate level.

It has not been possible for the agencies participating in Train4dev to make strategic commitments to the loosely defined collaborative initiative. Furthermore, each agency has its own organisational set-up, leading to multiple ways of dealing with knowledge sharing. Therefore, this document will attempt to take stock and outline trends and ways forward, as discussed in the Train4dev sub-group on Technology-Based Learning (TBL Group).

Knowledge sharing challenges

From industry, and especially from large private corporations, we know that good knowledge management increases the speed of production cycles, enhances product quality and the application of results from innovation and testing and lowers costs by eliminating unnecessary processes. For the purposes of knowledge management in the context of donor agencies and development assistance, knowledge management and sharing can be defined as follows:

> *Knowledge management is the process of managing accrued experience in order to create value for the organisation and its partners. Knowledge sharing can be seen as the practical application of knowledge management.*

This paper mainly deals with knowledge sharing and not so much with knowledge management in the development context, while acknowledging that they are part of the same process.

The shared vision among donor agencies is that knowledge sharing can help improve the effectiveness of development assistance. Our goal is to improve knowledge sharing between donor agencies and development partners to promote ownership, harmonisation, alignment, results and mutual accountability. From the extensive literature on knowledge sharing, it is clear that knowledge sharing is much more than the use of different media. However, the TBL Group decided to focus on knowledge sharing through closed intranets and the Internet, emphasising the latter in particular as it operates more openly and transparently, and involves more and more partners in development.

In light of recent developments in European donor agencies, the TBL Group identified the following important challenges:

- How to support and accelerate donor harmonisation and wider knowledge sharing between agencies and development partners?
- How to ensure common standards and high quality in decentralised development agencies?
- How to capture lessons learned rapidly from implementation of programmes in the field and to ensure that they are applied in new programmes and activities across organisations?

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- How to facilitate professional dialogue between peers involved in testing different approaches (embassy or agency staff in a region, sector advisers, national counterparts)?
- How to avoid information overload and achieve easier, more systematic access?

The Group decided to concentrate its joint activities on approaches to knowledge sharing, using open Internet-based systems to support decentralisation and harmonisation priorities set by the Train4dev forum of donors.

Status and analysis of knowledge sharing practices in donor agencies

The status of knowledge sharing in 11 donor agencies[2] was assessed through a four-page survey. A rough picture emerged from the responses, although this methodology had its shortfalls and limitations.

Three quarters of the respondents stated that knowledge sharing is frequently used and that their organisations have knowledge-sharing policies. Knowledge sharing is considered to be a crosscutting method by all except one respondent. Reasons for engaging in knowledge sharing varied considerably, and a large number of justifications were presented:

- Knowledge sharing helps us learn from experience and do it better the next time.
- Improves the quality of the products and enhances performance.
- Access to knowledge of best practices improves impact.
- Enhances development effectiveness.
- Improves efficiency of workflow (reduces search costs and time; finds content, sources, information; finds persons with special knowledge and experience; creates networks).
- Helps achieve a more cost-efficient administration.
- Enables the organisation to stay competitive during rapid changes, e.g., modernisation processes related to product information and the development of new products.
- Prevents loss of critical knowledge due to high rotation of employees.
- Develops synergy and supports better networking.
- Brings greater coherence to policy formulation and enables a more evidence-based policy approach.
- Opens up new perspectives by looking wider than one's own technical topics.
- Enables a more holistic approach in government and harmonisation processes.
- Helps build a sense of team, increases confidence and contributes to a more attractive workplace.

Only one agency is engaged in training in knowledge sharing systems, although all are busy working out how to do this.

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[2] AusAid, DFID, BMZ, GTZ, SDC, Sida, MFA Norway, NORAD, MFA Denmark (Danida), MFA Finland, MFA The Netherlands.

Responsibility for knowledge sharing is either anchored in various places in donor organisations – from personnel departments to training units – or completely mainstreamed into all departments. In several cases, the initiative comes from top management or the policy division.

It was difficult for respondents to explain how knowledge sharing leads to concrete recognition and rewards, but all considered it a big advantage.

The scope of knowledge sharing varies. Some people look only at their intranet, whereas others try to tap the advantages of working digitally in a number of ways. Obviously, the main focus is within the organisations, though in many cases knowledge sharing is carried out in collaboration with other technical organisations. Unfortunately, agencies have not yet reached the stage at which national authorities/partner organisations are regularly participating directly in web-based knowledge sharing.

According to survey results, the most important knowledge sharing relates to technical and operational experience, followed by regional and country-specific knowledge and development theories. General political knowledge and socio-cultural knowledge rank lowest.

The tools used for knowledge sharing vary according to the target group. For internal knowledge sharing, e-mails, web logging and intranet are commonly used. For external knowledge sharing, e-mail is still most popular, but other tools, such as communities of practise, are becoming more important. Traditional means of dissemination dominate in communication with users far from the donor organisation; i.e., reports and evaluations are more important than networks in the dialogue with national partners in developing countries.

Numerous concrete examples of successful knowledge sharing are cited in the survey results. But in most cases respondents did not specify the criteria of success (e.g., cutting costs, reducing preparation time or reducing errors in consultancy contracts). Here are three examples of successful knowledge sharing:

- Knowledge platforms designed for knowledge exchange in communities of practice. 120 platforms for our thematic products. All relevant in-house experts form communities of practice (product teams). One responsible product manager coordinates platform activities and product team.
- The peer review process has been highlighted as a successful tool for knowledge sharing in the agency. A review of the process has shown that it is a useful learning activity. It promotes transparent decision-making, greater corporate ownership of decisions and outcomes, and accountability for aid expenditures. In addition, peer reviews provide a more structured feedback loop between corporate lessons learned and new proposals coming through the pipelines. Peer reviews were designed in AusAID to extend and formalise existing good practice. They are successful because they have senior management support and build on a naturally occurring practice in the agency.
- The lessons learned workshop after the Renewable Conference 2004. When staff retires, a lot of knowledge and experience leave the organisation. Therefore, a 'knowledge bridge' was developed to retain knowledge.

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Some of the main obstacles for good knowledge sharing were identified as:

- An ad-hoc approach to sharing knowledge;
- Knowledge sharing initiatives not directly related to existing workflows. Instead of reducing work, knowledge sharing often leads to work overload;
- Weak incentives to share, reliance on 'good will' and an awareness of who else may value particular knowledge;
- Internal marketing of a tangible picture of the benefits of knowledge sharing is needed to overcome low staff discipline and low commitment by management;
- IT solutions which were not user-orientated, and poorly integrated information management systems and processes; and
- No appraisal of knowledge sharing.

The survey results clearly demonstrate that many issues remain to be resolved before donor agencies can fully reap the benefits of knowledge sharing.

Knowledge sharing approaches and strategic options

This section of the paper looks at various elements of knowledge sharing approaches taken by donor organisations, and the strategic options that are available to them.

Institutional aspects, anchorage, ownership and resources
Under the new public management wave affecting most governmental institutions in the 21st century, the convergence of training and knowledge sharing is seen as important for achieving the goals of improved effectiveness and higher efficiency. Donor agencies are knowledge-based organisations. Many have been involved in organisational learning for several years, acknowledging that valuable knowledge is created everywhere in the organisation. Various learning activities and training events involving staff training each other take place on a regular basis within most agencies. In fact, training and knowledge sharing overlap in what some call 'action learning techniques', and both contribute to organisational learning, which is seen as a constructive way to achieve better performance.

Knowledge sharing depends on the mandate, mission and goal of the organisation. Engagement in knowledge sharing also depends on organisational values and ways of working. National and cultural contexts prevail in bilateral donor agencies. For instance, the culture of openness in the public administration and the recent political drives in Scandinavia towards a fully transparent digital public administration influence knowledge sharing. When a donor agency is part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this represents a particular challenge to knowledge sharing. In these circumstances there may be internal obstacles, especially if documents are classified.

The capacity of the organisation is also important. If the business is well documented, engaging in knowledge sharing will be much easier. In general, the organisation must be able to deal with rather complex issues before being able to handle knowledge as illustrated in the upper end of the decision making pyramid (see annex). If this is not the case from the outset, a learning experience with mutual knowledge build-up is

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probably most appropriate, with an emphasis on self-development rather than development created externally.

Knowledge sharing should be aligned and mainstreamed with the core business of the organisation. The participating entities should have a clear vision of how knowledge sharing relates to the goals of the organisation. Donor support for knowledge sharing and web-based networks involving local and international researchers engaged in creating knowledge for innovation in development assistance require significant follow-up to ensure that this knowledge influences actual practice.

Resources available for knowledge sharing should be stated and related to expected outcomes in terms of cost savings, reduced production time and improved quality.

What knowledge?
Content matters. In the definition mentioned earlier, knowledge is the accrued experience in each donor's field of operation. The most interesting knowledge from this point of view is that which leads to more effective and efficient delivery of aid and positive impacts to the benefit of poor people in the partner country. Knowing what works and what doesn't is important for partners in development, both from a local and a global point of view. A key prerequisite for knowledge sharing is a comprehensive needs analysis. Mapping out where in the organisation to find the desired knowledge is useful for the process.

Knowledge sharing should be focused on core donor business goals and functional objectives (funding and implementation of development projects and programmes to alleviate poverty). The primary objective of managing knowledge in donor organisations is to enhance the impact of development activities. There may be other secondary objectives linked to improved quality, improved productivity, information flow, etc. Different entities and individuals participating in knowledge sharing may do so for different reasons.

Which processes?
The model generally accepted is that knowledge comes from analysis of information being derived from processing data. Wisdom builds on knowledge and represents the highest level of a decision-making pyramid. Knowledge is much more valuable than information. Data are almost without value if not processed.

Above all, knowledge management has been described as the process of capturing, distilling, validating, storing, applying and recycling knowledge. In daily work, knowledge management is about how to obtain, use and learn from knowledge and to make people contribute further to the generation of knowledge. In the longer term, it will be necessary to assess which knowledge is necessary for the organisation to meet future challenges, to sustain the sources of knowledge, to develop new knowledge and to get rid of knowledge not important for the future.

Which actors?
The knowledge of good development assistance is often spread among a number of stakeholders, such as the technical advisory unit of a donor agency, the country representation, consultants and international advisers from the private sector, staff from local and international NGOs, and officials from the partner government in the

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South. Knowledge management often begins in the organisation as a consequence of a quest for improved performance and work processes. The general trend, as seen, for instance, in the World Bank, is to start with introverted knowledge sharing, which is task and budget oriented, and after some years, to open up to more extroverted knowledge sharing with a much wider group of collaborators, both goal and network oriented.

People are often regarded as the most important asset in any organisation. Knowledge sharing should be incorporated into the human resource practices of the organisation. If maintenance of systems is embedded in core staff responsibilities, sustainability will be high. Management will be committed, because the exercise is related to producing better results, but individual staff member motivation for knowledge sharing should also be considered.

Internal marketing of the benefits may facilitate acceptance of new ways of working. The fact that sharing will translate into receiving is simply not enough. Recognition by peers and by the organisation is important, as well as rewards for outstanding achievements in knowledge sharing. Staff competencies and learning opportunities must accompany the process. Knowledge sharing should be part of the agenda in staff appraisals, personal development plans and learning plans. Also, knowledge sharing indicators should be developed for each individual.

Tools and approaches
Mainstreamed holistic and integrated systems for knowledge sharing are in demand in donor agencies. Organisations can form informal or formal teams, depending on the job at hand. Tools include communities of practice, Peer Assists, After Action Reviews, story telling and many more.

Communities of practice for transfer of best practices may be sector based, thematic based or regional/country based. Even though communities of practice can be vibrant in the beginning, they need events and continuous facilitation by somebody from the organisation if they are to survive. Mere document repositories, not embedded in day-to-day activities, will eventually become stagnant.

Peer Assists are meetings with peers to discuss an assignment and to draw on experience and knowledge. An After Action Review is a way of summarising lessons learned. Story telling is an ancient way of transferring knowledge; its experience translated into personal stories lived and told by people.

Another well-established option for personalised knowledge sharing is simply to connect people through an expert locator system, a competency catalogue or electronic yellow pages, which enhance knowledge sharing and networking. Again, without updates and inclusion in daily work, systems will fade out slowly.

Every approach in knowledge sharing will have to take into account the background of the participants. Are they international or are they local staff? Language is an issue of paramount importance.

Technology, open/closed systems for knowledge sharing
Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are evolving at a high speed, and
new technological services and products continue to become available for knowledge
sharing. Therefore, organisations and their ICT departments should regularly check
out possibilities for improved performance.

For computer-based sharing of information, a number of international standards
apply, such as the International Development Mark-up Language (IDML). An
International Network for Development Information Exchange (INDIX) is attempting
to follow up on norms and standards with regard to database access and exchanges.

In practice, donor organisations have mainly worked on their own intranets and the
Internet. Open knowledge networks or extranets are open-access Internet solutions to
knowledge sharing, which are globally available. These have the advantage that they
are accessible to all partners in development.

Other technology-based media are content management systems for large websites for
multiple downloads; learning content management systems for e-learning; and other
systems based on the international SCORM standard. Additional technology-based
media for knowledge sharing includes simple HTML websites, e-mail, web-logging
and Internet based video-conferencing. With more than 12 years in development,
business e-mail is the oldest and still by far the most used media to share codified
knowledge in the form of messages, documents and files.

A recent trend among donors is a move towards open-access extranets with full access
to all partners. Another trend is towards more interactive interfaces. Nevertheless,
both hosts and participants have realised that more interactive interfaces require more
hardware capacity, maintenance and supervision. Therefore, in the context of
collaboration with developing countries, a more basic and gradual approach should be
applied.

Measuring impacts of knowledge sharing
Successful knowledge sharing should be measured by criteria related to business
objectives: cutting costs, reduced preparation time, and reduced numbers of errors in
contracts. The focus should be on tangible gains from knowledge sharing from the
very start. Different stakeholders may need different measures. Senior management is
interested in outcomes, sponsors are interested in rate of participation, and the
participants themselves are interested in measures that affect their ability to do the
job.

Experience in some donor agencies shows that the commitment and perseverance of
management is critical to success after the initial establishment of a knowledge
sharing strategy and pilot implementation of various elements. Establishing
knowledge sharing mechanisms directly or indirectly linked to the core business
objectives and measuring progress using closely related indicators are also ways of
securing interest from decision makers in the organisation. The interest of top
management can ensure that the various departments involved in knowledge sharing
will continue to work together, particularly training, IT and technical advisory staff.

Linking knowledge sharing to organisational learning processes
An interesting roadmap of the steps and stages of introducing knowledge management has been developed by American Productivity and Quality Centre (APQC 2000), as well as methods for benchmarking, which could also be inspiring for donor organisations. Over time and in a phased development, the roadmap demonstrates that the knowledge management process eventually will lead to mainstreaming knowledge sharing into all work processes of the organisation.

In a learning organisation, knowledge networks, lessons learned and dissemination of good practices should become integral parts of implementation. However, the importance of eliminating and replacing work procedures and routines remains. In many larger corporations, knowledge management/ knowledge sharing have merged with organisational learning processes, and most likely this will happen in donor organisations as well. This means an increased focus on training, on enabling communities of practice and on distance learning, involving the Human Resource Departments and Training Units deeply in the process. The main motivation for all this is the famous British Telecom slogan 'Work smarter, not harder'.

Ways forward and action plans for future donor cooperation

Knowledge sharing is a mainstreamed activity closely linked to knowledge management, organisational learning and institutional capacities. Staff training units are mostly involved with capacity building, and the recommendations are a mixture of actions to improve systems and dissemination of lessons learned in a learning organisation. When the joint donor group was asked what it could do to improve knowledge sharing, several proposals were made for joint action:

- Promoting knowledge sharing widely amongst donors through joint initiatives, joint lessons learned, joint training courses, etc;
- Identifying champions, sharing examples and experience of knowledge sharing in the regions or donor embassies, for instance, through a more in-depth joint review of knowledge sharing practices;
- Helping to develop better protocols by sharing experience and tools and benchmarking knowledge management procedures, systems and policies amongst the donor organisations;
- Exchange of best practices: learning about practical instruments in use, improving direct knowledge exchange in the field, preparing good practise papers and documenting success stories;
- Improving access to information and knowledge that can be used by individual agencies, to improve the quality of their own aid activities and programme strategies, promote donor harmonisation of activities and provide the basis for a more considered response by both donors and recipients to emerging development issues; and
- Addressing information overload: how to prioritise and how to divest unnecessary knowledge.

These proposals were further discussed in June 2005 at the Train4dev meeting in Berlin, Germany, which was attended by representatives from 13 donor organisations. The workshop resulted in a number of additional proposals and comments:

- Use the Train4dev website for simple sharing of knowledge and tools, including a selection of best practise cases and stories;
- Stick to English as the only network language;
- Learn from large private companies like Accenture, Apple, Siemens, Nokia etc;
- Don't work on standards and protocols: they are already being dealt with in other fora;
- Don't work on general knowledge management training. Instead, be more specific and focussed;
- Link knowledge sharing tools with the products of the Train4dev collaboration, such as joint training on poverty reduction strategy papers and sector-wide approaches;
- Initiate dialogue fora on certain topics and invite knowledge management champions; and
- Establish links with the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) Community and the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) for information exchange and knowledge sharing to the benefit of members.

In order to keep the focus, prioritise and keep up the momentum, it was decided to limit the number of tasks for the coming year to five. These will constitute the main elements of the work plan for the TBL Group:

1. Promote open-access networks;
2. Identify knowledge sharing champions and prepare success stories;
3. Apply knowledge sharing tools in joint training activities;
4. Publish useful knowledge sharing tools on the train4dev website; and
5. Liase with networks like KM4Dev and GDLN to extract relevant lessons learned.

Concluding remarks

Knowledge sharing does not stop at the boundaries of our organisations. Donors are involved in capacity building, and the benefits of knowledge sharing should accrue not only in the offices of our organisations but where development aid is being implemented. This means we will have to involve more and more partners in the South, and it means that we have to go beyond our own organisations to fully capitalise on better knowledge management and knowledge sharing through open networks and communities of practice.

References

APQC (2000) *Road map to knowledge management results* American Productivity and Quality Centre: Houston, USA

OECD (2004) *Second International Roundtable on 'Managing for development results', 4-5 February 2004, Marrakech, Morocco* Organisation for Economic

Jensen, A. 2005. A joint donor training approach to knowledge sharing.
KM4D Journal 1(2): 76-88
www.km4dev.org/journal

Cooperation and Development: Paris, 13pp.
http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/40/16/31526893.pdf

Examples of open-access Internet links on knowledge sharing
Gateways and specific knowledge management/ knowledge sharing sites:
Development Gateway Foundation: http://aida.developmentgateway.org
American Productivity and Quality Centre: http://www.apqc.org
Bellanet: http://www.bellanet.org
Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung: http://www.it-inwent.net
Knowledge Management for Development forum: http://www.km4dev.org
EU Information Society Technologies KM programme:
http://www.knowledgeboard.com
World Bank: http://www.worldbank.org/ks
Global Development Learning Network: http://www.gdln.org
Australian Development Gateway: http://www.developmentgateway.com.au
AKWa – AusAID Knowledge Warehouse: http://aaid-as01.ausaid.gov.au/akw.nsf
Swiss Development Cooperation Knowledge sharing forum: www.daretoshare.ch
Train4dev: www.train4dev.net
Danida's professional networks: www.danida-networks.dk
SIDA's Partner Point: www.sida.se

General donor sites
AusAid internet site: http://www.ausaid.gov.au
DFID UK Department for International Development: www.dfid.gov.uk
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH:
www.gtz.de/en/
German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development:
http://www.bmz.de/de/english.html
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation, Finland:
http://global.finland.fi
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands: http://www.minbuza.nl/
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark: www.um.dk
Netherlands Development Organisation: www.snvworld.org
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation: www.norad.no
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC): www.deza.ch
Swedish International Development Agency: www.sida.se

Abstract
Training and knowledge sharing and the concept of a learning organisation are key elements in donor agencies' endeavours to improve effectiveness and efficiency. In this context, the paper discusses the challenges ahead and briefly presents the status of knowledge sharing in 11 agencies, based on a survey carried out during February-March 2005. The paper discusses the foundations of knowledge sharing, as seen from a competence development point of view, and it examines how knowledge sharing is connected to the work processes and training efforts of our organisations. There is a general trend among donor agencies to move from restricted intranet solutions only towards Internet-based knowledge sharing, accessible to all development partners. Finally, the paper points to five priority areas for further work by donor agencies.

About the author

Andreas Jensen is Chief Consultant at Danida's Centre for Competence Development (DCCD). His main responsibilities are professional competence development and pre-departure training for Danida advisers and Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff. His specialisations include knowledge management, web-based professional networks, thematic courses in Danida aid management guidelines, public sector reforms, good governance, human rights, environment and sustainable development, monitoring systems and indicators. His employment history comprises: 2002-2004, Technical Adviser (environment and natural resources), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Copenhagen; 1999-2001, Danida Senior Adviser Malawi; 1995-1999, Director, Fjord & Bæltcentre Kerteminde, Denmark; 1993-1994, Associate Professional Officer, FAO, Madagascar; 1991-1993, Associate Professional Officer, FAO Zambia; 1990-1991, Research Associate, University of Copenhagen. In 1990 Andreas earned a M.Sc. in Biology from the University of Copenhagen.

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Annex

DECISION MAKING PYRAMID
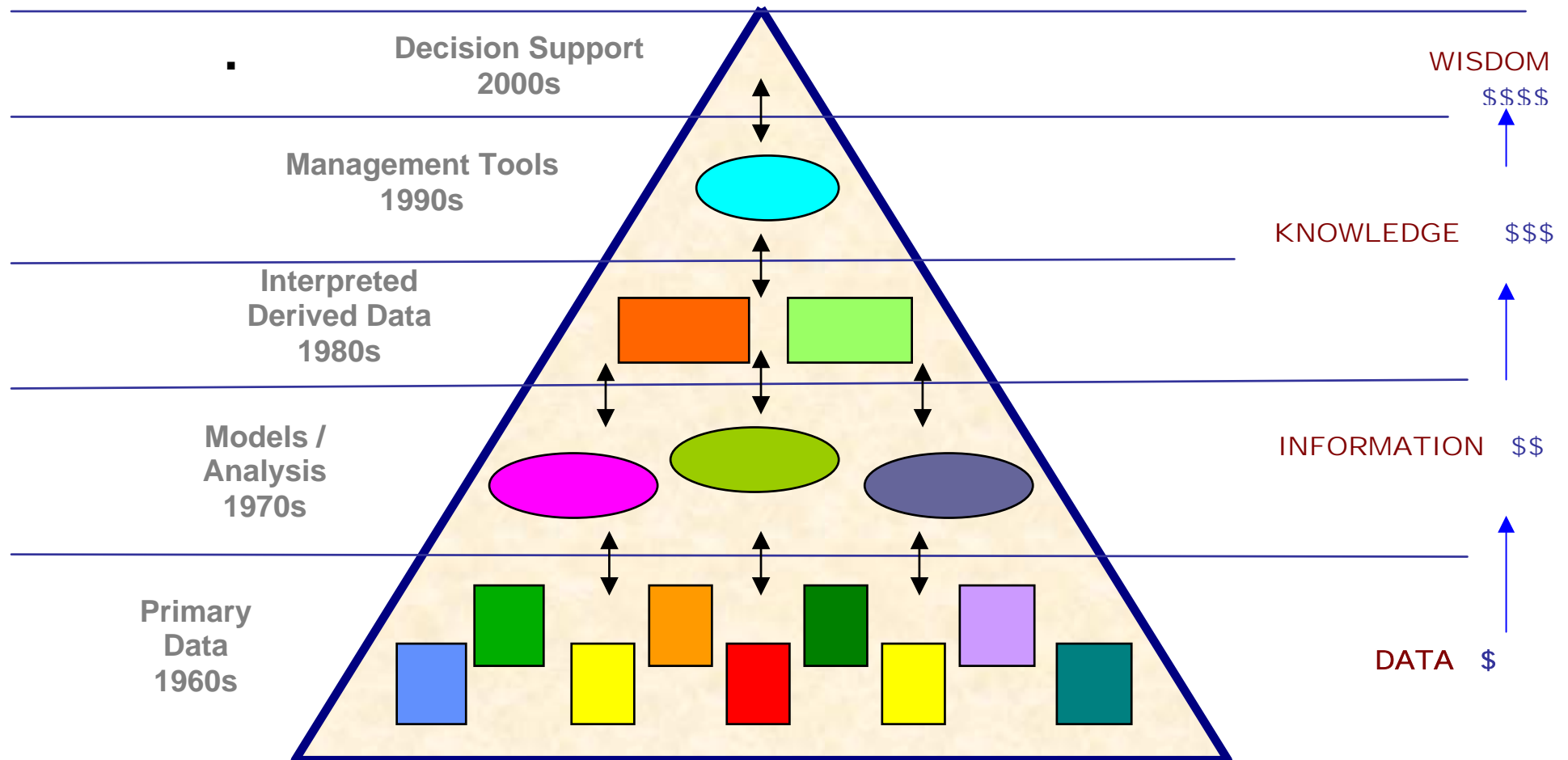
Knowledge management at the African Capacity Building Foundation

Interview with Phineas Kadenge

Who is the KS champion in the organisation?
Currently, the champion is the Manager, Knowledge Management and Programme
Support Department.

Who is the primary contact for KS? Other key contacts?
The primary contact is Dr. Gene Ogiogio, Manager, Knowledge Management and
Program Support Department: g.ogiogio@acbf-pact.org
Others include: Ms. Rutendo Kambarami: r.kambarami@acbf-pact.org

What is the initiative called?
The initiative is called Knowledge Management for Capacity Building and
Development Management.

Where is the KS initiative located in the organisation?
The KS initiative is located in the Knowledge Management and Programme Support
Department (KMPSD).

In what year did the organisation's KS initiative begin?
2000.

Is there a Web site for the KS initiative?
http://www.acbf-pact.org/knowledge/KnowledgeRelated.asp
Other sites that support the initiative are: www.acbf-pact.org/tapnets
www.acbf-pact.org/apif2004/index.asp
www.acbf-pact.org/efnet

How many staff work directly on KS?
Nine staff.

How are resources allocated to or through the KS initiative?
Through the Foundation's Strategic Medium Term Plan and Annual Budget.

What are the primary tools or KS approaches in use? Personalisation? Codification?
The primary tools are six continental and global knowledge networks/CoPs called
Technical Advisory Panels and Networks (TAP-NETs); the African Policy Institutes
Forum; Country-Level Knowledge Networks; Best Practice Studies; Senior
Policymakers and Development Managers' Knowledge Sharing Programme; Lessons
Notes; Operations and Thematic Research; and Publications Series.

What tools or approaches are planned?

Kadenge, P. 2005. Knowledge management at the African Capacity Building Foundation.
KM4D Journal 1(2): 88-90
www.km4dev.org/journal

e-discussion forum; CoP for Regional Economic Communities; Economic and Financial Policymakers' Network.

What physical spaces exist or have been created to support KS within ACBF?
The Library and Information Centre, Information and Communications Technology Platform, and the Outreach and Communications Unit.

Does the initiative have an external focus? i.e., is there an attempt to apply KS to the organisation's development projects?
The initiative also has an external focus. The Foundation's projects and programmes as well as partner institutions benefit from and share knowledge on frameworks, techniques and tools in policy research and analysis, as well as skills, practices and experiences relating to:

- Implementation of capacity-building programmes
- Support to government and other stakeholders through policy research, specialized training and work attachment programmes
- Establishment and strengthening of country-level knowledge networks for dissemination of policy research findings
- Strategies in institutional sustainability

What are the key sources of inspiration that guided your KS strategy? Who are your influences?
Knowledge management benchmarking missions have been conducted at most admired knowledge institutions. Our influences are African policymakers and development management institutions.

What led to the development of ACBF's KS Strategy?
It was inspired by the Executive Secretary, Dr. Soumana Sako. The development was led by the present Manager, KMPSD, Dr. Gene Ogiogio. The knowledge management system was designed as part of a change management process to enable the Foundation to provide strategic inputs in Africa's development process beyond project-based interventions.

Does the KS strategy have links to other strategic initiatives within the organisation? If so, please describe.
The Knowledge Management and Programme Support Department draws inputs from its own units; the ACBF core competence and knowledge management teams, who are essentially operations staff; ACBF partner institutions; as well as the Foundation's conferences, workshops and seminars. It feeds back best practices into operational programmes.

Is there a process in place to measure the impacts on the organisation? What are your indicators of success?
The performance of the knowledge management system is monitored continuously for improvement. The indicators of success include: appropriateness, functionality and continuing relevance of the design of the knowledge management system; the relevance, quality, effectiveness and utility of the inputs into the system; effectiveness of the infrastructural platform on which the system is based; ease of access by users to the Foundation's knowledge sites; and quality and utility of the knowledge generated

and shared by the system, especially, in terms of currency, relevance, and extent of use by beneficiaries.

What are the biggest obstacles you have encountered?
Some of the biggest obstacles encountered include the need to build a strong organisational cultural and incentives system within the Foundation that will effectively encourage staff participation in knowledge sharing and the need for adequate funding and staffing.

General description of the KS initiative
Over the period of the Strategic Medium Term Plan, 2002 – 2006, the Foundation is striving to emerge as a knowledge-based organisation guided by a knowledge management strategy whose main objective is to generate, collate and share explicit and tacit knowledge in capacity building and substantive development issues within the remit of ACBF's core competencies.

Describe the changes within ACBF that the KS initiative will help bring about?
The KS initiative will help bring about improvement in operational quality, strengthen knowledge of best practices in capacity-building processes, and contribute to the design and implementation of development policies and programs that work. It will also enhance openness to learning.

Phineas Kadenge is a Programme Officer in the Knowledge Management and Programme Support Department of the ACBF. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics and a Master of Science Degree in Economics from the University of Zimbabwe, and a Ph.D in Economics from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.
E-mail: p.kadenge@acbf-pact.org

Song, S. 2005. Review of 'Implementing knowledge strategies: lessons from international development agencies.'
KM4D Journal 1(2): 91-94
www.km4dev.org/journal

Review

Ben Ramalingam (2005) Implementing knowledge strategies: Lessons from international development agencies. *ODI Working Paper* No. 244, Overseas Development Institute: London
http://www.km4dev.org/index.php/articles/downloads/366

Steve Song

In 'Implementing knowledge strategies: lessons from international development agencies', Ben Ramalingam sets himself the tasks of contextualising knowledge initiatives in development agencies to date, profiling 13 agencies' knowledge initiatives, building a synthesis of the profiles, and producing recommendations based on his analysis. Ben is clearly not afraid of a challenge.

Ben starts by establishing a framework for understanding knowledge strategies. He uses the traditional metaphor of knowledge as a unit of production and divides knowledge activities into the categories of knowledge creation, storage, sharing and use. He sets those activities against three different types of knowledge: tacit, explicit and implicit. His model is a variation on a common framework, and whilst knowledge frameworks are often a subject of heated debate, Ben's model does a reasonable job and sets a context for the rest of the paper.

In developing the background for knowledge-for-development activities, Ben summarises several notable papers on the theme. The papers share a common sense of the complexity of development and the need for knowledge strategies to look further than the internal function of the organisation – an approach that appears to be a legacy of the application of corporate-sector knowledge management approaches. Among the most interesting of the papers he draws on are those dealing with organisational learning (OL) from the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), UK. He paraphrases Robert Chambers in one paper, describing the ultimate goal of OL as being to re-think basic organisational principles and values of the development project itself. This is consistent with the tone and approach of most of the other papers referenced. It is also consistent with the approach advocated by knowledge management (KM) consultants such as Steve Denning, who has in the past emphasized the broad and encompassing nature of KM by describing it as 'a different way of doing the organisation's business'. Accepting this broader challenge, Ben throws down the gauntlet to development agencies to embrace a more powerful, fundamentally different approach to development.

Having led us to this precipice, Ben then begins his analysis of the 13 organisational profiles. On the basis of his synthesis, he then develops eight key areas of analysis, which are expressed through the following questions:

1. How is knowledge and learning understood and applied?
2. How does knowledge interface with the existing structures of the organisations?

3. How do knowledge activities link to existing core functions within the organisation?
4. How do knowledge and learning link with the existing support functions of the organisations?
5. How do connective physical and electronic infrastructures support knowledge and learning strategies?
6. What role do vision, leadership and management play in implementing knowledge strategies?
7. How are the costs and benefits of learning or not learning measured?
8. How does the knowledge programme address the external aspects of knowledge and learning work?

Ben then maps these questions onto a framework adapted from the ODI's RAPID framework (http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Lessons/Tools/RAPID_Framework.html), originally designed for understanding research-policy linkages. The adapted framework is intended to be used as a construct for carrying out a comparative analysis of knowledge and learning initiatives in development organisations. While the eight key areas mentioned above make good sense and emerge from the interviews with organisations, the adaptation of these ideas to the RAPID framework feels forced, as it is not clear what additional value is added by the framework to the eight areas of inquiry.

Ben's synthesis of his findings based on the application of those 8 questions to the 13 development organisations can be summarised as follows:

- Knowledge initiatives are still largely information-system oriented, focused on 'knowledge products', as opposed to knowledge and learning processes.
- Whilst some knowledge-oriented practices, such as communities of practice (CoPs), are catching on in organisations, none of the organisations' profiles could boast that knowledge-oriented practices have been integrated in any widespread or systematic way.
- Knowledge initiatives within development organisations have a tendency to be marginalised or even isolated within organisations and are sometimes viewed as being in conflict with core processes and culture.
- Information infrastructure is a necessary but not sufficient condition for knowledge sharing. Many development organisations are drawn down the path of information infrastructure as a knowledge solution and fail to address the richer but less visible aspects of knowledge that are embedded in process and human interaction and are more difficult to measure.
- High-level buy-in and leadership were identified as necessary conditions for effective knowledge initiatives but were also found to be rare.
- Nobody really knows how to measure the costs of not having an effective knowledge strategy. Narrative is seen as a powerful tool but is criticised by some as being too often used to highlight one-off successes as opposed to actual trends.
- Looking outwards, most organisations have tended to focus on sharing their knowledge with Southern partners. Little attention has been paid to facilitating the flow of knowledge of Southern partners into development agencies. Similarly, inter-agency knowledge flows have not been identified as a priority.

Song, S. 2005. Review of 'Implementing knowledge strategies: lessons from international development agencies.'
KM4D Journal 1(2): 91-94
www.km4dev.org/journal

Having conducted his analysis, Ben then sets out recommendations for each of the eight key areas. One assumes they are aimed at development organisations in general, though this is not explicitly stated. This is the only really disappointing section of the paper. Whilst the recommendations are all perfectly sensible, they are at too high a level to be of great use to the reader. I am reminded of an old Steve Martin stand-up comedy routine in which he offers to instruct the audience in how to get a million dollars and never pay taxes. 'First, get a million dollars.…'

The recommendations may not be as difficult as getting a million dollars, but they are not that far off. For example, in the section on organisational contexts, the recommendation is made to:

> *ensure that leaders and senior management are on board, briefed and trained in all aspects of knowledge and learning work, especially rationales and the tools available.*

Having spent some time trying to do just that in my own organisation and having worked with a number of organisations to help them do that, I can attest to how difficult and complex and ongoing this issue is. Often, it is not clear how to start. It is evident that Ben has absorbed a huge amount from these organisations but is struggling to convey it in his paper. This is a classic example of the challenge of representing complex knowledge as information.

Ben's eight areas of inquiry make a good start towards a framework; however, they would benefit from both further refinement and validation. Something like a Delphic Survey of experts from the field of knowledge for development as well as organisational learning and perhaps learning-based evaluation may be a good next step towards achieving this.

In order to implement any such framework, richer data is required from the organisations. Many of the organisational profiles read a bit like a communications pamphlet. One approach might be to collectively develop a behaviour-based evaluation methodology for knowledge initiatives, which could serve the dual purpose of helping organisations reflect on and learn from their own knowledge initiatives but also provide a richer, more easily comparable data resource with which to carry out further research. Approaches such as outcome mapping, developed at Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), or other learning-oriented evaluation methodologies could easily be adapted to this purpose.

Ben's paper is a good first step toward a more structured discussion of knowledge initiatives in development agencies. Hopefully, it will spur others on to carry the process forward.

About the author

Steve Song studied cognitive science and artificial intelligence at the University of Toronto in Canada, and worked for many years in the computer industry. However, he prefers to refer to himself as a 'reformed' technologist. Steve Song is now the Managing Director of Connectivity Africa, an initiative hosted by IDRC that is part of

Canada's response to the G8 Africa Action Plan. Connectivity Africa's mission is to accelerate innovation, adoption, and development in information and communication technologies in Africa. Steve was formerly a Senior Programme Officer with the Bellanet International Secretariat where his work focused on knowledge management and its implications for international development. He has led a number of knowledge management strategic planning missions and has organized workshops throughout Africa and Asia. In the open source arena, he has championed the use of free software for collaborative work in developing countries. He has worked in the area of ICTs for development since 1991. He was involved in the early development of the Internet in the non-profit community in South Africa.
E-mail: ssong@idrc.ca

Gritty lessons and pearls of wisdom: using oral history interviews to draw deep insights from past action, illuminate heritage and catalyse learning

Stephanie Colton and Victoria Ward

What follows is a 'factional' (factual in essence but dipped in fiction to protect the identity of our clients) correspondence between the authors during an oral history project for an international development institution celebrating its 40-year anniversary, playfully dubbed the Responsible Earth & Sea Development Agency or RESDA. Insights are drawn from a number of client assignments undertaken over the last 8 years that put story capture tools to work in the context of attempting to achieve broader strategic knowledge management objectives. In this case Victoria Ward – founder of Sparknow – was participating in the creation of a knowledge management strategy programme and acting as advisor to Stephanie Colton, who was project managing the experimental oral histories strand. The authors have taken the liberty of writing an extended piece in order that others might benefit from specific, contextualised insights not reduced to general headings. The letters cover parts of the process that might be interesting to others, including:

- Writing the brief
- The rationale for using oral histories in knowledge management (KM)
- Writing and briefing interviewees
- Process timeline and capacity building
- Risks in a complex project
- Placing the person at the heart of the process – emerging lessons
- Analysis or 'picking out the good bits'
- Evaluation – what could we do differently next time?
- Advice for future oral historians

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From: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
To: Victoria Ward <Victoria@sparknow.net
Date: January 1st, 2005
Subject: Writing the brief
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Dear Victoria,

I'm so glad to hear that things are moving on apace. Just to keep you in the loop here's the brief we've agreed with RESDA for the oral histories strand. It would really help me if you could take a look and tell me how you see it fitting with our KM Strategy stuff: -

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PROJECT BRIEF: Evidencing the history of RESDA through the creation of a collection of re-useable Oral Histories, using sound, image and text. Specifically to:

* commemorate RESDA's growth by collecting stories of the genesis of structures, relationships, ideas and products;
* 'release' tacit knowledge of long-serving and retired staff members including reusable success stories and lessons learned;
* build internal capacity to elicit empirical knowledge not represented in formal record;
* engage and induct into the heritage and conscience of the organisation;
* complement more structured exit procedures and improve succession and hand-over processes;
* begin to shift patterns of communication and exchange and stimulate debate on particular topics.

The approach we are taking is to:

* align with high-level objectives for change, including RESDA's strategic KM program to validate importance of individual experiences;
* break from traditional OH archives and make a dynamic, interactive & extendable online experience that catalyzes learning by offering users multiple entry points including keywords, topic, time, person (in addition to full transcript);
* transfer skills & ownership of the project to ensure long-term continuation.

All best wishes,

Stephanie

> From: Victoria Ward <Victoria@sparknow.net>
> To: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
> Date: January 3rd, 2005
> Subject: The rationale for using oral histories in KM
>
> Dear Stephanie.
>
> It's a good starting point, although I suspect a rollercoaster journey behind the calm descriptions. I would probably be more esoteric and obscure, saying something like: "This oral history project is an experimental exercise in using oral history, both content and process, to make visible the hidden histories in RESDA; to use the resulting histories and exhibits to create a heritage collection which would allow the Agency to build on the past in shaping the future; to use the experience and raw materials to inform the development of a sustainable framework for knowledge and change management; and to build capacity during the assignment so that the Agency would have an embryonic community of oral historians." But I think you get there rather more elegantly than I.
>
> As far as connecting to the KM strategy, we're positioning the oral histories project as an experiment in releasing 'empirical knowledge' – knowledge gained from experience –and presenting it back in an engaging and user-friendly format. RESDA regards itself as a pioneering organization, and this focus on innovation may have led to a devaluing of 'old knowledge.' We're

suggesting they use oral history tools to draw out critical lessons within programming cycles, past experience that can be immediately put to use by other teams. We're also extolling the virtues of working with oral as well as written histories e.g. that listening to an audio story while simultaneously reading the accompanying transcript helps retain a connection between knower and known, preserving the human side of information. As the author and mythograpgher Marina Warner pointed out in a recent lecture at St. Donat's Castle in Wales, the creation of pathos between speaker and receiver can inspire receivers to mimic the action they see being played in their mind's eye. Change managers take note.

We're also raising the stakes, encouraging the team at RESDA to boost their ambition beyond simply creating a collection of heritage oral histories. The tools – disciplined and participative elicitation, documentation, analysis and presentation with a strong narrative bias - can be tied into improving existing evaluation and reporting processes, impact assessment and so on and should be regarded as vital instruments for knowledge management. I have in mind Donald Schon's work on reflection-in-action (thinking on our feet) and reflection-on-action (reviewing the encounter afterwards). The notion of repertoire is also a key aspect of his approach. Practitioners build up a collection of images, ideas, examples and actions they can draw on and assess new situations as both the same as, and different from, those he and she has encountered previously [Schon, D. (1983) 'The Reflective Practitioner. How professionals think in action' London, Temple Smith.]

One question: how you are going to sell oral histories, not just to the interviewees but to the rest of the organisation which might find them a bit indulgent – old people getting out hoary old self-aggrandising rehearsed stories which wallow in the good old days and have nothing useful to say about the future?

Yours truly,

Victoria

From: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
To: Victoria Ward Victoria@sparknow.net
Date: January 5th, 2005
Subject: Re The rationale for using oral histories in KM

Dear Victoria,

You asked about how we'll go about recruiting the rest of the organisation. Here's an excerpt from the draft promotional materials for the annual conference launch that describes why and how people should take serious interest in the techniques:

Colton, S. and V. Ward. 2005. Gritty lessons and pearls of wisdom: using oral history interviews
to draw deep insights from past action, illuminate heritage and catalyse learning.
KM4D Journal 1(2): 95-107
www.km4dev.org/journal

A semi-structured investigation of the past through the gathering together of personal testimonies, the Oral History technique has its roots in social psychology and anthropology but is now starting to gain credibility as a vital tool for Knowledge, Change and Human Resources Management. Complementing other more structured forms of interviewing, the systematic completion of oral histories with leaving staff members can help in risk management by documenting information not usually recorded in the formal record of the organisation – experiences, memories, stories, impressions and advice. Oral histories are qualitative, personal and subjective, documenting the 'human side' of a professional's working life and providing deep insights into the working practices and culture of individuals and the organisation at large. Crucially interviews are not just added to a static archive but are also used to trigger fresh discussion or thinking. In this way organisations begin to build on their pasts to shape their futures.

I thought you might be interested to know what I've been jotting in my field notebook… some of it could be relevant for the KM strategy:

…. How closely tied to the 40-year anniversary? The brewing sense of celebration could hinder as users may see the exercise as flimsy rather than relating it to the high-level KS ambitions. We should position to avoid undermining the long-term learning potential of the collection.

…. We're only interviewing the 'elders' – retired or soon-to-retire members of staff. Will people dismiss their insights as out-dated or irrelevant? We need to present the histories back in such a way that the speaker is not necessarily the first thing visitors encounter – the collection could be arranged by topic, date or keyword instead.

… RESDA has an oral culture – not a flipchart in sight. Important stories - for example about why particular programmes were set up, how they've worked with peers and partners over the years – have never been officially documented. The organisation is hierarchical with only minimal communication between levels that hinders transmission too. However, one side effect of oral culture can be a greater emphasis on the importance of memory and people here do have startlingly precise memories, even when remembering events from 40 years ago.

… RESDA's membership is multicultural, multinational and polyglot – "a miracle of harmony and diversity" according to one senior figure we met in the lift yesterday. While this may present practical issues around translation and so on, it should mean that if our sample is representative, the whole collection will offer something for everyone.

That's all for now. Best wishes,

Stephanie

From: Victoria Ward <Victoria@sparknow.net>
To: Stephanie Colton Stephanie@sparknow.net
Date: January 21st, 2005
Subject: Inviting and briefing

Dear Stephanie,

Just connecting to the point you were making about the clarity of their memories – and I would guess the vividness of the word pictures they will paint for us - don't forget that Weick is a

Colton, S. and V. Ward. 2005. Gritty lessons and pearls of wisdom: using oral history interviews
to draw deep insights from past action, illuminate heritage and catalyse learning.
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great one for the importance of 'vivid words' as a sign that an organisation is rich in renewal [Karl Weick, 'Sensemaking in Organisations', Sage Publications, 1995]. I think it's also worth bearing in mind what I said in an earlier email about the danger of people just telling rehearsed stories. Are we going to get behind polished performances to the unpolished jewels? As outsiders how will we know the difference? The RESDA trainees will play a vital role in helping unearth these previously untold narratives and we'll need to impress this on them. I've had a go at the invitation to interviewees too, though I'm not quite sure that interviewee is the right noun to describe them. Here's a snippet. Let me know what you think: –

"You will be asked to imagine you are speaking to the whole staff body, passing on critical wisdom that can be applied to everyday working situations. To create a collection that really intrigues and grabs the attention of future audiences we will be asking you to cast yourself in the role of storyteller, focusing on specific instances and avoiding general comments. We will be moving through this sequence: -

Introduce yourself	Birthplace, education and professional career before joining RESDA
Timeline	Describing key milestones in your journey with RESDA from association to present day including highs, lows, turning points, pivotal decisions, relationships and external or internal pressures
Reflections	Evaluating achievements and contributions
Success stories	Good practice examples, impact stories and examples of the Agency growing and fulfilling its mandate
Lessons learned	Hard-hitting instances where mistakes were made that should be avoided by the next generation assuming the mantle of leadership
Pearls of wisdom	What should RESDA stop/ start/ continue doing? What one piece of advice would you give someone just joining RESDA?

To kick-start the process please prepare a timeline that maps out either: I) your own transition or career with the Agency; II) the evolution of particular projects or programmes you were involved in; III) the development of the Agency as an institution. This will act as an *aide memoire*. In addition please bring along any artefacts that signify or evoke a particular place and time, for example souvenirs, photographs etc. It is crucial you bring things that can be photographed; these images will form a vital part of the final collection when it is presented back - the more intriguing or evocative the better.

The interviewer's role is to invite you to recollect under a set of broad headings. Unlike a journalistic interview this will not be an interrogation or 'question and answer' session – the focus is on encouraging you to recollect in a comfortable, open and honest manner."

It's a bit long, but should give them enough to chew on. Let me know what you think.

Yours truly,

Victoria

From: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
To: Victoria Ward <Victoria@sparknow.net>
Date: April 21st, 2005
Subject: Process timeline and capacity building

Dear Victoria,

Sorry I haven't been in touch for ages – it's been crazy; we sent the
invitations out and within a week the interviewees were lined up and
ready to go. An interesting twist - when we approached people to be
interviewed, they were very retiring and not believing their
operational experience would be of interest to others and saying, "Oh
I don't know if I have much to offer, but you should talk to so-and-
so, he really has stories to tell." In the end we had to do a kind of
referral thing where we approached people and asked them who they
thought we should talk to, rather than approaching people directly.

Most interviewees felt comfortable casting themselves as
storytellers, and in particular loved imparting their 'pearls of
wisdom'. Perhaps we should rename lessons learned and call them the
grit, i.e. the grit around which pearls form? Anyway, my favourite
quote so far is from the introduction to the very first interview,
where a retired Director said:

*"As I am the first one to be interviewed, I would like to say a few
words. I want to try to avoid being like the grandfather that I am,
telling fairy tales that all have happy endings. I will also try to
avoid giving advice or rulings."*

Setting this tone his interview was an outstanding example of KS in
action. Oh, before I forget, Paul asked me to send you the process
timeline for your presentation: -

P.T.O.

CORE PROCESS

Feb — RECRUITING
Definitions and awareness raising meetings; RESDA staff invited to submit 'burning questions'; Preparation of information pack on 'what is oral history?'; Recruitment of RESDA Oral History volunteers – the 'core team'

Mar — PREPARING
Design of approach and interview question framework; 2 observed test interviews; Solicitation letter and briefing note sent to 10 senior officials; Preliminary research on interviewees; Interview scheduling; Technical training in use of recording equipment.

Apr — INTERVIEWING
'Break the ice' session with interviewees; 11 semi-structured recorded interviews (2 – 5 hours each); After Action Review sessions; Production of audio files; Transcription and translation of audio file into text; Verification and approval of transcript by interviewee.

May — ANALYSING
Each interview listened to and 'good bits' sifted out; Segmentation and cataloguing of key clips (keywords, time coding, naming, quality control); Mapping connections between segments; Building searchable archive of interviews and segments (audio + text).

Jun — VISUALISING
Reorganisation of segments crosscutting themes or connected by keywords; Building presentation layers for the online collection; Facilitating user choice and exploration within the collection by adding sophisticated search aids; Creation of display materials for the annual meeting showcase.

KNOWLEDGE
A core team of 4 volunteers participated in each stage of the Core Process including:
- design of questions
- technical training including recording equipment
- observation of process
- interview skills practice
- After Action Review and lessons learned
- audio segmentation and cataloguing
- mapping connections
- design principles and user requirements for online collection

This team will be ready to act as a central resource as the collection is extended.

RE-USEABLE TOOLS & ASSETS
'What is Oral History?' info pack; Letter and briefing note; Interview approach and question framework; Recording equipment and skills training; Lessons learned (from AAR); Segmentation and cataloguing templates; Database and website documentation; Open source software for handling audio and text

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From: Victoria Ward <Victoria@sparknow.net>
To: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
Date: April 28th, 2005
Subject: Risks in a complex project
```

Dear Stephanie,

I am concerned you're not allowing enough time for the analysis/ cataloguing/ segmentation part. It looks like a big task on a tight deadline and what's more, it's going to be hard to show the RESDA team how while trying to get everything done in time. Don't forget we're asking the volunteers to give their time, and since we'll be working from the audio in real time (and not the transcripts) they might find it impossible. I understand the rationale for getting everyone involved but won't this make for

Colton, S. and V. Ward. 2005. Gritty lessons and pearls of wisdom: using oral history interviews
to draw deep insights from past action, illuminate heritage and catalyse learning.
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uneven quality? It might be worth giving me the templates for a
trial run, just to see how it feels.

Good luck!

Victoria

From: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
To: Victoria Ward Victoria@sparknow.net
Date: April 29[th], 2005
Subject: Placing the person at the heart of the process – emerging
lessons

Dear Victoria,

You're right about the timing but I've decided it's better the
trainees have a go than we do everything for them or outsource it.
We'll see how far they get, but can always back them up. Thanks for
the offer to be guinea pig. I've attached the segment templates and
the audio file for the interview with the HR Director. Let me know
how you get along. In the meantime I thought you might like to know
how my interview with the Head of Country Operations went today. It
has some great lessons in it.

In her seventies she is a charming woman but seemed tired from her
longer-than-usual boat journey to headquarters – they had to pull
into the harbour half way here to shelter from storms and she was
wiped out when she arrived. A last minute change of plan too –
instead of interviewing in her old office we were in a meeting room.
I could sense her discomfort, and it was neither cosy nor inspiring.
In addition, the table was rather low leaving the microphone at knee
level – an uncomfortable set-up and she didn't quite know whether to
lean back or lean forward. In any case it was obvious throughout and
certainly constrained her.

Quite by accident the trainee oral historian and I got our seating
arrangements wrong too, so although I was asking the questions the
interviewee was looking at the trainee, which created an odd kind of
triangle that hindered the flow and made the right kind of eye
contact and body language (so necessary to create the encouragement
for stories) hard to get right. Plus, and I think this is the most
important lesson, she was expecting to be interviewed in Cornish. As
you know my Cornish is very rusty… unfortunately so was the
trainee's. After posing the first question the interviewee reeled off
a long answer in Cornish and then gave quite a stilted version in
English. This created a jolty and uncomfortable rhythm from the
outset – we couldn't accommodate her needs and she ended up being
forced to speak in English. I think it cramped her storytelling quite
a bit.

Because of this rocky start we ended up skimping on her own
beginnings and extraordinary career journey. As a result there were
times when I felt she was disengaged or marginal in the stories,
talking about RESDA at a general level or about other people's
contributions.

So in summary the emerging lessons - or bits of 'grit' as you called
them - are:

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- Ensure someone from RESDA speaks personally to each interviewee beforehand to establish common understanding and check any particular wishes e.g. to interview in language the interviewee feels most comfortable telling stories in, whatever the extra work;
- Ensure the physical and psychological environment feels both safe and inspiring;
- Allow adequate time for the interviewee to unfold personal stories about life before the organisation places them at the centre of the process and content making them more likely to be frank when they feel they have been accorded attention in their own right.

Anyway, let me know how you get on with the segmentation template. We're starting next week, so I may not get time to talk to you in depth about it.

Thanks again, and best wishes

Stephanie

> From: Victoria Ward <Victoria@sparknow.net>
> To: Stephanie Colton Stephanie@sparknow.net
> Date: May 2nd, 2005
> Subject: Analysis or 'picking out the good bits'
>
> Dear Stephanie,
>
> Phew, this segmentation business is tough going. I liked listening rather than just reading the written transcript and picking the good bits out that way. It's all in the telling, as they say. Oh, and I think there's a magic formula – 'length of audio segment x 3 = length of time to catalogue'… I spent 12 hours over the last 2 days listening, scribbling in my notebook and tapping away on my PowerBook in the garden. Thank heavens for wireless technology.
>
> By the way I spoke to Will and he's on board to come in as technical and design guru for the creation of the online collection (with an extendable navigable archive behind the scenes). Give him a call. Back to the Strategy stuff, which by the way is starting to become quite interesting…
>
> Victoria

From: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
To: Victoria Ward Victoria@sparknow.net
Date: June 1st, 2005
Subject: Re Analysis or 'picking out the good bits'

Dear Victoria,

Sorry it's been a while since we last spoke. You were right; this segmentation has been exhausting. Thanks so much for testing it. I showed the team your completed segment templates as examples. The team was so brilliant and got stuck into this labour-intensive work, bearing with us as we experimented with new ways in processing, synthesising, segmenting, cataloguing, mapping and visualising the rich data to produce a navigable collection. I had to remind them that our approach has been to do something innovative, that unlike

more traditional oral history collections – where interviews are transcribed and uploaded to sound archives in full, and often left to gather dust – we want the RESDA collection to be designed to offer users the choice of how to view the information. Where some users might want to listen to the whole interview, others may simply wish to hear what everyone said about a particular topic or episode, say boatbuilding, or the sustainable tin mine story, or the time when the senior management team got shipwrecked. The interface should also facilitate exploration, with 'dead ends' kept to a minimum.

Each member of the team listened to 4 - 10 hours of audio, identifying and cataloguing those segments (and the corresponding section of written transcript) they felt would be of most value to the rest of the organisation. Time codes, keywords, dates, and quality control ratings were attached as markers to enable future searching across the collection of clips. We then met for a final two-day session during which we pooled our findings before building a map of the segments, arranged around the core themes that had emerged. We now have: -

- A definitive list of the interviews, with speakers, summaries and notes;
- A library of audio clips, consistently and thoroughly described and summarized;
- A lexicon containing all the descriptive terms that have been attached to clips;
- A catalogue of the key themes and topics that have emerged from the analysis.

Since then Will and I have been immersed in the fiddly business of making time codes accurate, recording English translations (Chris in his best public speaking voice), trying to transcript text to correspond with each voice clip, etc. I'm not sure I can bear to look at a time code again, quite honestly.

That's all for now. Will and I are doing an informal evaluation tomorrow. I'll let you know how we get on.

Stephanie

From: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
To: Victoria Ward Victoria@sparknow.net
Date: June 2nd, 2005
Subject: Evaluation – what could we do differently next time?

Dear Victoria,

Me again. Here are the headlines from our informal evaluation session yesterday, bearing in mind these are thoughts for Sparknow's continued work and not for RESDA to take on:

- While the audio and text combination works well, the collection lacks illustrations. I'm pretty sure we were right not to use video – talking heads are not that interesting to watch - but it does mean we'll need to find other ways to bring images in, for example by listening for objects and artefacts, even metaphorical ones, locations, characters that can be photographed to sit alongside the story. We missed a trick by not hooking up with the RESDA museum and archive. I know the change team have been able to

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use both really well to create a roving exhibit about cultural change and we could really have used the skills of the curator to help us think about objects and exhibit in relation to the audio materials;

- We only interviewed the great and the good this time, but what about the dinner ladies in the canteen? The receptionist who has been there for 18 years, the man who pushes the buttons in the lift and delivers the mail? These are hidden histories and small daily rituals with just as much importance as the big stories of mission and high-level decision-making.

All best,

Stephanie

> From: Victoria Ward <Victoria@sparknow.net>
> To: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
> Date: June 5th, 2005
> Subject: Re Evaluation– what could we do differently next time?
>
> Dear Stephanie,
>
> Thanks for the notes. One thing we should repeat is the way we named particular episodes we were told, using their words, to make the segment feel more like a story and to create intrigue, an example being the story we called 'The Dusty Winds of Khartoum: Endings and Beginnings' or 'Crossing Drought-Ridden Sub-Saharan Africa on Dirt Roads: The Value of Leaving the Headquarters' or 'The Beggar of the Public: Making the Transition from Recipient to Donor.'
>
> We should bear in mind the radio ballads that Charles Parker produced for the BBC between 1958 and 1983. They are now in Birmingham City Archive, so we should really go up there for a trip. But they've also just been re-produced by Topic Records and I really think we should get Sparknow a copy. Just look at some of the titles:
>
>> The Ballad of John Axon - death of a heroic train driver
>> Song of a Road - building the first motorway
>> Singing the Fishing - North Sea herring fishermen
>> The Body Blow - the battle against polio
>
> Charles Parker called the ballads 'folk orchestration' and they really are sonata-like compositions. Some of the story telling is incredibly skillful – like traditional storytellers they had a great sense of timing and developed the story through direct rather than reported speech. And we have quite a bit of that vibrancy in our raw materials too, since some of our interviewees are extraordinary storytellers. In our next project we should extend beyond the pure sound of voice to music, the sounds of life – footsteps, street sounds, children singing and chanting in class, sounds of the fieldwork in action.
>
> I think we should draw this correspondence to a close now, since the deadline for the KM4Dev journal is looming. What, I wonder, would be your advice to anyone thinking of conducting oral history interviews?

Yours truly,

Victoria

From: Stephanie Colton <Stephanie@sparknow.net>
To: Victoria Ward <Victoria@sparknow.net>
Date: June 7th, 2005
Subject: Advice for future oral historians

Dear Victoria,

Advice… well certainly we found that nesting the project inside a broader programme such as the KM strategy work gives it instrumental purpose. And the very act of the oral histories, in their long, slow, unfolding and the different qualities (long interviews, minimal interruption) enacts a different pattern of communication and exchange.

I would go back to the training that Roger Kitchen gave us, and his four golden rules of collecting [- I found a link to it at http://22villages.22plus3.co.uk/oral_history_workshop.htm too]:

1.   You only get what you ask for… so you have to do the research to figure out what you want to find out). Complement general questions with more specific ones tailored to each individual. Open questions, always.

2.   Be interested… Having your voice valued for the first time can be intense and you will encounter great humility, even amongst experienced personnel. Taking an interest in the smallest detail can draw people into richer recollection. Eye contact makes a huge difference (although sustaining it may be culturally inappropriate) and so does not looking at the tape recorder or watch, or taking notes. Practice to establish the necessary rhythms, silences and gestures of encouragement.

3.   Listen, keep hold of clues and don't interrupt the flow… There are both obvious and subtle differences between this form of interviewing and a more journalistic style. In essence in an oral history interview the interviewee is not being interrogated and asked for their opinions; they are being invited to recollect. Interject to keep things moving along but remember even simple clarifications of a date or name can throw speakers off the path they were on and impoverish the results.

4.   Respect the individual… You may hear the same story from many angles, so it could be tempting to think you have a better grip on the story than the teller and stop listening. Think about how the interviewee's age, gender, status or personality is affecting your attitude to them in the moment. Try to be mindful of your behaviour and control frustration or reticence where it occurs. At all times strive to maintain positivity and openness.

There are so many small lessons about the practicalities, it is hard to know where to start, but perhaps I could end with the words of one of the interviewees, on being asked what advice he would give to someone new joining RESDA:

"Enter into the spirit of things. And be patient. It takes time to
understand and make a difference."

Anyway, I'm really looking forward to our summer solstice cold swim
in Lake Geneva after the KM4Dev workshop. Thanks so much for all the
encouragement over the last few months.

All best wishes,

Stephanie

About the authors

Stephanie Colton began work with Sparknow in 2001 following two
years in the knowledge team at Wolff Olins, a leading brand and
communications consultancy. With a background in social
anthropology Stephanie leads the story practice at Sparknow and
specialises in embedding narrative qualities into the design of key
interfaces, creating opportunities for people to exchange experiences
and promoting meaningful dialogue between business and the arts. In 2004 Stephanie
founded Inside : Outside, a partner of Sparknow specialising in oral history work and
cutting-edge web techniques that enable the collection and release of valuable
experiences using sound, text and image.
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Victoria Ward started work in financial futures in the City in 1981
following a degree in modern languages and art. She set up Sparknow
with Claudine Arnold and Neil Nokes in November 1997. Sparknow's
intention is to honour the human spirit in the workplace. Much of its
work is to do with narratives and story at work, the role of the physical
workplace in nurturing knowledge sharing and risk taking, and the
development of resilient communities which bridge organisational boundaries.
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Knowledge management Feng Shui: designing knowledge sharing-friendly office space

Marc Steinlin

What I needed

After 15 years in a nice old residential building, Helvetas decided to move to a new site offering more adequate office space. That was my longed for chance, as a knowledge manager, to influence the design and arrangement of the new office environment in accordance with the ideas and ideals of knowledge sharing.

I had some ideas for the new design, but I was not too sure about them, so I decided to draw on 'my community'. I posed the following question to KM4DEV:

'I have the rare opportunity to advise someone who is about to move into new office premises, where they can design the physical space according to their wishes with relatively few limitations. They asked me whether I have ideas, models, tips and more on how to design and equip it to be knowledge-sharing friendly.

Can you provide me with some information, experiences and more? Do you know of some outstanding examples which we might look at? Do you know of some organisation which specialises in such questions?'

Within two days I received a considerable number of responses, providing ideas on how to optimise workspace, which criteria to take into account, what other experiences might serve as examples, who could share more experience and expertise and more.

My thanks go to the following contributors ('in order of appearance'): Urs Egger (SKAT), Stephanie Colton (SparkNow), Julie Ferguson (Hivos), Barbara Weaver Smith (Smith Weaver Smith), Lucie Lamoureux (Bellanet), Alim Khan (ILO), Allison Hewlitt (Bellanet), Peter Thorpe (Centre for Health and Population Research) and indirectly (quoted) Steve Song (Connectivity Africa/IDRC).

Experiences, ideas and tips

Some concrete hints
- The best knowledge-sharing workplaces that I have experienced devote minimal space to separate 'offices and maximum space to group-work areas. Including moveable furniture and white boards so that groups of many sizes can configure a workspace to suit their current project needs.
- [ISNAR has some] neat physical spaces that they have introduced in their building. They have installed coffee areas at strategic points in the building. Each

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area (or at least the ones I saw) has a couple of tall tables where you can either stand or sit on tall stools; has a coffee machine where the coffee/tea/cappuccino, etc., are free; and has a white board and pens. I'm guessing the spaces are about 3 m wide by 6 m. In the 15 minutes I spent at one of the tables, I was introduced to a remarkable cross-section of staff. It struck me as a simple but effective mechanism for enhancing a simple coffee machine into a collaborative space. I'm sure the free coffee helps.

- Mix 'n match: Put people from different sectors/divisions in rooms together so they know what the others are doing. More room for cross-fertilisation!
- Is there a specific person/section for coordination of knowledge sharing? Or other people critical for this function (knowledge brokers)? Put them at a 'busy intersection' of the building (e.g., near the entrance) where people pass by a lot, so everyone knows who they are and people will drop by a lot.
- Share lunch! This is the ideal opportunity for knowledge sharing between colleagues who may not do so during regular business.
- Along the same lines, put a nice 'standing table' in an open hall-area, near the coffee machine. Spontaneous knowledge sharing is guaranteed to occur. (We have been advocating one of these for ages; not been successful yet though!). Also, include a few comfortable corners/spots where people can have informal meetings, and notice boards/pin boards near each department for people to hang up their announcements/posters/etc.
- No central library! The most interesting literature remains in people's own collections, so you may as well leave them there. Further, person-to-person knowledge sharing still continues to work best. (A digital library can support this system, e.g., http://obiblio.sourceforge.net).
- If there are really no limitations: a cocktail bar!! Knowledge sharing happy hour... (Peter Ballantyne's invention).
- Check out *Dilbert's ultimate cubicle* on their Web site *http://www.ideo.com* for inspiration.

On the concept of 'caves and commons'

Integrated interior systems (School of Building & Real Estate, NUS 2/3/99)
- Individual small workstations that could be partially closed off (caves), surrounding commons areas for meeting, spreading out work, and relaxation, in addition to shared project rooms, conference rooms, and equipment rooms;
- Different specialties could be brought together in new neighbourhoods for an innovative project;
- Matching of building services to the increasing density and diversity of work spaces;
- The sparse air diffuser density, thermal zoning controls, window access and lighting fixture configuration that has repeatedly been inadequate in conventional open plan configurations with medium and high partitioning will prove even more problematic in the mini semi-enclosed offices and dispersed, varied teaming spaces.

Personal harbours and coves
- Small, partially closable individual offices;
- Mobile furniture that can be taken to alternate work locations;

- Shared work area furniture for conferencing, relaxing, concentrating, teaming, laying out or presenting work, and multi-media-ting;
- Mobile, personally owned furniture like chairs, work surfaces and storage on wheels, to support teaming activities and individual work in alternate work sites throughout the building.

Personal enclaves
- New furniture designed to increase closure and privacy of the open office, with new ceiling and wall sections, doors and windows, and new furniture for enhancing the settings for shared work and 'teaming';
- Larger closed offices assigned as project rooms and a number of mini closed offices used for temporary meetings or concentrated work.
  http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/bdgwnh/www/MBS102/MBS102T7/sld027.htm

Caves and commons case study: evaluation of a workplace strategy for improving team effectiveness
(Daniel Richard Welton, May 1996 – Loope Chair, Cutler Committee)

Abstract
This study investigated an innovative workspace strategy designed to support and facilitate group work in the office environment. Referred to as 'caves and commons,' this workspace strategy featured a series of work settings designed to promote crucial aspects of group process for a single team without significant space growth. The design consisted of compact and enclosed individual workspaces for supporting focused concentration and an open group space for supporting and facilitating collaborative work. Because this approach focuses on aspects of the workplace environment that are known to have a positive influence on group processes, it was hypothesized that the caves and commons approach should have a corresponding positive effect on team performance.

This hypothesis was tested through an exploratory case study conducted in real time under actual working conditions. The test period lasted six months. Behavioural evidence was collected before and after the installation of the caves and commons environment through a series of focused interviews and questionnaire surveys. The evidence was numerically coded, reduced. analysed and then graphed to identify rating differences. Results of the analysis indicated that the 'caves and commons' office setting had measurable positive impact on the team's overall performance.
http://www.asu.edu/caed/SOD/design/FACULTY/MEMBERS/CUTLER_abstracts.htm

Lessons from the leading edge
(Tim Stevens, July 1999)

Excerpt
In one such experiment, called 'caves and commons', a workspace was arranged with private, personal workstations surrounding a team space with movable tools and furniture, and the cameras rolled. 'We watched formal meetings and informal gatherings', says Keane. 'Sometimes two people would meet, start talking, others would join for a while, then leave, then return. So we were able to identify dynamics of the team space. When we asked people how they used the team space, they

mentioned the formal meetings, yet we observed the unofficial meetings which were also important uses of the area'.

The result of the caves and commons exercise was a workspace design concept called 'pathways' that includes a lot of informal team spaces, with white boards on a beam-and-post system, so people can make points and negotiate. The boards then can be removed or swung out of the way when sessions are complete. 'Observational techniques are designed to help tease out the difference between what people say they do and what they actually do, what they say they need and what they really need', says Keane.
http://www.industryweek.com/CurrentArticles/asp/articles.asp?ArticleID=582

Examples of 'implemented' KS office space

Switzerland
- Phonak (often cited in KM literature)
- Wüest and Partner ('open offices around a meeting area in the middle with standing tables, high tables where you can stand around for meetings. Keeps meetings quite short and people do not fall asleep'.)
- SDC building in Bern ('offices in glass boxes, meeting spaces and an interaction zone in the corridor. Exception is the canteen in the basement that is certainly not at the right place'.)

United Kingdom
- UK Dept. of Trade & Industry (ministerial floor)
- BBC
- Countryside Agency
- DFID Offices, Palace Street, London

Netherlands
- The former offices of ISNAR (cf. below; http://www.isnar.cgiar.org)

USA
- The Strategy Studio, Smith Weaver Smith, Inc. (Indianapolis; http://www.smithweaversmith.com/strategystudio.htm)

Advisory organisations
- SparkNow (in collaboration with Prof. Clive Holtham, CASS Business School), which has been implementing such spaces since 1997; references: UK Dept. of Trade&Industry, BBC, Countryside Agency; case studies/academic papers downloadable under: http://www.sparknow.net/)
- Innovation Labs (specialised in this design work for years, has written extensively about it; headquartered in California but has a significant presence in Europe and has worked with many large NGOs; info at http://www.innovationlabs.com/)

Further references
A large debate on the issue, with more ideas, references and examples, can be found on the Community of Interest for readers of the practical knowledge management

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handbook *Learning to Fly*: *http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/learning-to-fly/message/824*

Reflections on the process

Within a remarkably short time and with little effort, I had assembled a good set of information and ideas. I sent out this concise 'product' to my colleagues and especially to the person leading the process of converting the new venue. This led to the sensitisation of the whole team. Our project manager included the summary of the KM4Dev brainstorming with the documents in the tender dossiers for interior designers. The product will later on serve as a basis for discussions of concrete projects. We will assess to what extent the submitted design proposals incorporate the indications in the product.

I am a strict defender of the 'knowledge-on-demand' principle, and I believe this experience has given me another convincing example. I was interested in learning about how to design knowledge sharing-friendly office space at a particular moment – not before and not after. The feedback on my specific question provided 'tailor-made' experience and knowledge, which was produced on demand. No 'prophylactic' information ('reserve supply') would have served my purpose, nor would it have addressed my point and answered my question within such a short time. Furthermore, it would have provided much more unsolicited details and thus 'polluted' the information base.

However, in order to obtain knowledge on demand, one must have a community of practice, which is capable of reacting as mine did. Such a community is an asset which requires considerable investment at the start but which pays off in moments of need.

About the author
Marc Steinlin has been leading the Knowledge Management Initiative of Helvetas in Zurich for 5 years and has been a member of the KM4Dev-community since its beginnings.
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Third issue of the *KM4D Journal*

The third issue of the KM4Dev e-journal will deal with 'Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: Making the invisible visible' and will be co-edited by Peter van Rooij (ILO), Rohit Ramaswamy (Service Design Solutions), Catherine Vaillancourt-Laflamme (Centre international de solidarité ouvrière) and Lucie Lamoureux (Bellanet).

> *By engaging cultural processes at all levels, development practitioners can encourage local initiative and better understand social change.*
> (Rob Vincent, *Culture key in developing HIV communication strategies,* Healthlink Worldwide, 2005)

Culture has many definitions. One of these refers to culture as 'a particular society at a particular time and place'. A related word, acculturation is defined as 'all the knowledge and values shared by a society'. Different cultures, with diverse knowledge and values, can be important sources of knowledge for development. Exchanges between cultures offer opportunities to find and share the local knowledge more broadly.

The purpose of the third issue is to present recent experiences of the influence of culture in knowledge sharing by practitioners who have been involved in planning, introducing and mainstreaming knowledge sharing approaches in development organizations. This topic was also the theme of the KM4Dev annual meeting, which took place at the ILO in Geneva on 20-21 June 2005.

Among others, the 3rd issue will include the following papers:
- An article by Sebastiao Darlan Mendonça Ferreira on the challenge of KM in the social realm, and its similarities and differences compared to KM inside organisations.
- Dr. Ceaser McDowell from MIT will be using cases from Latin America to discuss how a methodology has been used to support the generation of local knowledge, including some of the challenges when trying to support this generation as well as attending to cultural issues and the pressures of development interest.
- Chris Burman will reflect on his experiences with addressing the cultural dimension of knowledge sharing in a cross-cultural context, through a case study of a series of horizontal exchanges between two rural women's associations in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

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- Anne Trebilcock, Rafael Diez de Medina and Barbara Collins will present a case study by on the cultural lessons they learned while organising a Knowledge Fair at the ILO.
- Deborah Macan Markar and Petra Karetji will outline BaKTI's approach (Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange) in development, within a context of change and the role of knowledge in this 'Journey of Change'.
- Julie Ferguson on overcoming cultural barriers when a development organization teams up with a research institute, in this case in a Hivos-Institute of Social Studies' knowledge network.

The issue will also include a story from Camilo Villa on his research project on the role of regional culture and collective learning in Colombia, and an interview with Dr. Clive Holtham on his work with knowledge spaces and indigenous knowledge.

Forthcoming: **December 2005**