EDITORIAL

Knowledge management for development in 2020: let your imagination fly!

The true method of knowledge is experiment
William Blake

Living in time of radical shifts

Papers in this issue sketch where KM4Dev is heading as a discipline, and what opportunities and challenges KM4Dev practitioners could be facing in the coming years.

We are publishing this issue at a moment of radical shifts on political, organizational and management levels. The amount of geopolitical and societal uncertainty is staggering. We might be pivoting towards a new global order, traits of which are still to be uncovered and negotiated. From an economic perspective, we are navigating an extended period of low global growth. Large groups of citizens are losing faith in the capitalist model and are seduced by the promises of protectionism.

Organisations in our sector are under pressure to improve efficiency and demonstrate effectiveness. Responding to these pressures often requires changing the way of working. These changes can be very demanding, while their success is not always obvious. For example, we observe a rise in rhetoric and practice of partnerships, hoping they will be one possible answer. Yet, the private sector teaches that managing successfully a rich alliance portfolio is a tricky business.

We also observe a rise of a new management paradigm, primarily in the private, but also in our sector. Reliance on standardization and hierarchy is being replaced with open and adaptive organizational structures. In addition to delivering on their tasks, managers are expected to be enablers of collective intelligence and catalysts of continuous innovation. This puts additional stress on their shoulders and requires they discover new ways of managing.

In essence, we are called to embrace uncertainty on various levels.

Implications for the KM4Dev field: strategic, cross-pollinating and open

The articles in this issue try to highlight few implications for the field of KM4Dev (and KM more generally).

Gillman and Hagmann say that embedding knowledge management strategically in the organizational tissue will be the key for ensuring its relevance in the future. They lament that knowledge management interventions are often introduced as "yet another" task, disconnected from the organizational dynamics. The paper argues that KM should be strongly linked to the

top line organizational goals. Such approach gives powerful results because KM becomes a driving force in establish new ways of working.

Two articles see the future of KM in cross-pollination with other disciplines.
The paper by Boersma calls for knowledge design thinking, which marries the practical side of design thinking with more abstract tendencies of knowledge management. This will make KM, among other things, more human-centred and collaborative. The author gives several examples from public and private sector, spanning across several countries.

The paper by Feinstein maps the key trends in development evaluation and discusses how they could link with knowledge management. He argues that the two are interdependent: knowledge management can and should play a critical role in codifying the evaluation results, linking them to the characteristics of the context and in making the results accessible to policy makers, researchers and civil society.

Cleland introduces us to the 'ReefGame', which facilitates discussions and raises awareness about overfishing, alternative livelihoods, marine protected areas and coral reef ecology in Philippines. On a conceptual level, this paper gives us insights into principles that enable creation of a game for learning and engagement. We are breaking new ground here, as we are exploring how models and games can help to integrate, disseminate and implement knowledge.

Cranston and Pels explore what is next for the KM4Dev community. They harvest the key conclusions of a network self-reflection to draw important lessons on network dynamics. The central message for the future is that networks are stronger and more resilient if they allow multiple conversations, are open, accept diversity and tolerate inefficiency and duplication.

Implications for the KM4Dev practitioners: KM entrepreneurs

After looking at the implications for the KM4Dev field, let us try to see what are the implications for KM4Dev professionals.

We find that the papers in this issue converge in emphasising the entrepreneurial nature of KM. Let us pick few such aspects that run through almost all the papers in this issue.

Think strategically and starting with why: our mandate as KM4Dev practitioners is to ensure KM activities are integrated into the core business (or organisations) and support their overarching goals. If we don't do so, our interventions will not be fully appreciated. In the most extreme scenario, our positions will be cut in the next round of cost cutting.

Fearlessly leading change: our projects will be successful only if we uncover the KM vision together with our key stakeholders. It means we need to go beyond the cosy circle of KM champions; build cross-organisational and/or network coalitions; negotiate with sceptics to give us the benefit of doubt; measure and feed back results of our interventions to middle and senior management, network members and policy makers.

Cross-pollinating KM with other disciplines effectively defines innovation a' la Steve Jobs: connecting previously disconnected things. If we recognise this, we should be relentlessly questioning the status quo and asking: "how does this or that connect to what I am doing?".

We are also invited to experiment and fail. This translates concretely into being opportunistic and acting fast, piloting, evaluating and adapting. It also means being flexible in the face of change and resilient in the face of confusion.

Finally, Arno's paper raises another critical point: in doing all of the above, we need to have fun.

Can it get more entrepreneurial than this?!

Hence, we should fully embrace the uncertainty in front of us. We like to believe that this entrepreneurial spirit of KM4Dev makes the field and practitioners particularly well positioned to respond to future global, organisational and societal challenges.

Of course, it will be hard. We will co-exist with challenges and frustrations. We will be asked to solve "wicked problems" and to come with innovative solutions. In many cases, we will face resistance because KM usually brings change and discomfort. Everyone likes change, but everyone also hates changing.

But we trust that, ultimately, our future journey will be extremely rewarding.
To paraphrase Seth Godin: when we successfully manage to push people or organisations into discomfort, they come back, asking for more.

Our thanks
We thank all of the contributors who have written papers for this issue, all of the colleagues who reviewed papers and provided feedback to authors. We are very pleased with the quality of the contributions and would like to thank the authors for letting their imagination fly.

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