

PART ONE

Orientation to knowledge management implementation

Executive summary

Chapter 1 will give you a rapid overview of how to define KM in practical terms for your organization. It stresses the importance of taking a holistic, balanced approach to KM, and will help you figure out when the KM implementation is out of balance. Chapter 2 sketches out the pros and cons of different KM approaches, and identifies the main phases of KM implementation. This chapter provides a roadmap to the rest of this book. Chapter 3 identifies the most common implementation pitfalls to avoid.

THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

COPYRIGHT MATERIAL
NOT FOR REPRODUCTION

What is knowledge management?

01

Introduction

This chapter tackles, as best it can, the thorny topic of what knowledge management (KM) actually is, and what it entails. It contains the following elements:

- a definition of KM, and a comparison with other disciplines;
- the six main components of KM;
- a translation of KM into business terms;
- the supply chain as an analogy for KM;
- the essential elements of KM;
- KM as orchestration.

Definition

There's a saying that if you put five knowledge managers in a room, they will come up with seven definitions of what KM is. This is apocryphal, but it reflects reality. There is a lot of debate and confusion about the nature of KM, none of which is helpful to you as you attempt to implement it within your organization. Hence, your first step, together with your line manager and the steering group for the KM implementation programme, should be to come to a common definition and understanding of what 'knowledge management' means in your organizational context.

Our view is that KM is the latest in a range of management disciplines, and is the discipline with knowledge as its focus. 'Knowledge management' (or KM) represents a way of managing work, paying due attention to the value and effect of an intangible asset, namely, knowledge.

Knowledge is one organizational asset among many. For centuries, organizations have managed their visible assets, such as money, people, property

and equipment. More recently organizations have been addressing their intangible assets, such as their reputation, their IP, their customer base, the diversity and talent of their staff, their ability to work safely and sustainably, and how they manage their knowledge.

Knowledge management is therefore just the latest management discipline dealing with intangibles. Risk management, quality management, customer relationship management, brand management, reputation management, talent management and safety management all also deal with intangibles and the implementation programmes for these analogous disciplines can all provide a model for implementing KM. Look at the closest discipline that is already embedded in your organization, and ask, 'How did we implement this? How are we sustaining this? What lessons are there for the KM programme?'

In the industrial sector, probably the closest analogue disciplines for KM are safety management and risk management. Neither of these disciplines are about the management of tangibles – neither safety nor risk are things you can pick up, weigh and put in your pocket. They are about how you manage your organization so that safety and risk are given priority, and so that people's safety behaviours and risk behaviours change. This is exactly what we are looking for from KM. So if your organization has, in the past, successfully introduced risk management and safety management, then you should be greatly encouraged, as KM can then follow a proven implementation path.

KM can also be placed within the same governance framework as the other disciplines. You can position it within the same structures and expectations, and you can review it using the same review processes; the stage reviews of the project management framework, for example. In other words, you can (and should) embed KM within 'normal work'. How are the other disciplines sustained? Do they have a company policy? Support staff? Roles embedded in the business? KM will probably need something similar. This does not mean that you reproduce the frameworks from other disciplines, but it means you can learn from them. Any analogue that has successfully been embedded is a learning opportunity for your KM implementation.

Tip

Find the people who were responsible for implementing the latest new management framework in your organization (eg risk management, quality management, diversity management, or safety management) and conduct a learning session with them. Probe for the things they did that were successful, and ask for their advice. Find out the things they tried that did not work, work out why they did not work, and discuss how you might avoid these pitfalls yourself. Focus on what was needed to fully embed the framework.

The six main components of knowledge management

Looking at KM as ‘intangible asset management with knowledge as a focus’ may help us align it with other management disciplines, but does not particularly help us understand what KM entails, and what it could look like in your organization.

A 2014 survey of knowledge managers from around the world explored this issue by asking the respondents to prioritize, from a list of 11 potential KM approaches, the ones that they focused on as part of their KM implementation (Knoco, 2014). Table 1.1 shows which elements were given highest priority.

TABLE 1.1 Survey results showing the priority given to different elements of KM

Knowledge management element	Percentage of respondents that judged this element to be the highest priority
Connecting people through communities and networks	22.2%
Learning from experience	17%
Improved access to documents (including search and portals)	15.3%
Knowledge retention	13.5%
Creation and provision of best practices	9.4%
Innovation	8.7%
Improved management of documents	4.8%
Training and development	3.1%
Accessing external knowledge and intelligence	2.4%
Knowledge-based engineering	2.4%
Big data	1%

The big percentage jump between the 6th and 7th items suggests that the top six are perhaps the core components to KM. These six include:

- connecting people;
- learning from experience;
- improved access to documents;
- retention of knowledge;
- creation of best practices;
- innovation.

Different industries and markets may favour different components, and priorities will shift depending on circumstance and need, but in combination they seem to pretty much map out the mainstream field of KM as it is currently understood.

Tip

Use the table above as a discussion point with your manager. Decide how you will, in your organization, prioritize the six core components of KM. Avoid the temptation to ignore any of these six completely, but they will not all be of equal priority. When you have to rank them, you will find yourself discussing important distinctions for your business.

Translating KM into business terms

All of the six KM components above are expressed in KM terms. When we communicate to the business about KM, we need to avoid using KM terminology and instead talk about business issues. We need to identify the business problems or issues that the KM solutions will address, and talk about KM in business language.

We can think of an organization as a large-scale entity that needs to solve three broad types of business problem in order to function effectively. Each of these problem types generates specific business problems that KM solutions can address.

Coordination

The different parts of the organization need to be able to coordinate their activities, maintain shared objectives, avoid mistakes in handoffs, and keep

track of how they are making progress on common tasks. Business issues here include:

Collaboration – bringing together knowledge from different parts of the business to develop better ways of working, using the knowledge you already have, but which is scattered and siloed. Here you use KM approaches from the ‘connecting people’ component, such as communities of practice.

Hand-offs and situation awareness – ensuring effective communication of knowledge between teams and workgroups. Here you can use taskflows, shared calendars, shared knowledge bases and standard templates, as well as the processes and policies that guide their use.

Document and information management – making sure that important shared documents and other information content are made easily accessible to those who need them, regardless of which part of the organization produces them. Here you would use knowledge asset audits to identify high-priority information for sharing, and taxonomies and information architecture to ensure they are easily findable. You may also need to align your knowledge sharing and information security policies to ensure that this information is actually accessible to those who need it.

Memory

The organization needs to be able to retain key capabilities such as skills, stakeholder/partner relationships, experience and expertise as people come and go, and to keep track of its plans, decisions, activities and commitments. Business issues here include:

Recordkeeping – ensuring that critical decisions, plans and activities are documented and made easily accessible to anyone who needs to refer to them. Here you use records management approaches, alongside the use of standard templates for capturing key information in a predictable and easy-to-use format.

Maintaining capabilities over time – addressing the risk of loss of critical knowledge and capability as people retire, and ensuring that this knowledge is retained, made available to, and used by the remaining and replacing workforce. Here you use approaches from the knowledge retention component.

Learning

The organization needs to be able to internalize learning from changes in its external environment and adapt its practices accordingly. Business issues here include:

Speeding up the learning curve – making sure your employees get up to speed quickly in new jobs or when dealing with new areas of work (new projects, new markets, new products, new geographies). This is of particular importance for organizations seeking to grow, diversify or explore new frontiers, or organizations with rapid turnover of staff. This can use a combination of many of the KM approaches above.

Continuous improvement – involves ensuring your projects and business activities do not repeat the mistakes of the past. Learning is built into the organization's memory so that it can build on its solutions and successes. This is the whole area of project-based learning, which KM will address through processes from the learning from experience component.

Standardization – comparing and learning from the disparate practices across the organization, to find the ones that work best in given circumstances. Here you use approaches from the 'best practices' component. This may also include arming your customer-facing staff with the knowledge they need to close the deal, or delight the customer, or providing self-help material for your users and customers.

Business intelligence and decision support – systematically collecting, analyzing and disseminating information about your organization's external and internal environment, to support decision-making, strategies and plans. Here, dashboards, data visualization and analytical tools may help.

Development of breakthrough products and services – is a business problem which requires bringing together the knowledge of all relevant staff, as well as external knowledge, to build new ways of doing things, new products, and new lines of business. Here you use KM processes from the innovation component.

Tip

Take your prioritized list of KM initiatives from the previous exercise. See if you can translate them into business terms by explaining how they support your fundamental business needs.

The supply chain analogy

A particularly useful analogy for KM is to liken it to a supply chain. We generally think of a supply chain as giving a worker the supplies they

need to do their work. When they are constructing an airplane or selling tins of beans in a supermarket, the materials they need have to be sourced, assembled and supplied. For a knowledge worker, the raw material of their work is knowledge. Knowledge management can provide the supply chain by which that raw material is sourced, assembled and supplied.

The analogy of the supply chain has the benefit of thinking about KM from the point of view of the knowledge user. What knowledge do the knowledge workers in your organization need to be able to make the right decisions and take the right actions? How can that knowledge be supplied to them both efficiently and effectively? How can it be sourced (the source often being the experience of others), how can it be packaged in support of their work, and how can it be transported to the user?

John Browne, the CEO of British Petroleum, was quoted in Prokesch (1997) as saying that ‘anyone in the organization who is not directly accountable for making a profit should be involved in creating and distributing knowledge that the company can use to make a profit’. This is a vision of the organization as a knowledge supply chain, with the profit-makers as the users.

Tip

It may be too soon to map out the knowledge supply chain in full as we haven't yet covered the knowledge assets audit, but try this simple exercise. Choose a key knowledge user in a critical role, in an activity you are familiar with. Map out the knowledge they need to do their job, their knowledge sources, and the knowledge assets they produce. Determine who the key knowledge users for those assets will be. Note that sometimes the supply chain is a loop – the same group of people may create the knowledge, and use it.

The essential elements of knowledge management

We will discuss the elements of a KM Framework in greater detail in Chapter 12, but underpinning any KM Framework are three core principles. They are as follows.

Principle 1. KM must address roles, processes, technologies and governance

There are four enablers that support KM, like four legs that support a table. These are the factors that enable the flow and storage of knowledge:

- the technology elements, such as portals, collaboration tools, search engines, lesson management systems etc;
- the elements of roles and accountabilities, such as CoP leaders, knowledge managers, and knowledge owners;
- the process elements, such as after action review, lessons capture, knowledge asset creation etc;
- the governance elements, such as KM expectations and policy, metrics and incentives, formats and protocols, taxonomies, and support.

Each of these elements should be mutually supportive and closely interconnected. Like the four legs on a table, the four elements of KM are all equally important. No single element is dominant – they all support each other, they all support KM, and they all support KM in supporting the business. For example, technology needs to integrate with other technology, and with processes, roles and governance. Through the integrated elements the two ingredients of KM – content and conversation – begin to build and flow, and the supply chain begins to deliver.

Principle 2. KM must cover both the elements of connecting people through conversation and collecting and organizing content for access

This is one of the earliest models in the history of KM, but one that sometimes seems to get forgotten. They represent two routes for knowledge transfer between knowledge suppliers and knowledge users.

The connect route supports knowledge transfer through connecting people and has particular strengths in tacit knowledge sharing. During the connect approach we facilitate the transfer of knowledge through conversations, whether these are electronically moderated or face to face.

The collect route supports knowledge transfer through collecting knowledge into content and focuses on codified knowledge. During the collect approach we facilitate the transfer of knowledge through captured and codified content in the form of documents, files, text, pictures and video.

Connect and collect are not alternative strategies. They are complementary components of a single framework and a single strategy, which work in parallel. Any complete KM framework needs to enable, promote, facilitate and otherwise support both conversation and content. Your organization

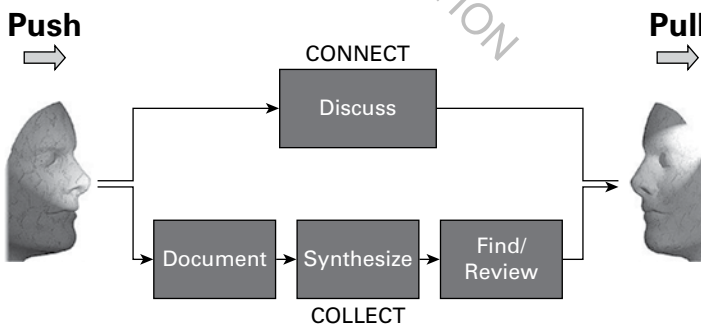
will contain critical knowledge of very many kinds. Some of it needs to be managed as content, and some as conversations. Conversations are a far richer medium than content, while content is more scalable, can reach far more people, and has a longer life-span. Knowledge can be transferred effectively through conversations and efficiently through content.

Managing conversation without content leaves no traces, other than in the minds of the people involved. Unless new knowledge becomes embedded and documented in process, or guidance, or recommendations and new ways of working, it is never truly 'learned', and without this we find knowledge has to be relearned many times, with errors being repeated, wheels reinvented and so on.

Managing content without conversation leads KM towards the already established fields of content management and information management. A focus on content without conversation results in a focus on creation of knowledge bases, blogs and wikis as a proxy for the transfer of knowledge, but unless people can question and interrogate knowledge in order to internalize it, learning can be very ineffective. No matter how smart your systems, content does not know who you are or understand your contextual needs in the way that a colleague can, and it does not know how to tune itself to your needs and current knowledge level in the way a good mentor can.

When connect and collect work in unison, you will be supporting four knowledge 'transactions' – discuss, document, synthesize, find/review – as shown in Figure 1.1 below. This mirrors the four modes of conversion of knowledge described by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) – socialization, externalization, combination and internalization.

FIGURE 1.1 The four knowledge transactions



As Table 1.2 shows, the four transactions occur when knowledge is transferred between or within the realms of tacit knowledge ('knowledge in the head') and codified knowledge ('knowledge captured in digital or written form').

TABLE 1.2 The four transactions of knowledge as interfaces between tacit knowledge and codified knowledge

	To tacit knowledge	To codified knowledge
From tacit knowledge	Discuss	Document
From codified knowledge	Find and review	Synthesize

Connect and collect therefore can be seen as representing the four transactions below:

- discussion of knowledge, the means by which conversations on the ‘connect’ route are conducted;
- documentation of knowledge, the means by which content on the ‘collect’ route is created;
- synthesis of knowledge, the means by which content on the ‘collect’ route is combined into new updated and structured knowledge, and old knowledge removed;
- search and review of knowledge, the means by which content on the ‘collect’ route is accessed and internalized.

Principle 3. KM must address push and pull (aka supply and demand)

Look back at Figure 1.1. The four knowledge transactions support both push and pull, which represent knowledge supply and demand. Push is the transfer of knowledge driven by supply (publishing, blogging, tweeting or loading material to a database or wiki), and pull is the transfer of knowledge driven by demand (asking a question on a forum, or searching an Intranet). The ideal KM framework runs push and pull in parallel, as both supply and demand are valid ways of instigating knowledge flow. A KM supply chain, as described earlier, will require demand (pull) for knowledge at one end of the chain, and supply (push) at the other.

As in economics, push without pull (supply without demand) leads to knowledge over-supply and overload, and ultimately to destruction of knowledge value. Pull without push creates a market, but any market needs to be supplied. Knowledge management, whether you view it as an internal knowledge market or as a knowledge supply chain, needs both push and pull to function.

Tip

Review the current balance within your organization between connect and collect, and between push and pull. Which of these is dominant? It is common to have systematic biases in the way knowledge is addressed: a bias towards content push for example, or a bias towards connection through technology. These will need to be balanced with other elements as you develop your framework. If you find such a bias, consider how you can rebalance.

Knowledge management as orchestration

Earlier in this chapter we talked about analogue disciplines to KM. These are disciplines that you can learn from in implementing KM in your organization. There are also partner disciplines that you will need to work with. These include:

- human resource – especially human resource development;
- organization development;
- information and data management;
- information security;
- risk management and governance;
- records management;
- IT management;
- internal communications teams and corporate communications teams;
- internet, intranet, portal and extranet management.

These disciplines may already have some responsibility for some of the business issues and related KM solutions we described above. In some cases, there may be grey areas or fuzzy boundaries between your territory and theirs. It is extremely important that you are able to:

- a** identify and recognize what they are currently doing;
- b** work with them to adapt what they are doing where there are KM gaps;
- c** negotiate the boundaries, integration and coordination points between your work and theirs;
- d** scope KM projects and programmes collaboratively not competitively.

Later in this book, we will cover stakeholder management and working with partners, either in the direct lines of business, or in these partner

(or competitor) disciplines. When you clarify what KM means for your organization, you will also need to clarify how KM integrates with the work of these other disciplines. In short, you will need to become an orchestrator of KM activities as much as an implementer.

Tip

List out the partner disciplines that exist in your organization. Visit them and learn how they see their main responsibilities, and what their current priorities and projects are. Take notes on where these priorities and projects meet KM needs that you have identified. Ask them for feedback where they think the KM function could integrate with what they are doing, and on where they think you could offer help. To avoid raising unrealistic expectations, explain that you can't take on everything and will have to prioritize. Promise to consult them as your implementation planning progresses.

Summary

Although knowledge management is a fuzzy and poorly defined topic, you have many analogue disciplines such as safety management or risk management which you can use as models for KM implementation, and you can be guided by the experience of other knowledge managers in choosing what to include within your KM implementation. Analogues like the KM supply chain, or KM orchestration, give you alternative views of your task, which you must remember to translate into terms that the organization will easily understand.

Ensure that you take a complete view of KM, including the elements of people, process, technology and governance, the four transactions of discussion, capture, synthesis and finding/reusing, and the two drivers of push and pull.

However you finally define KM for your organization, make sure your definition is shared with your manager and your steering committee and broadly accepted within the organization. Then you can proceed to the next step of developing your implementation approach, which we will cover in the next chapter.