

Brief Introduction to Knowledge Management

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During the mid 1990's, a new term began to emerge amongst academics, management consultants and business authors – Knowledge Management. Elaborate academic models were developed and within no time, the IT industry had embraced the theoretical concepts of Knowledge Management and had produced a plethora of communication and collaboration tools and technology applications which promised to be the panacea for unlocking organisational intellectual capital.

Organisations spent small fortunes in pursuit of this holy grail and the much vaunted ability to leverage the intangible assets held captive within individuals and teams as well as the untapped corporate memory.

Tragically, the completely unbalanced focus of effort and expenditure on IT infrastructure and process, as opposed to people and knowledge sharing, led to a global failure of the first incarnation of Knowledge Management. However, it had awakened sufficient potential and opportunity to not be tossed into the academic graveyard of brilliant, but unusable ideas. The second incarnation of Knowledge Management took form in the early 2000's, with a renewed vigour and appropriate focus on the people element and the need to want to share knowledge first, before you could try to manage it.

Knowledge Management professionals began to realise that it was not a tool or technology, but rather an organisational competency and culture and had to be nurtured, rather than implemented. Knowledge Management also met different needs and offered different benefits to different organisations and so the industry standard consulting solution of 'one size fits all' that could be re-used a thousand times, was completely inappropriate for Knowledge Management.

When fully extended, the true potential of Knowledge Management is a profound and holistic, end-to-end solution for any organisation, of any size and in any industry or environment. There are literally hundreds of definitions for Knowledge Management. This simple and pragmatic definition developed by KMI states – ***“it is the consistent ability to get the right information, in the right context and format, to the right people at the right time, in order for them to take appropriate action in line with stated and agreed objectives.”***

The value proposition and benefits of successful enterprise-wide Knowledge Management are enormous, and are both tangible and intangible in nature. Common examples of the benefits are increased innovation, reduced production cycle times and wastage, new product development, increased organisation and individual visibility, career prospects, cross-selling and improved corporate integration, rapid problem solving, sustainable competitiveness, job satisfaction and trust.

Implementing Knowledge Management is best attempted through a series of logical steps and discoveries, and a typical example is displayed below:

- What is Knowledge Management – what are our ultimate expectations
- How to develop a Knowledge Management strategy – strategic alignment
- What is Knowledge Sharing – you cannot manage what you cannot measure
- How to assess Knowledge Management readiness – cultural assessment
- What are Knowledge Assets – leveraging the tangible & intangible assets
- How to develop a Knowledge Network map – expert & best practice locator
- What is Knowledge Flow – tacit knowledge to explicit discovery to implicit memory

- *What are Communities of Practice – empowering Knowledge Sharing*
- *Tips, Tools, Techniques, Taxonomies, Templates & Technologies – KM enablers*