

# **Implementing a Successful KM Programme**

By Stan Garfield



# Contents

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|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Preface .....  | 1         |
| <b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>                                  | <b>3</b>  |
| What is knowledge management?.....                                   | 3         |
| Reasons for starting a KM programme.....                             | 3         |
| Learning about the field.....  | 4         |
| The priorities for implementing a KM programme.....                  | 5         |
| Key pitfalls to avoid.....   | 8         |
| Five steps to follow.....  | 9         |
| Summary.....   | 9         |
| <b>Chapter 2: Identify the Top Three Objectives .....</b>            | <b>11</b> |
| Goals of knowledge management.....                                   | 11        |
| Obtaining user input.....  | 13        |
| Challenges.....  | 14        |
| Opportunities .....  | 14        |
| Examples.....  | 15        |
| Summary.....   | 16        |
| <b>Chapter 3: Provide Nine Answers .....</b>                         | <b>17</b> |
| People questions.....  | 17        |
| Process questions.....   | 19        |
| Technology questions .....   | 20        |
| Obtaining user input.....  | 20        |
| Examples.....  | 21        |
| Summary.....   | 22        |
| <b>Chapter 4: Define the KM Strategy.....</b>                        | <b>23</b> |
| Nine categories of KM strategies.....                                | 23        |
| Examples.....  | 26        |
| Summary.....   | 27        |
| <b>Chapter 5: Obtain the Ten Commitments .....</b>                   | <b>29</b> |
| Culture and values.....  | 30        |
| Summary.....   | 31        |
| <b>Chapter 6: Create and execute the Implementation Plan.....</b>    | <b>33</b> |
| Define programme governance.....                                     | 33        |
| Define the desired modes of knowledge flow .....                     | 39        |
| Select and implement people, process, and technology components..... | 44        |
| Summary.....   | 48        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>Chapter 7: People components .....</b>            | <b>49</b>  |
| Culture and values.....                              | 49         |
| Knowledge managers.....                              | 53         |
| User surveys and employee satisfaction surveys ..... | 55         |
| Social networks.....                                 | 63         |
| Communities .....                                    | 64         |
| Training.....  | 65         |
| Communications.....                                  | 70         |
| User assistance and knowledge help desk.....         | 74         |
| Goals and measurements.....                          | 76         |
| Incentives and rewards .....                         | 77         |
| Summary.....   | 80         |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>Chapter 8: Process components .....</b>           | <b>81</b>  |
| Methodologies.....                                   | 81         |
| Creation .....                                       | 83         |
| Capture .....  | 84         |
| Reuse.....   | 85         |
| Lessons learnt .....                                 | 85         |
| Proven practices.....                                | 86         |
| Collaboration .....                                  | 87         |
| Content management .....                             | 87         |
| Classification .....                                 | 88         |
| Metrics and reporting .....                          | 89         |
| Management of change .....                           | 91         |
| Workflow.....  | 92         |
| Valuation.....                                       | 93         |
| Social network analysis.....                         | 93         |
| Appreciative inquiry.....                            | 95         |
| Storytelling .....                                   | 96         |
| Summary.....   | 99         |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>Chapter 9: Technology components.....</b>         | <b>101</b> |
| User interface .....                                 | 101        |
| Intranet .....                                       | 102        |
| Team spaces.....                                     | 103        |
| Virtual meeting rooms .....                          | 104        |
| Portals.....   | 105        |
| Repositories.....                                    | 105        |
| Bulletin boards and threaded discussions.....        | 106        |
| Expertise locators and ask the expert .....          | 108        |
| Metadata and tags.....                               | 109        |
| Search engines .....                                 | 110        |
| Archiving.....                                       | 111        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Blogs .....  | 112        |
| Wikis.....   | 113        |
| Podcasts.....  | 114        |
| Syndication and aggregation .....  | 115        |
| Social software .....  | 115        |
| External access .....  | 116        |
| Workflow applications .....  | 117        |
| Process automation applications .....  | 117        |
| E-learning .....   | 118        |
| Subscription management .....  | 119        |
| Incentive points tracking .....  | 120        |
| Survey and metrics reporting automation .....                                | 121        |
| Summary.....   | 121        |
| <b>Chapter 10: Communities: creating, building and sustaining them .....</b> | <b>123</b> |
| Getting started.....   | 124        |
| Select a community leader.....   | 124        |
| Build community membership .....   | 125        |
| Publicise the community .....  | 126        |
| Keep the community active .....  | 127        |
| Provide community tools.....   | 128        |
| Sustain the community.....   | 129        |
| Require community participation .....  | 130        |
| Learn more about communities.....  | 131        |
| Summary.....   | 132        |
| <b>Chapter 11: Knowledge management Maxims .....</b>                         | <b>133</b> |
| Additional insights.....   | 135        |
| Summary.....   | 146        |
| <b>Appendix: Resources for learning about the field .....</b>                | <b>147</b> |
| Books .....  | 147        |
| Periodicals.....   | 149        |
| Websites.....  | 149        |
| Subscribe to blogs and news using syndicated feeds.....                      | 149        |
| Aggregators .....  | 149        |
| Periodicals.....   | 150        |
| Websites.....  | 150        |
| Blogs .....  | 150        |
| KM conferences .....   | 153        |
| Training.....  | 154        |
| Experts .....  | 155        |
| KM communities .....   | 156        |



# Preface

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In 1996 I was asked by the senior vice president of my business unit to start a knowledge management programme after we visited Ernst & Young's Center for Business Knowledge in Cleveland, Ohio. When he heard that Ernst & Young had a chief knowledge officer, he turned to me and said, "I want you to be our CKO". This made it sound simple, but it turned out that a lot of time and effort was needed to get our KM programme off the ground.

Along the way, I had to endure many ups and downs, enlist allies in the cause to join my virtual team, get executive sponsorship from a succession of leaders, increase investment and commitment to the programme, deal with constant organisational change, adjust to changing technology, migrate from and integrate with legacy software, exercise diplomacy with many other groups, and cope with two large-scale corporate mergers.

Much of knowledge management has stayed the same during the past ten years. The fundamental goals have not changed (see Chapter 2 for a list of 15), the challenges are much the same, and the basic categories of people, process, and technology still apply. What has changed is the technology, the acceptance of KM as a strategic initiative, and the willingness of organisations to assign people to the roles of knowledge manager and knowledge assistant.

We still struggle to get people to spend time sharing and reusing knowledge, it can still be hard to find information at the time of need, and expense budgets are still tight. But there are more people practicing KM today, there are more ways for practitioners to share their thinking (e.g.,

blogs), and there are building blocks (e.g., communities, team spaces, taxonomies) that are now in widespread use. Emerging tools and techniques (e.g., wikis, social network analysis, tagging) are being tried and tested in KM programmes to better address existing requirements and to enable new capabilities.

The future challenges for knowledge management include creating new knowledge to stimulate innovation, expanding and better exploiting people networks, incorporating narrative in all knowledge initiatives, and making it easier to find information when it is needed for better decision-making. Knowledge management is here to stay, and by applying its fundamental concepts of learning from the past, reusing good ideas, and avoiding past mistakes, KM practitioners can ensure that their initiatives will succeed.



# Chapter 1: Introduction

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## **What is knowledge management?**

Knowledge management (KM) is “the art of transforming information and intellectual assets into enduring value for an organisation’s clients and its people” (from Ellen Knapp, former chief knowledge officer of Pricewaterhouse Coopers). Knowledge management fosters the reuse of intellectual capital, enables better decision-making, and creates the conditions for innovation. This is achieved by providing people, processes, and technology to help knowledge flow so that people can act more efficiently, effectively, and creatively. For a discussion on this topic, see “Defining Knowledge Management” by Steve Barth at <http://www.destinationkm.com/articles/default.asp?ArticleID=949>.

Why should we spend any time trying to manage knowledge? We are all busy enough as it is without adding the burdens of searching for and contributing knowledge.

If we don’t spend time on knowledge management activities, we run the risk of wasting even more time on unnecessary effort that could have been avoided. We might repeat mistakes that others have already made, costing time, money, and even lives. And the results of our work will not be as valuable as they could have been if they had been influenced by the experience and expertise of others.

Here are five key KM activities and the associated benefits.

*Learn* by doing, from others, and from existing information so you can perform better, solve and avoid problems, and make good decisions. Learning is the origin of knowledge.

*Share* what you have learnt, created, and proved to allow others to learn from your experience and reuse what you have already done. This provides a supply of knowledge.

*Reuse* what others have already learnt, created, and proved to save time and money, minimise risk, and be more effective. This creates demand for knowledge.

*Collaborate* with others to yield better results, benefit from diverse perspectives, and tap the experience and expertise of many other people. This allows knowledge to flow at the time of need, creates communities, and takes advantage of the strength in numbers.

*Innovate* to be more creative, inventive, and imaginative, resulting in breakthroughs from bold new ways of thinking and doing. This creates new knowledge.

## **Reasons for starting a KM programme**

Why do you plan to undertake a KM initiative? Here are some typical reasons.

An outside consultant advised management to start formally sharing knowledge, form communities of practice, or some other initiative which is in vogue. Management has decided to take this advice and assigns you to get it started. You are told to work with the consultant as the internal programme manager.

A senior manager heard or read about knowledge management and thinks your organisation should be doing it. You are given the task of investigating it further.