

Practical Knowledge Management for Information Professionals

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Introduction

On Thursday 31st May I attended the UKeIG one-day course ‘Practical Knowledge Management for Information Professionals’, led by Dion Lindsay, funded by a YOHLNet bursary. The course was attended by LIS staff from a range of settings (primarily law librarians, but also including record managers, KM officers from charities and health librarians).

My report on this course draws heavily on the ‘Workbook for Participants’, written by Dion Lindsay (DLC Ltd). I have attempted to extract and summarise the key learning points from the day.

The Knowledge Management landscape

- It’s a good time to be thinking about KM (more KM jobs have been advertised already this year than in the whole of last year)
- There are as many different types of KM as there are organisations doing it. Most organisations don’t have fixed ideas about what KM should look like so there’s scope to influence how it is delivered. It is then necessary to demonstrate the impact of KM.
- Not all KM strategies and techniques will suit all organisations equally: it depends on the organisation’s management style and tolerance of risk.

What is Knowledge Management for?

Consider the different types of intellectual resource within or available to an organisation. One way to conceptualise this is the DIKW Hierarchy or Pyramid which distinguishes between:



- data (e.g. raw data lacking headings or context to make it meaningful)
- information (data plus context or manipulation to turn it into something meaningful)
- knowledge (‘the experience, personal/professional expertise and problem-solving power that influences how people do their jobs’ DLT)
- wisdom (something beyond knowledge; emotional responses to knowledge? knowing when to trust your luck?).

In practice it can be difficult to distinguish between levels, particularly between information and knowledge, and a KM role might also/often does involve managing data and information as well as knowledge. Some organisations may treat data as information, feeding knowledge. In many organisations the DIKW mix may not form a pyramid and the shape and balance between the levels is likely to change over time. Be flexible and work with the best-fit for your organisation.

Different models of Knowledge Management: what sort of KM does your organisation need?

1. Knowledge is the context which turns data into information, David Snowden, Cynefin Centre). This model focuses on how best to make decisions in complex and chaotic environments
2. Facilitating Knowledge Sharing (David Gurteen). Managing knowledge as an asset may be impossible. Facilitating knowledge sharing may be the best we can do. Create the right environments for knowledge to flow.
3. Managing sources of data, information, expertise and wisdom (Dion Lindsay). A pragmatic method of mapping sources of tacit and explicit knowledge in an organisation and considering how they can be managed (e.g. by creating a Knowledge Map).

The methods used will depend on the nature and needs of the organisation. A risk tolerant organisation may support more creative methods of knowledge sharing; risk averse organisations may opt for a 'standard' solution like SharePoint. 'Knowledge Transformation' rather than simple knowledge management may be required to demonstrate the impact of a KM strategy.

Designing your own knowledge management strategy

Adapt the models above to suit the needs of your own organisation. Consider:

- What are the expectations for KM in your organisation? Why do you want your team to be involved in KM? What KM models attract you? Shape your own based on what appeals and seems a best-fit from the other models and approaches. What KM opportunities do you have? What KM obstacles do you face?
- The scope of your strategy: don't try to write a long-term strategy (organisations and their needs change quickly; build into your strategy the expectation that things will change); be pragmatic and think small; consider organisational objectives but also look beyond formal objectives to the real issues/pressure points/demands on the organisation; sell the KM brand (badge everything you do in this area as KM to raise awareness); report success: make sure people know things are going well because of a KM technique

Reflections:

- Most organisations are unlikely to have a fixed idea about what KM should look like.
- Consider your rivals: who else in your organisation will be keen to take on KM roles and work areas (HR, IT, Communications)? Take ownership of KM and promote interdisciplinary working.

- Who are your natural allies? Who are the thorns in your side?
- Build KM strategies that suit the culture of your organisation and the people within it
- Assume you are leading on KM: be ready to drop back but lead where possible. It's likely you have thought more about KM than anyone else in the organisation. Look for KM partners.
- Add KM techniques to what you are already doing (don't call them KM techniques with the people you're working with; reserve 'KM' for the board/strategy).
- If something is already working that can be considered KM, badge it was KM and build on it.

How to sell knowledge management to users and sponsors

- Sell the benefits and demonstrate an emotional commitment to KM: standard sales techniques
- Solve problems, address fears and support hopes within the organisation. Find out what people are worried about.
- Look for initiatives that are already happening and show how KM can help
- Know your customers (look for partners; KM champions)
- Talk about 'knowledge management' at strategy level; talk to users/staff groups using their language (not technical KM jargon): they will already be doing some KM!
- Return on investment: monetize KM benefits where possible (it can be difficult): lots of KM doesn't cost; be shameless about costing/measuring savings to staff time. It's sometimes easier/better to tell the story of KM successes rather than trying to calculate cost benefits/savings.

Practical knowledge management techniques

- **Knowledge Cafes:** a gathering of 12-24 people brought together to discuss a single issue in a structured way: acts as a stimulus to knowledge sharing:
<http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/id/kcafe-run>
- **Communities of Practice:** bring together people with expertise/shared interests within your organisation (physically or digitally); capture the knowledge shared and gained; consider making this available to all staff via a database. can lead to more tangible outcomes than Knowledge Cafes)
- **Knowledge Harvesting:** capture knowledge when people leave, join or change roles
- **Exploit social media**
- **Internal consultancy:** look for issues and opportunities in your organisation (e.g. processes where information flows or knowledge sharing is at the root of a problem)
- **Knowledge Sharing games**
- **KM functions on intranets:** e.g. blogs, wikis, surveys, communities, staff directories

Quick wins in knowledge management

- Identify all the knowledge management that your LKS is already doing!
- Address an immediate need: what does the organisation need? Use KM principles to address problems and failed products.
- Improve an existing process: look for something that is already working and badge as KM.
- Be pragmatic: work with KM partners and existing products/projects to save time and money.
- Consider which KM practical techniques would work in your organisation: how long would it take to get them up and running? Market them, brand them as KM, learn from setbacks and claim the credit!

Reading List:

- Collison, Chris & Parcell, Geoff. 2004. *Learning to fly: practical knowledge management from leading and learning organizations* . Wiley.
- Milton, N and Lambe, P. 2016. *The knowledge manager's handbook*. London: Kogan Page
- Rhem, Anthony. 2017. *Knowledge Management in practice*. CRM Press.

