Making Knowledge Management Work for Your Organisation

TIM HAWLEY
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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT (KM) can make the difference between surviving or thriving in a world of accelerating change and complexity. KM provides the ability to connect and collaborate, to work more effectively, to make sense of a complex world and to drive innovation.

To make KM ‘work’ for your organisation it must be grounded in the realities of the business needs and drivers, and aligned to the delivery of organisational objectives. It should not be seen as a discretionary peripheral activity but as part of the organisational DNA, embedded in the culture and process, relevant to the day job, so that ‘this is the way work is done around here’.

The aim of the report is to provide a practical, benefits oriented approach with clear guidance for practitioners and decision makers to take an organisation to the next level of performance. It demonstrates how KM can enable an organisation to respond effectively to the changing business landscape and achieve its strategic goals. It is supported by case study contributions and insights from experienced practitioners. The report is organised in a logical sequence, from alignment with business strategy through to the changing nature of the workplace in a networked world, with each chapter representing a possible entry point for making KM work for your organisation.

Chapter 1 looks at the changing business landscape in relation to the evolution of KM, highlighting how KM’s development has reached a point where it can enable an organisation to effectively meet its external challenges.

Chapter 2 sets out the critical link between business strategy and KM, taking a top-down perspective, setting out practical methods to strengthen this connection. It aids an understanding of how to interpret the business drivers and organisational goals from a KM perspective in order to determine how a strategy can be developed that better enables the achievement of these goals. This will provide decision makers with the confidence to invest time and resources in building the necessary enabling environment, to leverage wider organisational capabilities in making a difference on the bottom line.

Chapter 3 establishes the requirements for KM from the bottom-up organisational perspective. KM needs to be relevant to the daily work needs of the organisation; it cannot be imposed from above and expected to stick. The top-down sets the strategy, but the bottom-up defines how this will operate effectively in practice; it places the worker at the centre of the knowledge system. KM needs to be embedded in the workflow in a way that makes it easier for people to do their job, and should not be an additional burdensome task. This section looks at approaches to engage staff and identify ways to improve performance.

Chapter 4 combines the strategic top-down framework with the organisation’s bottom-up requirements into a coherent KM strategy and business case. This is characterised in the form of a journey, by
first understanding where the organisation is currently and establishing an appropriately prioritised scope that is holistic in its perspective. This section sets out how a KM road map could be developed, investment justified and the benefits measured.

Chapter 5 establishes approaches for mainstreaming KM – making it part of everyone’s role and bringing it into the heart of the organisation – by cultivating the required culture through engagement, enablement and understanding the importance of leadership, the blocks and barriers to knowledge flows, and management as an enabler.

Chapter 6 is concerned with organisational learning – how an organisation retains the capacity to learn from experience, to retain and distribute organisational knowledge, to make sense of external changes ‘amplifying weak signals’, such as the perceptions of frontline staff or lessons from near misses, and to be able to adapt accordingly. This chapter references a variety of relevant enabling KM tools to help achieve these aims.

Chapter 7 focuses on the increasing trend for collaborative working and knowledge sharing, as more and more products and services are both designed and delivered through cross functional team working. This section demonstrates how KM provides the necessary thinking and tools to enable collaboration to develop and operate effectively, from the virtual to the physical workspace.

Chapter 8 of the report looks at how KM can be utilised to inspire innovation and creativity by establishing the enabling and fostering environment.

Chapter 9 looks at how technology has caught up with the needs of KM, and sets out some practical approaches for determining what the best technology tools are to enable the strategy objectives to be realised and for encouraging participation. It also explores some of the growing trends for social media use and offers some practical advice for incorporation within the mainstream of the organisation.

Chapter 10 concludes the report by looking at how KM is not only relevant to today’s organisational challenges but also, as a practice, is becoming ever more central to the changing workplace in a networked world where connection, context and collaboration are becoming more fundamental for success.

This report has a number of case studies and contributions from a variety of practitioners which reveal further insights and perspectives into how organisations are successfully dealing with these challenges.
About the author

TIM HAWLEY focuses on improving organisational effectiveness and delivering value from complex integrated change programmes. In enabling organisations to adapt to the rapidly changing environment, Tim has helped shape management thinking around how best to leverage intellectual capital and adopt new ways of working.

With over 25 years of experience, formerly in industry and latterly as a consultant, Tim has led a series of major organisational transformation programmes working mainly internationally with clients in Europe, the United States and Asia. Within these programmes, KM has played either a central or major strategic role and has covered private, public and more latterly the third sector.

Tim is currently an associate director of Arup, an independent firm owned in trust on behalf of its staff of designers, planners, engineers, consultants and technical specialists. Arup is the creative force behind many of the world’s most innovative, influential and sustainable designs. Arup is globally recognised for its award winning approach to KM.

Tim started his career in industry with Courtaulds (now part of AkzoNobel), initially supporting business system implementations, before moving to line management positions, progressing through planning and logistics roles to operations management and then on to general management. Prior to moving into consulting, Tim was general manager of Critchley’s heat shrink cable identification business (now part of Tyco Electronics).

Tim graduated from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne with a BSc (Hons) in Geology and from Cranfield University with an MBA, and has a diploma in organisational behaviour.
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PART ONE

Knowledge management and your organisation