

Sharing Knowledge by Design - Building Intellectual Capital in a Virtual World

By Nancy Settle-Murphy and Stan Garfield

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In an increasingly competitive and volatile world, the ability to share knowledge is a prerequisite for successful growth, especially for organizations that prize intellectual capital as one of their most valuable assets. With organizations becoming more dispersed and complex, it can be an especially daunting task to create an environment where knowledge is easily and freely exchanged among those who have it and those who need it. As today's baby boomers retire in droves, the imperative to capture and share vital knowledge is critical.

Building a companywide system of knowledge-sharing may take years and sizeable investments in resources and technology. However, there are many practical steps that team leaders can take today to create an environment that encourages and enables the exchange of vital knowledge.

In this article, jointly authored by Chrysalis principal Nancy Settle-Murphy and Stan Garfield, Hewlett-Packard's worldwide Knowledge Management Leader for Consulting & Integration Services, we map out ideas about how team leaders can create a knowledge-sharing system in their own virtual backyard. Who knows? One relatively modest knowledge-sharing system may be the springboard by which an enterprise-wide system is born.

- **Sell the benefits.** Senior management needs to be persuaded of the value, given that they may have to lay out additional funding and resources to set up even a modest knowledge management program. Tip: try to estimate the cost of not reusing knowledge. For example, how many people have to spend how many hours generating how many proposals throughout how many organizations each year? How many prospects choose other vendors when proposals are delayed? Chances are, with some pretty simple math, you can make the case for some initial investments.
- **Appoint a knowledge management leader who can dedicate meaningful time to building the right infrastructure.** While this need not be a full-time job in many cases, you will need a sharp person who is conversant in the field of knowledge management to spend dedicated time for the design and launch of any knowledge management program.
- **Set up a community of practice to start.** This community should include people of a certain function, discipline, area of expertise, or field of interest that all share. Make it easy to join and participate. You can start with something as simple as a newsgroup or an email list. Convey the benefits of membership clearly to give people a reason to join. Find venues by which you

can promote the available communities of practice to those most likely to be interested.

- **Create a formal repository in which knowledge can be dropped off.**
Using a web collaboration technology or a shared messaging system, such a repository needn't take a lot of time or money to set up. Ask participants to help brainstorm a logical construct, to make loading and accessing relevant knowledge more intuitive for all. Start with a few categories and be prepared to refine after an initial period. Plant a few examples in each category so people will see what type of documents best belong where. Focus efforts on the type of content that has the greatest potential for reuse by others.
- **Think globally.** When setting up a community of practice, be sensitive to cultural differences and local requirements. Make sure that local leadership is in place to tailor the knowledge management program to each region or country as needed. For example, local language may be required in some cases, or a different web portal may be used as the gateway for knowledge in some locations. Strive for a universal look and feel when possible, to make searching and retrieving information easier across all locations.
- **Encourage the sharing of knowledge by embedding related activities within existing work processes.** For example, make it a requirement that post-mortem documents following a consistent format are submitted at the close of a project, or make it mandatory to store proposals in a shared space.
- **Reward those who show special initiative in sharing knowledge,** whether through formal recognition, financial remuneration, or promotion. Consider including knowledge management leadership as part of performance reviews or as a basis for bonus plans, from senior management on down.
- **Cultivate senior management as champions.** Help them to promote the benefits of knowledge management in their lines of business. Provide them with actual case studies and examples they can showcase for others to aspire to. Encourage them to model knowledge-sharing in visible and meaningful ways.
- **Create a network of knowledge advisors.** These people are subject matter experts who help others to leverage available tools and methods so they can help create self-sufficiency among members of the knowledge community. Depending on what percentage of time these people have to devote to their roles, these knowledge advisors can also be instrumental in helping to set up new communities of practice and guiding participants in the creation of principles and norms.
- **Open the lines of communications among knowledge management subject matter experts,** regardless of their exact titles, roles and locations. Encourage them to communicate frequently using multiple channels, sharing

what works, what doesn't, and working to connect different communities of practice. Suggest that they model their own knowledge-sharing techniques for others to learn from.

Laying the foundation for a worthwhile knowledge management program takes careful thought, focused resources, and visible commitment by senior management. You can start with a few straightforward steps within a single organization, and then expand the program as other organizations realize the value.

Setting up a Knowledge Management Program: Guidelines and Resources

By Stan Garfield

Priorities for setting up a KM program

1. Put a strong KM leader in place, and ensure that the KM team has only strong members.
2. Balance people, process, and technology, with a project leader for each category.
3. Establish a governance and collaboration process to engage all regions and functions, and to formally manage and communicate on all projects – appoint KM leaders in each major country, region, and function.
4. Hold annual worldwide face-to-face meetings to get all KM leaders informed, energized, and collaborating.
5. Communicate regularly through newsletters, training, web sites, and local events.
6. Get the senior executive to communicate regularly about the importance of the program and to inspect progress against goals.
7. Engage with other KM programs, both internal and external, to share ideas and practice what you preach.
8. Focus on delivering tangible business benefits.
9. Deliver regular improvements to make the KM environment effective and easy to use.
10. Focus on three basic goals, and stick to the basics - participate in a community, collaborate using team spaces, and search for and submit reusable content.

KM Strategy

1. Get all employees to actively participate in knowledge sharing and reuse.
2. Capture key information on all work performed so that everyone will know what others have done and whom to contact for further details.
3. Reuse intellectual capital on each new project.
4. Make it easy for employees to find the information they need to do their jobs.
5. Measure and reward knowledge sharing and reuse.

Goals of Knowledge Management

1. Avoid redundant effort.
2. Avoid making the same mistakes twice.
3. Take advantage of existing expertise and experience.
4. Make it easy to find information and resources.
5. Communicate important information widely and quickly.
6. Provide methods, tools, templates, examples, & data to streamline business.
7. Make scarce expertise widely available.
8. Show customers how knowledge is used for their benefit.
9. Stimulate innovation and growth.
10. Make the best problem-solving experiences reusable.

Knowledge Management Resources

Books

1. Learning to Fly: Practical Knowledge Management from Leading and Learning Organizations by Chris Collison and Geoff Parcell <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1841125091/>
2. Working Knowledge by Thomas H. Davenport and Laurence Prusak <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1578513014/>
3. Thinking for a Living: How to Get Better Performances And Results from Knowledge Workers by Thomas H. Davenport <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1591394236/>
4. The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative by Stephen Denning <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/078797675X/>
5. Common Knowledge: How Companies Thrive by Sharing What They Know by Nancy M. Dixon <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0875849040/>
6. CompanyCommand: Unleashing the Power of the Army Profession by Nancy M. Dixon, Nate Allen, Tony Burgess, Pete Kilner and Steve Schweitzer <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0976454106/>
7. If Only We Knew What We Know: The Transfer of Internal Knowledge and Best Practice by Carla O'Dell and C. Jackson Grayson <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0684844745/>
8. Intellectual Capital: The New Wealth of Organizations by Thomas A. Stewart <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0385483813/>
9. The Wealth of Knowledge: Intellectual Capital and the Twenty-first Century Organization by Thomas A. Stewart <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0385500726/>
10. Cultivating Communities of Practice by Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, & William M. Snyder <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1578513308/>

Periodicals

1. Ark Group Inside Knowledge <http://www.ikmagazine.com/currentissue.asp>
2. destinationKM <http://www.destinationkm.com/>
3. Gurteen Knowledge-Letter [http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/\(Views\)/WebNewsList?OpenDocument&Count=999](http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/(Views)/WebNewsList?OpenDocument&Count=999)
4. Journal of Knowledge Management <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/info/journals/jkm/jkm.jsp>
5. KMWorld <http://www.kmworld.com/news/>
6. KnowledgeBoard Newswires <http://www.knowledgeboard.com/pastnews/index.html>
7. K Street Directions http://www.knowledgestreet.com/About_Us/Directions/directions.html
8. Melcrum KM Review http://www.melcrum.com/cgi-bin/melcrum/eu_content.pl?docurl=topic%20km
9. Montague Institute Review <http://www.montague.com/review/review.html>
10. Steve Denning's newsletter about organizational storytelling <http://www.stevedenning.com/>

Blogs

1. Anecdote <http://www.anecdote.com.au/>
2. Patti Anklam <http://www.byeday.net/weblog/networkblog.html>
3. Colabria <http://kmblogs.com/>
4. Steve Denning <http://stevedenning.typepad.com/>
5. Denham Grey <http://denham.typepad.com/km/>
6. Joitske Hulsebosch <http://joitskehulsebosch.blogspot.com/>
7. Bill Ives http://billives.typepad.com/portals_and_km/
8. Dave Pollard <http://blogs.salon.com/0002007/>
9. Jack Vinson <http://blog.jackvinson.com/>
10. David Weinberger <http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/index.html>

Web Sites

1. AOK <http://www.kwork.org/index.html>
2. APQC <http://www.apqc.org/portal/apqc/site/generic?path=/site/km/resources.jhtml>
3. Brint KMNetwork and WWW Virtual Library on Knowledge Management
<http://km.brint.com/>
4. Buckman Laboratories: Knowledge Nurture <http://www.knowledge-nurture.com/>
5. CIO KM Research Center <http://www.cio.com/research/knowledge/>
6. Gurteen <http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/>
7. International Knowledge Management Institute <http://www.kminstitute.org/index.php>
8. KmWiki <http://kmwiki.wikispaces.com/>
9. KnowledgeBoard <http://www.knowledgeboard.com/index.html>
10. KNOW Network <http://www.knowledgebusiness.com/>