



Implementing Knowledge Management Practices

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Knowledge management (KM) practices can support an organization when they account for human nature. People typically want to go through the path of least resistance, especially when time is against them. Sharing knowledge of a process may scare some people because they may feel that they may be passed by if someone else knows what they know.

While there are many KM practices an organization can use, below are four KM practices organizations can implement to support an organization's growth and achievement goals while supporting professional growth of their employees:

Eliminate silos of knowledge within the organization. A business has an annual plan with specific goals. While the goals may be specific to organizational silos, knowledge about the silos may be able to be used throughout the organization. Eliminating knowledge silos¹ requires a team mentality and not an individual mindset to support collaboration. For example, when you are in school and having difficulty in a course, you are not necessarily stuck to those in your class to help you understand an assignment. You have colleagues in other majors who may be able to help provide insight, especially if the course is a basic English 101 course or something similar. However, if you resist sharing a problem in your class because that person is outside of your major or not in your class, you may fail the course because of missing a needed component.

The same goes for business overall. Just because you work in finance and someone else works in business development, does not mean that either or you cannot help each other. Getting an outside perspective brings another point of view as well as the chance to unearth some long-ago used experience and knowledge. Individual employees must be willing to coordinate with other employees. This must also move up in the business through divisions, departments, and so on so that everyone has the knowledge availability and understanding to make educated and knowledgeable decisions to support the annual plan. Converting tacit (known to you) to explicit (codified) knowledge and then sharing that knowledge throughout the people who need it in the organization will support the annual plan and the effort required to achieve the annual goals.

Map where your knowledge is located. When you map your knowledge, you will also map the gaps in organizational knowledge in both the physical location of procedures or the personal knowledge of the organization's employees. As organizations set goals for growth, knowledge of what is needed or more importantly, identifying the unknown, becomes critical to completing the task or achieving the goal. Mapping knowledge doesn't require fancy software, but it does require that you have a process to follow and that that process is known throughout the organization. Also, don't hold back on who is allowed or requested to provide the knowledge since everyone will have a necessary piece complete the puzzle both up and down the corporate ladder.

¹ Gleeson, B., & Roza, M. The silo mentality: How to break down the barriers, Forbes (Oct 2, 2013). <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brentgleeson/2013/10/02/the-silo-mentality-how-to-break-down-the-barriers/#191d31618c7e>

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Implementing Knowledge Management Practices continued

Start with something small within your division, department, or group. As business start to reenter the daily grind, knowledge must be captured, especially if your workforce not returning at the same time. If your organization is going to remain in a virtual or working-from-home state, you can also accomplish mapping processes to share. Mind maps can be used to support business development², personnel growth and retention, or onboarding of new employees. Process mapping is already conducted through process improvement initiatives, but when knowledge is specifically mapped, it can also be used to support goal attainment.

Fill the gaps in the knowledge. Filling knowledge gaps does not happen immediately. This may take a regular battle rhythm of events until the gaps are filled into based on the desire of those leading the effort. This starts with taking the maps completed previously by a team and opening them up to a larger audience. Not everyone will have all of the necessary information to fill the knowledge gaps, but one person may have one piece of information with the associated experience to know what it means to the overall map.

As you being to fill gaps in, review the overall maps because filling in the knowledge gaps will be a reiterative, cyclical process as new knowledge is gained or created with new employees joining the organization. Especially important is capturing knowledge of personnel leaving the organization³ whether by the own choice or not. When a person leaves by request or demand of the employer, the outgoing employee may not be open to setting the departure up with successful knowledge turnover. When a person leaves by their own decision, whether going to another company or retiring, they will be more open to sharing and transferring their knowledge to those taking the responsibility for the experience leaving. Either way requires a process be in place for capturing the knowledge to prevent gaps upon their departures.

Create a knowledge management (KM) community of practice (CoP). Before trying to take on the world and turning everyone off with pairing everything to KM, start with what is important to their part of the business. A great way of doing this is to create a KM CoP⁴. You can start with the basics such as blogs, wikis, and libraries of information, but use these to start the knowledge sharing between the members of the community. You may also want to consider getting representation from each of the divisions or departments within your organization so that there is a point of contact who can take back the knowledge gained from the CoP to share with others not in the CoP. CoPs are especially helpful for understanding processes that can lead to mapping or planning improvements for processes that may affect more than one division or department.

While organizations may not have a specific KM program or KM directives, these are not always necessary if you have leaders who have a desire to share, transfer, capture, or map knowledge. It requires a culture of aiming to achieve the same goals or opportunities. KM is a team sport and knowledge should not be resident with only one or two people. When knowledge is managed at a team level, it can benefit everyone in the organization as well as the customers they support.

² Young, C. J. Mind mapping in 6 simple steps for business development: Strategic tool combines tacit, explicit knowledge to see a competitive edge. ISE Magazine, 51(12), 34-38, (2019).

³ Are you taking steps to prevent knowledge loss when offboarding employees? Panopto, (2020)
<https://www.panopto.com/blog/are-you-taking-steps-to-prevent-knowledge-loss-when-offboarding-employees/>

⁴ Garfield, S. How to start & lead communities of practice. Medium (Dec 30, 2017).
<https://medium.com/@stangarfield/how-to-start-lead-communities-of-practice-f2944b22ef56>