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Knowledge management in a Post-Covid world



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This newsletter takes a look at how Knowledge Management may become part of the Post-Covid "new normal."

We cover topics such as the nature of the post-Covid landscape, the need for learning, taking a strategic view of knowledge topics, paying attention to leavers and onboarding, using ISO 30401 to rebaseline KM, lesson learning, and building on new digital habits.

The Post-Covid landscape

After the current pandemic is finally past, we will be in a new world. The industrial landscape will be changed. Whole industries will be in major recession; aviation, hospitality and tourism for example may take years to recover. The oil sector is in a huge slump. Many well-known high street brands will be no more. Some small suppliers may be out of business.

Other organisations however will emerge leaner and fitter. We will have learned new skills, we will be far more familiar with remote working, but we may have lost critical corporate memory through downsizing.

The key to surviving a new set of conditions is learning and agility. Those organisations which learn the fastest and best will thrive, while others will struggle. In any new world, First Learner Advantage is the way to win. Organisations which were smart enough to retain their Knowledge Management capability can use [KM as a strategic tool](#) to out-learn the competition. Others which lost their KM capability during downsizing will need to restart it quickly.

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The rest of this newsletter offers some ideas on how KM can add value in the post-Covid landscape.



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Knowledge and Learning

The word "crisis" comes from the Greek and it means "I decide, I separate, I judge" in relation to the moment in which a very marked change takes place in something or in a situation. Therefore, it does not have a negative connotation, but rather can be seen as an opportunity to change. The coronavirus crisis offers organizations an unrivalled possibility for change: to develop the capacity to learn as a complement to their proven ability to produce.



Javier Martinez,

[Knoco Chile](#)

Change and uncertainty are not the exclusive heritage of our time but have been inherent in humans forever.

Knowledge has always been the tool that has allowed us to deal with day-to-day challenges and gradually progress to leave the caves and get to where we are today. While the changes were happening at a slow or human-scale speed, people knew that they could rely on their personal knowledge to live safely for many years. But as the speed of change increased, knowledge began to expire more and more rapidly. We can no longer be sure that what worked yesterday will continue to be valid tomorrow. Perhaps the most drastic change occurs when the world becomes

increasingly unpredictable and complex, when we can no longer rely on the past to predict the future because reality has become exponentially volatile.

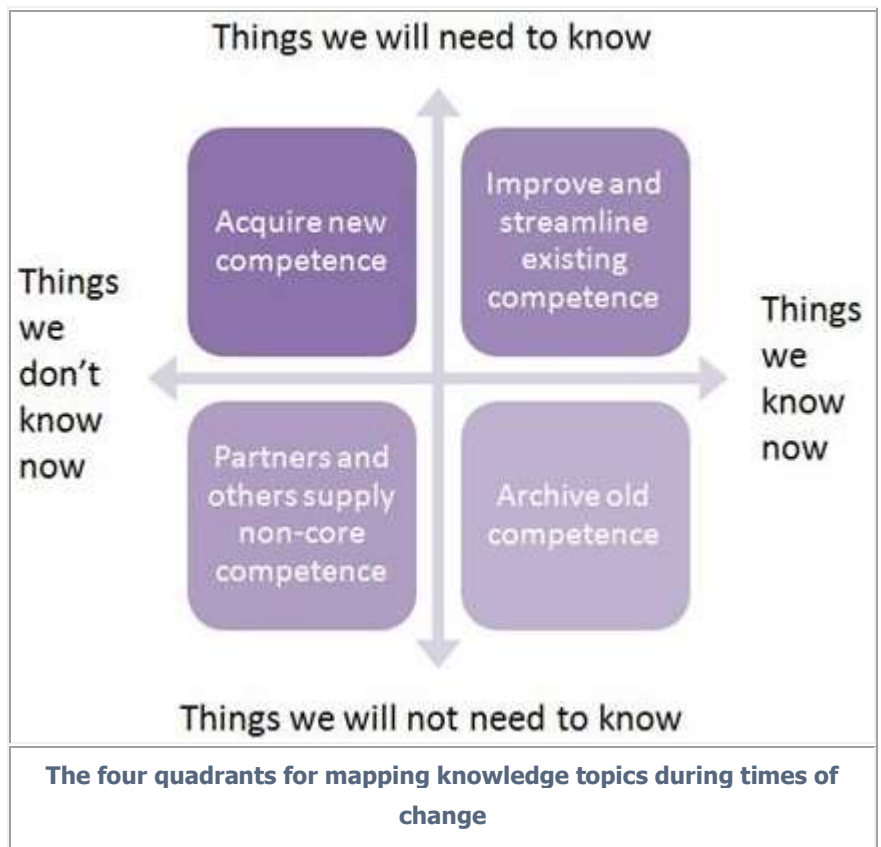
Unlike humans, organizations were never designed with the goal of learning. Their goal is to produce, be efficient and profitable, and when reality changes quickly, many organizations suffer to adapt and disappear. In such a world knowledge is the main asset, the raw material without which neither people nor organizations can exist. While intelligently managing their existing knowledge, people and organizations also need to learn from what goes on daily. We know that there are events that cannot be avoided, but what we can always do is prepare ourselves with the existing knowledge and once these events happen, learn from them so that next time we will be better prepared.

So, the future of organizations depends on their ability to develop both muscles, the one that allows them to manage present knowledge and the one that ensures that they learn and develop future knowledge. It is one thing to know and quite another to learn. Although they are not the same, they are part of a whole. They both are 2 sides of the same coin.

Taking a "strategic topics" view of KM

When the world changes, it is easy to concentrate on Activity ("What do we do now?"), but why not take a Knowledge view instead, and ask "What do we need to **know** now?"

There are four generic classes of knowledge shown in the matrix below, which should be considered by any organisation going through major changes, major downsizing, or a major recession. Using this matrix, the organization can take a competency-based and knowledge-based view of the future, centred around the services and products it will deal with in the new future. Currently it has the knowledge and competence to deliver the old services, but it needs to move to a set of competencies needed to deliver the new, transformed post-Covid services. We can think about this competence transition in terms of four areas of knowledge, as shown and described below.



Things we need to know in the new world, but don't know now. This is the future competence which will need to be developed to operate in the new world. Those organisations which come out of recession as leaders tend to be those who invest in new competence. Knowledge Management can help develop new competence through processes such as [Innovation Deep Dive](#) and Communities of Purpose. In the early days, the organization will need to learn rapidly, using their "learning muscles" on a daily basis, with close attention to the lessons learned process; acting on the lessons from the past and capturing their own lessons, both to develop their own performance, and to share with followers.

Things we used to know, and need to know in future. This is current core competence which will be also needed in the future. Here the focus is on improving and streamlining the current competence, reducing inefficiency and waste, and controlling cost. Knowledge Management can help improve efficiencies through processes such as [Lessons learned](#), [After Action Review](#), and [Communities of Practice](#), with knowledge shared through technologies such as Wikis, Portals and networking tools. Any staff reduction in these areas will need to be done very carefully. An excellent example of public-sector Knowledge Management and Lessons Learning can be seen within the Military sector, where considerable attention is paid to delivering the most effective result through learning from all activity.

Things we used to know, but will no longer need. These are the competences associated with the peripheral areas of business which we will cut, and may be transferred to other bodies. The knowledge associated with these areas should be either archived, or packaged and transferred. Knowledge Management can help retain and transfer this knowledge through processes such as [Knowledge Interview](#), [Knowledge Exchange](#), and through technologies such as Wikis and Portals. These technologies can host knowledge assets for informing future service providers. The approach to [knowledge retention](#) and knowledge capture needs to start as early as possible, so that a measured strategy and process is set in place from the beginning. A model can be taken from NASA, where the strategy to capture and document the knowledge from the Constellation program (cancelled by the Obama administration) started a year in advance of the program closure.

Things we don't know, and won't need to know. These are areas of non-core competence, delivered by others. These areas are outside the scope of work of the organisation, both now and in the future, but still may impact delivery. Knowledge Management can help address these areas through the creation of communities of interest along the supply chain or across government agencies, or by using ISO30401 to ensure that the organisations you rely on are also managing their knowledge.

Work with your senior managers to identify critical knowledge and map it onto this matrix, then discuss with them the Knowledge Management approaches needed to flourish in the new post-Covid landscape.

[Contact Knoco](#) for assistance on mapping critical knowledge.

Knowledge Retention and Acquisition in the New Normal

Covid 19 has placed demands on organisations to survive. I want to concentrate on the Knowledge profile of staff.

Staff have been laid off or are working reduced hours. The pandemic has imposed personal stress on their lives, apart from their employment. Over the next 2 years these factors will continue. It is probable that during that time there may be periods of further physical restrictions, border closures and so forth. We normally see [Knowledge Retention](#) issues around people retiring, resigning, or being laid off. Organisations which do not have an active knowledge transfer regime suffer. With Covid 19 the layoffs have not been planned. So, the initial question is: How much



Ian Fry,

[Knoco Australia](#)

Knowledge has the organisation lost? Will you get them back? And at what level of involvement? For example, interruptions to Child Care will affect employee's availability. People may have already left the industry; for example, airline staff getting jobs (however temporary) in agriculture.

One feature of the period is that any vacant position will get a lot of applicants. This is an opportunity to add diversity to the staff cohort. For example, as above, airline staff are well trained in following procedures and may be a useful addition. And with the churn in employment, the organisation will be facing more staff induction. Over recent years, induction processes have placed more emphasis on knowledge, especially in Asian companies. The induction process will be greatly strengthened with core [Knowledge assets](#) in place, assisted by [communities of practice](#) and by [KM governance](#). In the induction period (nominally up to 6 months) staff are introduced to the wikis, collaboration tools, joined into the relevant Communities of Practice, assigned a mentor etc.

Given all the pressures on the organisation, where do you start with Knowledge Retention and Acquisition? A [Knowledge Scan or audit](#) will identify the critical knowledge you need to protect, and to provide to new staff, and we suggest that this should be your starting point. Given the environment of the new normal; it is worth repeating even if you have done it previously.

[Contact Knoco](#) for assistance in conducting a Knowledge Scan

Surviving recession through agility

After the 2008/2009 recession, the Economist Intelligence Unit surveyed 349 executives, on the topic of "[Business agility - How business can survive and thrive in turbulent times](#)". The conclusions of the study were that Knowledge Management will be an important factor in delivering the Agility needed to survive turbulent times in the future. These conclusions apply strongly to the post-Covid world

Although the focus of their questions in the survey was primarily Technology, and many of the people they talked to seem to be CIOs or similar, there were some interesting conclusions with regard to Knowledge management. It becomes clear throughout the report that KM is second only to process efficiency as a driver of agility.

- Firstly, when asked to rank what they will do to increase agility and the ability to make fast, correct decisions, the action of "Improving knowledge management and information sharing processes" was ranked the second highest strategy, chosen by 38% of those interviewed, while the third choice was "Improve collaboration".

- Secondly, they point to KM as a key tool for innovation and agility. As the report says; "In acknowledging the interplay between organisational agility and superior innovation, executives expect several tools to take a central role. Topping the list are knowledge management and collaboration systems, something that 81% of those polled indicate will go furthest in spurring innovation".

The report concludes as follows - "For most companies, the path to organisational agility involves transformation, the ability to whittle away at inefficiency and regroup around what is truly core to the business. While the task may appear daunting, there are a number of steps that management can consider to lighten the burden of change:

- Optimise core processes.
- Minimise information (and knowledge) silos. Barriers to change include conflicting departmental goals and priorities, a culture of risk aversion and silo-based information. By reducing silos, business leaders can improve collaboration inside and outside their enterprise and better align departmental goals and performance measures with overall strategy.
- Integrate and automate fundamental knowledge-sharing processes. Such integration will enable IT (and KM) to advance an organisation's ability to problem-solve, improve decision-making and convert information (and knowledge) into insight".

This may be a useful report to share with your management as a guide to surviving recession.

Re-baselining KM using ISO 30401

In the post-Covid world, you will be promoting KM as a strategic tool to provide the agility needed to thrive in a changing environment. Now is the time to re-baseline KM on a firm footing, using [ISO 30401:2018](#) as the foundation. This will have the following advantages:

- It will reassure your senior management that your [KM framework](#) is international quality, and can "stand with the best";
- It will ensure that your KM framework is based on the organisation's objectives and strategy, and aligned with the needs of the stakeholders;
- It will ensure [the governance elements of the KM Framework](#) are firmly in place, including leadership, performance management and continuous improvement;
- It will demonstrate to your customers and clients that your organisation is treating knowledge seriously, and in a professional way.

If you have not already done so, buy a copy of ISO 30401:2018 and begin a review of your KM framework against the requirements of the standard. Ask a trusted external partner to help with this, to avoid confirmation bias and to keep you honest!

[Contact Knoco](#) - we would be happy to help you align your KM program with ISO 30401

Building on new digital habits

The response to Covid has delivered a "burning platform" to drive digital transformation. Organisations under lockdown can no longer work the way they used to, with paper reports and face to face meetings. Suddenly remote working is the norm, as are shared files and digital documents. Digital transformation is no longer an option but a necessity, and this has short-circuited the need to drive behaviour change and adoption. Covid itself has driven adoption.

But does this mean that suddenly knowledge is being managed as never before? We don't think it does, or at least not yet. The new digital habits offer new potential for knowledge management, for sure, but remote working and digital transformation are not enough to deliver knowledge management. Let me explain what I mean.



[Digital nomad by Marco Verch on Flickr](#)

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An organisation that cares about an asset (and for the purposes of the Knowledge Management discussion, we will look on Knowledge as an asset) will talk about that asset. They will talk about knowledge, track knowledge, identify knowledge gaps, create new knowledge, combine knowledge into new solutions, and above all, will

discuss it. The bulk of the conversations we have seen online during the lockdown have been team conversations talking about work. Progress reporting, assignment of tasks, prioritisation etc. Very little about knowledge.

I have heard of one online knowledge cafe, but no online peer assists or after action reviews. I am sure online knowledge-focused discussions have happened, but my impression is that these are rarer than before, not more common. In other words, the work delivery stream has been digitally transformed, but the knowledge delivery stream seems not to have benefitted, and potentially has suffered. People are working differently, but they still don't seem to care much about the asset that is Knowledge.

The Covid-induced digital transformation holds the potential for enhanced KM, which then holds the potential to deliver more of the value that digital transformation makes possible. **However we (the knowledge managers) still need to do some work!**

- Now people are used to remote working, lets broaden the conversations. Let's not just talk remotely about team progress, let's talk about lessons we have learned, what knowledge we need to build, what knowledge we need to gain.
- We can talk around the world now - so why just talk with your own team? Decide what knowledge you need, and find the people in the world who have that knowledge. Let's talk with other teams, and share our lessons with them. Let's learn their lessons in return. Digital transformation makes these conversations possible, but we have to make them happen.
- Let's talk with (or form) the communities of practice. Once we know what knowledge is important, let's find the people who are working with that knowledge, get together and share experiences. Compare solutions, build better practices.
- Now we are moving to digital documents, let's think beyond the concept of project work and project deliverables. Let's make sure we have a knowledge stream with knowledge deliverables as well.
- Let's make sure the roles are in place to manage the knowledge work streams, and build and curate the collections of knowledge products. Now we have gone digital, these digital collections can add huge value, so long as the knowledge products are created, organised, synthesised, owned and managed. This takes resource, but adds huge value. Covid won't make it happen, but Covid-driven digital transformation makes it far easier.

In many ways, Covid has handed Knowledge Management an opportunity, but the opportunity may well get lost under the pressure of "normal work", for those organisations which do not see KM as part of "normal work". Our work as knowledge managers is to change this perception, and harness the benefits that

enforced digital transformation has offered. If we can make KM part of the post-Covid "New Normal", then the possibilities are endless.

Covid and Lesson learning

Spanish newspapers such as El Periódico or El Diario de Mallorca refer to the message of Aroa López, a nurse at the Vall d'Hebron hospital, during the Spanish State tribute to the victims of the pandemic: "**Let us never forget the lessons learned.**" We totally agree with the statement, but [what are "the lessons learned"](#)?



Joaquim Carbonell

[Knoco Spain](#)

Probably, if we ask in our environment about the meaning of the concept, the answers will refer to school or academic lessons and the need to remember those that are of vital importance. Someone, placing the sentence in the context in which it was carried out, may relate the idea to "what we have learned through experience" derived, this time, from the management of the new situations caused by the pandemic. We suggest that there are two aspects that characterize lessons learned as part of knowledge management:

1. Lessons are pieces of knowledge that are derived from experience and reflection on what has happened.
2. Systematic collection and addition of lessons allows us to create and continually improve a body of knowledge.
3. The true value occurs when this body of knowledge is implemented in operations. It is then that, through practice, the true learning of the lesson occurs.

This "new way of doing", derived from the mistakes and successes of experience, will improve the results of the organization. How do we implement a lessons learned system? Let's see some simple steps to carry it out:

1. First we have to identify and collect the lessons. We are not always aware that learning has occurred, especially if things go reasonably well. Unexpected results are (should be) also a source of learning. Not all people (or all organizations) perceive them in this way, some focus more on the identification of blame than on the cause. The most frequent sources for identifying possible lessons learned are [after action review](#) and [retrospective analysis](#).
2. Then we have to validate them. We must ensure that learning will add value by making the process more effective, improving results and/or saving resources and efforts. It is recommended that a group of

specialists validate that the lessons are replicable and applicable and that their implementation will have a positive impact on the organization.

3. Finally we must implement them. It is worthwhile, therefore, to collect the lessons learned to avoid the repetition of mistakes already made and to share the best way of doing things. It is of little use, however, to have a lessons learned system if they are not applied. The organization must ensure that the lessons learned are incorporated into the operation correctly and that they provide the expected value.

[Contact Knoco](#) for help in building, auditing or improving your lesson learning system

New Survey report available

Knoco recently conducted the third of our global surveys of Knowledge Management, which have been held every 3 years in 2014, 2017 and 2020. These surveys now only show us the current state of KM across the world, but also any significant changes over the past 6 years.

You can [order a free copy of the 2020 survey report here](#).



Typical plot from the Knoco survey

News from Knoco

The consulting world has been quiet since the start of the pandemic, and KM consulting is no exception. All conferences have been cancelled, or are being held virtually. We therefore have little news at the moment.

On August 18 at 10AM Chile time, Javier of Knoco Chile will give a talk on "Smart Organizations" in the framework of [the Annual HR Conference](#) organized by

Seminarium. And September 23 we will participate in the CenturyLink Forum 2020 LATAM organized by Century Link with the conference "The learning muscle".

On August 11 at 9:0 AM UK time Nick will be presenting to the KM South Africa "[First Knowledge e-Imbizo](#)" on the topic of "The status of KM in the world today".

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