

Where is Knowledge Management going?

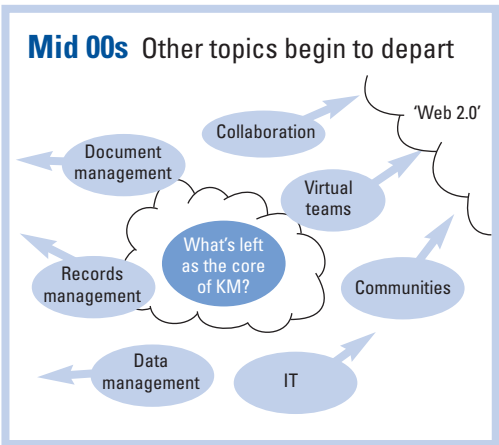
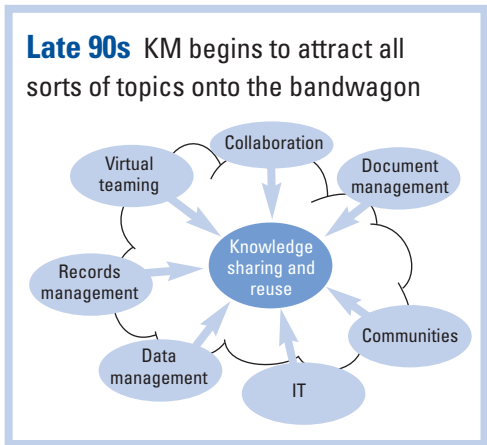
There has been a series of discussions lately, in a number of forums, on whether 'Knowledge Management is dead'. In Jerry Ash's online forum, in *Inside Knowledge* magazine, and on the Melcrum communicators forum, there are a number of opinions and some lively debate.

The 'KM is dead' camp is typified by David Snowden – always a provocative thinker – who says that KM nowadays has come to mean 'the IT department using collaboration tools'. 'KM is not dead *per se* (he writes) but the agenda has moved on. It's over guys, live with it'. On the Melcrum forum, others agree – 'KM as a label has probably reached its sell by date'; 'KM has largely had its day'; 'social media tools ... are delivering what KM practitioners have largely failed to deliver'.

Needless to say, there is an opposing view, firmly held by Knoco among many others. Knowledge is too valuable not to be addressed by a management system. In the big companies, and on the major projects, Knowledge Management is becoming established as management discipline to be conducted in parallel with the likes of risk management, quality management, safety management, reputation management and all the other systems that address the sources and drivers of value.

There is no doubt in our mind, however, that something is changing. The hype is changing, and the market is changing. You can tell the hype is changing by the reduction in the conference circuit, and the gradual decline of the magazines. We don't think

that's a bad thing, as when KM came to the fore in the late 90s, it attracted so much hype that the topic became confused. Almost anything to do with Information, Data or Knowledge was rebadged as 'KM'. Now some of the hype is going, or perhaps the hype attention has shifted to 'Web 2.0' which is today's hot topic (although there are some signs that the backlash has already started with Web 2.0). ▶



Wedded to KM?

This summer's big news was Nick Milton's wedding. He married Cathy at a ceremony held in Burnett, a small village in Somerset. Instead of presents, and to offset Nick's carbon footprint, guests gave trees that will be planted in a one-acre wood. Congratulations to Nick and Cathy and best wishes for a long and happy marriage!



Now the key question is: 'Once any peripheral hype has left KM, what remains at the core?'

The people who say that KM is dead might say that nothing of any value remains. Those of us who have seen KM working and delivering value, to individuals, teams and organisations, would say that what remains is a focused and disciplined approach to delivering value

through the application of knowledge. The tools you use, the technology you apply, and the roles you appoint in order to do this, may vary from organization to organization. However Knowledge Management, at its heart, means 'managing as if knowledge matters'.

The biggest source of evidence that KM is not dead, is the way that it seems increasingly

to come up in 'requests for tenders' as a qualifying requirement for contractors. If you want the job nowadays, you have to demonstrate that you have an approach to knowledge management that is systematic, demonstrable and being routinely applied. It's becoming a recognized piece of good management practice, and if this trend continues, it won't die.

Ten years of KM at BP



In 1997, delegates from across BP's worldwide operations gathered in Milan to launch the company's KM drive.

Ten years ago, in September 1997, Knowledge Management was launched in BP. Back then, 70 people from around the company flew into Milan for three days of discussion and presentations, including external speakers such as Larry Prusak and John Henderson. Together we launched the vision of KM for BP:

BP knows what it knows, learns what it needs to learn, and uses its knowledge for overwhelming competitive advantage.

Looking back over this ten year journey, it is interesting to see what happened when that

vision hit the real world of deadlines, cost pressures, and multiple reorganisations. You can read some of that story in our publications, especially the paper Nick Milton co-authored for the Society of Petroleum Engineers last year, entitled *Implementing a Framework for Knowledge Management* (SPE paper SPE-101315-PP)

Nick and two BP co-authors are working on bringing the BP story up to date, and are interviewing a number of prominent BP staff who were at the founding Milan event. While that is work in progress pending publication, Nick can share some

of his own personal views.

'When we launched KM in BP in 1997, it had the feeling of a crusade. We started a series of "fires" around the organization. Some flared up for a while, some burned out, and a few have burned steadily ever since.' Like a fire, KM needs three things to survive.

- Leadership attention. If your managers aren't interested in KM, you're not going to be able to sustain the effort for long.
- A viable KM system, of technologies, processes and accountabilities. When KM failed, it was often for lack of accountability. Seldom for lack of technology.
- Performance management. There needs to be someone keeping an eye on the performance of KM, and intervening if things begin to drop off.

So interestingly, the conclusion is that although personal excitement and energy is important to the launch of KM, it is the more 'managerial' side that is vital to sustain it in the long term.

The case study will illustrate this with more details and more stories. If you would like to receive advance notification of its publication, drop Nick a quick email at nick.milton@knoco.co.uk

Knowledge and innovation

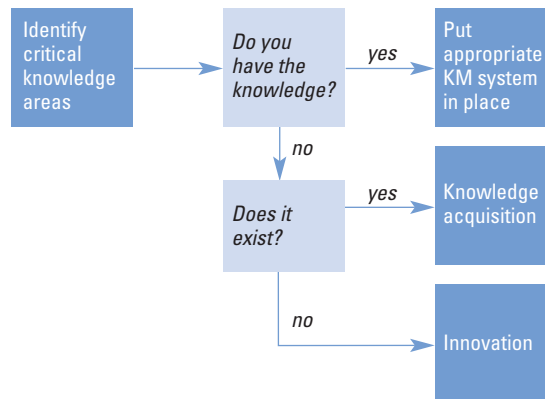
Another lively discussion, this time in Houston Texas:

What's the link between Innovation and KM?

Are they opposites? Are they the same?

Are they two sides of the same coin? Here are some of our thoughts. As ever we would like to hear from you on whether you agree or disagree with our assertions on this topic.

- Knowledge management takes over from Innovation at the point where an idea becomes knowledge, and that point is where you first test the idea, and first gain experience.
- Innovation takes over from knowledge management when there is no knowledge to fit your business need, and you need new ideas. New ideas can often spring from old knowledge combined in new ways.
- Proactive innovation beats reactive innovation. Systems where employees volunteer innovative ideas are nowhere near as powerful as systems where planned conversations are held around work process. The Technical Limit process, for example, where work crews are led through a structured discussion seeking new approaches, often leads to step changes in performance.
- Networked innovation is a favoured model. Bringing together a series of fresh minds can lead to breakthrough solutions. The more diverse the network, the more radical the innovations can be, and we have experienced this ourselves at innovation-focused peer assists. Networked innovation forms the core of our Business driven Action Learning approach.
- Both Innovation and KM need to sit within a single strategic umbrella, focused on organisational competence. This could be an Organizational Learning Strategy, for example. This strategy would map out the competence of the organisation, both current and desired, and map out its knowledge, both existing and missing. Missing knowledge, if it exists, can be learned or bought in (see flowchart)
- Innovation and KM are both driven by challenge. If people are not challenged, they will do what they have always done, using the knowledge they already have. The best way to get someone to actively seek for knowledge (either through innovation or re-use) is to give them a challenge they don't know how to solve. We saw this when studying innovation in the Innovene (Chemicals) process, where innovation was driven by the sales force making promises that were beyond



current technology. Ford drove incremental innovation by continually decreasing operating budgets. BP drives innovation by promising a continuous improvement in operating efficiency.

- Innovation and KM only come into conflict when used inappropriately. Reuse of old knowledge is inappropriate if it can't do the job. Innovation is a waste of time if sufficient knowledge already exists. Why reinvent the wheel? Perhaps the greatest waste of all is when great ideas are lost because organisations fail to manage their knowledge holistically. Ian remembers a classic example that demonstrates why it is important: 'The importance of managing knowledge was highlighted during the 1990s in De Beers. Ilana Myburgh, a young metallurgist, was given a project. Ilana found the solution in a visionary internal report written in 1971 – an idea that appeared before its time. The innovative solution radically improved diamond recoveries and cut costs – the new technology was rapidly deployed across the group'.
- One of the nicest illustrations of the KM/Innovation balance is the Accenture Tiger Woods golf-swing poster, available at <http://www.accenture.com/NR/rdonlyres/EED60B1D-9ACD-4C3F-8C3BA12E2EDE87BB/0/consistencywillingness.pdf>

New publications

Tom Young has finished the proofs of the new Knoco book *Knowledge Management for Services, Operations and Manufacturing*, a sister volume to last years' *Knowledge Management for Teams and Projects*. This will be available through Amazon.

Nick Milton has an article coming out in *KM Review* on 'Making a business case for KM'. Let us know if you would like a copy!

Towards an integrated Knoco approach

Organisations frequently invest a significant amount of money in trying to develop innovative solutions across a spectrum of challenges – but how good are the processes that are used? Do they really maximise the potential to succeed?

In a world where the pressure to supply answers frequently leads to people shooting from the hip, and following the first suggestion, knowledge managers can play a crucial role in helping the organisation to solve strategic challenges and maximise value from these investments – here's how.

The link between knowledge and innovation is one of Ian Corbett's main areas of interest, and one of the reasons for his deep-seated belief in Knoco's approach which emphasises the importance of people and relationships.

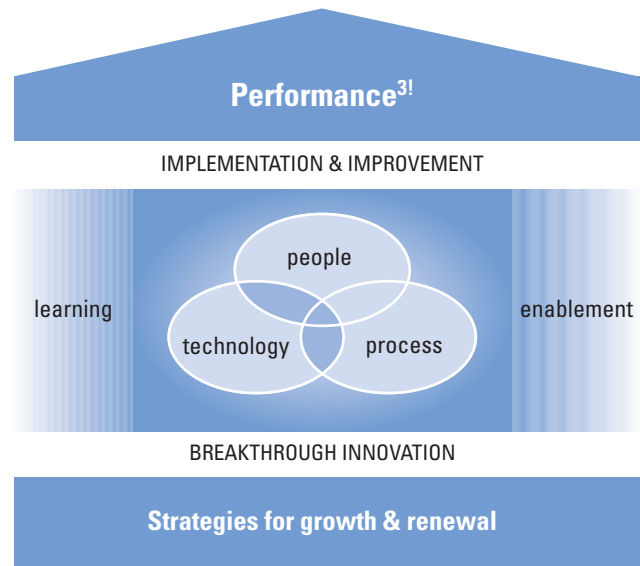
Knoco's integrated approach has evolved from a number of key insights:

- Conversations with Carol Gorelick about Ian's personal experiences in leading successful, highly innovative teams led to the realisation that learning is only truly effective when people and teams are properly enabled to use that learning or knowledge!
- Theodore Zeldin, a well-known historian at the University of Oxford, is fascinated by conversation and dialogue. In his book entitled *An Intimate History of Humanity* he concluded that 'Most advances in science have been the result of intermediaries venturing

beyond the boundaries or paradigms of their disciplines, uniting insights from different kingdoms of knowledge'.

- Alex Osborn's observations of high-performing creative teams in the BBDO advertising agency and his research with Sydney Parnes showed that teams who are consistently challenged to solve problems do so using a rigorous, process-based approach – for them, innovation is no passive, random thought process at all.

By analysing the critical success factors his teams experienced, as



well as insights gained through running Business Driven Action Learning, Ian's integrated framework brings a variety of best practice processes and techniques together. It also provides the basis for developing teams to manage the innovation process more effectively whilst teaching them to manage knowledge and apply interesting techniques to facilitate it. The result is a dynamic experience that develops people and radically improves the capacity of teams to deliver innovative solutions. It also positions KM to play a key role in the organisation in which it is applied.

The most recent element to be added assists Knoco in helping clients to create teams to solve challenges – an aspect that research shows many organisations commonly fail to do well enough.

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