



October 2013 - the 7 partners of KM, and how to work with them



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Knowledge Management never works alone - it works in partnership with a whole number of other management disciplines, and needs to interface and coordinate with them if it is to become fully embedded in the organisation.

The challenge is to steer the fine line between cooperating with the 7 partners, without being drawn too far into their own agenda. Even when Knowledge Management reports to another department, it needs to maintain its own identity.

Read our articles below to understand how KM works best with its 7 organisational partners, listed in the index on the left.

KM and HR

Every executive's primary role is to manage the assets of the company intelligently, to guide the company to achieve its objectives. The tangible assets have been well known for a long time and are well managed using familiar sophisticated tools, and attention is now moving to the intangibles such as knowledge.

It is impossible to imagine a smart organization that does not consider a strategy to identify its intangible assets in order to manage them. Most of the assets in a company have a known owner:

- Money has a clear owner which is the Finance department.



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- Customers are usually property of the Sales, Marketing and Customer service departments.
- Products have an owner who is none other than the Production department.
- However often no one is in charge of the most important asset that has the largest impact on results: knowledge.

Given that HR departments own the issue of the Human Assets, we commonly see them take charge of administrating the knowledge of the organization as well. Where should HR departments begin to manage knowledge? These are the first 3 steps:

1. [Assess the status of knowledge management](#) in the company
2. Ensure Executive support and [assess the culture](#) to identify any potential barriers to the effective implementation.
3. Run a [knowledge scan](#) to determine what knowledge we have and what is the critical knowledge to be managed first.
4. [Define an strategy](#) for that knowledge.

However HR will have to work with others to develop a balanced strategy, as a focus on individuals and their learning needs to be balanced with a focus on communities, on work processes and on supporting technologies.

KM and the Projects organisation

Business Development and Product development are realized through Projects and Programmes, and many organizations deliver their services through projects. Projects create new knowledge, and appl new and existing knowledge to help improve project performance. Subject Matter Experts, project managers and portfolio management bear the responsibility for ensuring that new knowledge is reused for higher productivity, quality and innovation.



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It therefore makes a lot of sense for Knowledge Management to be closely linked with the Project organisation. in

some cases reporting to the head of projects.

The level of application of KM in projects varies widely. Learning after, resulting in [Lessons Learned](#), is widely used, but lessons are usually not synthesized to the benefit of others learning. [Learning before](#) is much rarer, despite its high value. Learning during e.g. in scrum processes does take place, although it isn't looked upon as a learning process but rather as a planning process.

Part of the issue is that knowledge management does not operate in the projects alone. The project managers can do their part, but they often lack the time, the skills and the support to do their own KM tasks. The responsibility generally lies with the project portfolio management. From their position it is possible to institutionalize learning as part of being better and better in project execution and measured by the following KSF's; to improve

1. Business benefits from project deliveries,
2. The prediction of development time and costs,
3. Delivering comparable projects with less and less time and costs,
4. Mobilization of creativity and energy via Social Learning.

KM and Research and Development

In many organisations, Knowledge Management is positioned within the R&D organisation. The thinking behind this is that R&D is about innovation, innovation is about knowledge, and therefore KM is a subset of R&D. You often see this model in the Pharmaceutical industry, for example.



[Ian Corbett](#),
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However KM is about more than innovation - it is about application as well. KM can help R&D to innovate, through processes such as [Business Driven Action Learning](#), and it can also help R&D

to capture and disseminate the new knowledge that has been gained, and then to support the business in the roll-out and development of the new knowledge, until it becomes established into best practices and standards.

Knowledge Management is concerned with the development and use of knowledge across the whole organisation. R&D can help KM by

providing a mechanism to acquire or create new knowledge, and KM can help R&D to develop and improve the processes of knowledge acquisition and creation.

KM and the operational departments

The operational units are, in most service or manufacturing companies, where the work gets done. It is therefore quite a common model for Knowledge Management to report to one of the main operational departments, in order to make sure that Knowledge is applied on the big business problems, and in order to maximise the return to the company.



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Learning cycles can be easily built into operational work, for example a simple Do - Review - Benchmark - Learn loop linked to the operational reworking cycle;

- Do - staff undertake the operational activity,
- Review - staff review their own activity using a Knowledge Capture process such as [Retrospect](#),
- Benchmark - staff ask the community or review the corporate knowledge base to compare their performance against others. Opportunities to improve are identified,
- Learn - staff can develop a KM plan, and use [Peer Assist](#), [Learning Visits](#) or the [Community of Practice](#) to learn from other locations and hence improve their performance.

However there is a risk in making KM report to Operations, and that risk is that KM remains operational, and misses the strategic view.

KM and IT

KM and IT, in fact, Business and IT often have a love-hate relationship; they just don't understand each other. This is regardless of the fact that they're both using words that they think they each understand, they actually understand them differently, i.e. the words have different meanings and connotations depending on who is using them, and the context they are being used in.



[Stephanie Barnes, Knoco](#)
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So, what do we do?

We recognize the fact that there is a disconnect, and bring both sides together with a facilitator who understands the language of KM (and the business) and the language of IT. It takes time, and effort, and patience, and understanding, but the end result is a solution that works for everyone.

IT enables KM and thus the business to make better use of its knowledge; to store, find, and reuse it as needed. The solution allows the organization to learn, grow and evolve because it is aligned with their processes and how they operate, and IT has a solution that they can support and that is actually being used by a willing and enthusiastic group of users, because they can find what they need to be effective and efficient in their roles and responsibilities.

KM and Sales and Marketing

Sales and Marketing are all about Knowledge. Sales staff need knowledge of their customers, knowledge of their products, and knowledge of the skills and art of selling. Marketing departments need knowledge of the market, knowledge of the competitors, and knowledge of the art of influence.



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Sales-oriented organisations may place KM within the Sales department, with KM typically focusing on providing customer knowledge (perhaps through a CRM system) and product knowledge to the people at the sharp end of the business. Certainly KM has a big role to play in support of Sales, but needs to look beyond the Sales department alone.

Instead, KM needs to look at the movement of knowledge along the internal supply chain - helping the product department to create the knowledge products that Sales can re-use for example. Or making sure that sales knowledge and marketing knowledge are fed back to R&D and product development. If sales and marketing are your primary activities, then the whole company needs to feed knowledge to the front line. Knowledge becomes one of your products, and KM can help with the creation, packaging and distribution of that product.

KM and Strategy

If Knowledge is to have the greatest possible impact, then it needs to work hand in hand with the whoever sets the strategy (a strategy department, for example, if there is one).



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Working with projects delivers better projects, working with Sales delivers more sales, working with R&D delivers better products. But if you want a longer lasting, faster growing business, then you need the best strategy that you can get. KM can help with this.

How does Knowledge Management work with Strategy?

Strategy is about knowing your strengths and capabilities as an organisation, and applying these to market opportunities. Knowledge Management should be preferentially applied to building and deploying your core strategic competencies, and to acquiring the new strategic competencies you will need. Spend your KM efforts on the strategic activity, because that's where it will make the greatest long term impact.

In return, strategy helps KM by telling you where to focus.

In an ideal world, each Knowledge Management department would report to the Head of Strategy. Even if KM reports somewhere else - to HR, IT, Sales, R&D, Operations or the Project Office, it still needs to be closely aligned with the company strategy.

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