

Knowledge management (KM) is the process of capturing, developing, sharing, and effectively using organisational knowledge.

[Wikipedia: Knowledge Management](#)

The main goal of knowledge management is to improve an organization's efficiency and save knowledge within the company. Often it is referring to training and learning in an organization or of its customers. It consists of a cycle of creating, sharing, structuring and auditing knowledge, in order to maximize the effectiveness of an organization's collective knowledge.

3 main areas of knowledge management

1. Accumulating knowledge
2. Storing knowledge
3. Sharing knowledge

The goal is to enable organizational learning and create a learning culture, where the sharing of knowledge is encouraged and those who seek to learn to better themselves find it easy to do so.

When thinking about knowledge management, it is helpful to consider the types of knowledge and how possible it is to share that knowledge within an organization.

Tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge are the two main types of knowledge covered within the definition of knowledge management.

- Tacit knowledge is more intuitive, less easy to package and share with others. Examples of tacit knowledge are innovative thinking and understanding body language.
- Explicit knowledge is information that is easily codified and taught, such as how to change the toner in a printer and mathematical equations.

Successful knowledge management will improve an organization in several ways. It will ensure that the specialized knowledge of employees does not leave with them, or go unutilized by other employees who would benefit from that knowledge.

It allows for better situational awareness, as well as opening doors for learning about best practices, lessons learned, and overall organizational improvement.

Why is knowledge management important?

Knowledge management is important because it boosts the efficiency of an organization's decision-making ability.

In making sure that all employees have access to the overall expertise held within the organization, a smarter workforce is built who are more able to make quick, informed decisions that benefit the company.

Innovation is easier to foster within the organization, customers benefit from increased access to best practices and employee turnover is reduced.

The importance of knowledge management is growing every year. As the marketplace becomes ever more competitive, one of the best ways to stay ahead of the curve is to build your organization in an intelligent, flexible manner. You want to be able to spot issues from a distance and respond quickly to new information and innovations.

Companies begin the knowledge management process for many different reasons.

1. A merger or acquisition could spur the need for codifying knowledge and encouraging teams to share their expertise.
2. The imminent retirement of key employees could demonstrate the need to capture their knowledge.
3. An upcoming recruitment drive shows the wisdom in using knowledge management to assist in the training of new employees.

Benefits of knowledge management

1. More efficient workplace
2. Faster, better decision making
3. Increased collaboration
4. Building organizational knowledge
5. Onboarding and training process is optimized
6. Increased employee happiness and retention, due to the valuing of knowledge, training, and innovation

Knowledge management is an important tool in any company that wants to increase their bottom line and market share.

Knowledge management examples and best practices

Depending on what the company needs, their knowledge management will look different.

Below we have listed the most common types of knowledge management examples:

1. Tutoring & training, communities of practice, Q&A, and expertise location

These examples all involve the transfer of knowledge directly from the knowledge holder.

This could be through in-person tutoring, company-wide training sessions, online chats and group discussions - or a mix of those options and others.

For expertise location to be an effective aspect of a knowledge management system, there must be a searchable matrix built that allows for documentation of competencies.

Pros:

- Questions can be immediately answered
- Clarifications can be made if the material is not understood
- Brainstorming sessions can be facilitated, taking advantage of the combined power of the group's experience and knowledge
- In-person learning tends to be remembered more clearly

Cons:

- Can be time-consuming and take away from the tasks the knowledge holder is trying to complete
- A system of expertise location can be time-consuming to build and maintain
- Can be difficult to document and save for future use
- You can lose the knowledge if the knowledge holder will leave the company

2. Documentations, guides, guidelines, FAQ and tutorials

These written communications are great for storing and transferring knowledge.

With text-based knowledge management, a system to store, categorize and navigate subjects is necessary.

In many cases, metadata is a great help for this.

Pros:

- Can be archived and stored easily
- Easy to share online
- Can easily combine multiple people's expertise into one packet
- Fast navigation to solutions when organized well

Cons:

- Requires more time to create
- Must be organized properly or the knowledge will not be findable
- Knowledge must be kept up-to-date

3. Forums, intranets and collaboration environments

These online resources spark conversation and bring many knowledge holders into the same place.

Threads, subforums and groups can be divided by topic, level of expertise or any number of other classifications.

Pros:

- Collaboration drives innovation
- Many experts can be brought together into one place, no matter their location globally
- Facilitating contact with remote teams helps teamwork and knowledge transfer

Cons:

- Can be a chaotic, noisy environment
- Knowledge is not actively being vetted as it is added to discussions
- Searching through many messages and threads for relevant answers is time-consuming
- Messages and threads might not be archived

4. Learning and development environments

Creating an environment where learning is considered an asset will drive employees to continuously educate themselves.

Incentivizing them to take advantage of your knowledge management systems will result in upskilled employees who are ready to take on leadership roles in your organization.

For this to happen, there must be structured and accessible learning and development technology in place that employees can use.

Pros:

- Motivated employees can develop themselves at will
- Training pathways can be set out
- The structure allows for easier discovery of subjects

Cons:

- Requires a lot of effort to build and maintain
- Content must be created and continually updated

5. Case studies

These in-depth studies into particular subjects serve as complete guides to a subject.

Looking at the actions taken, the results of those actions and the lessons learned can be extremely valuable and allows for lessons learned to be fully documented and archived.

Pros:

- Allow for full documentation and archiving of lessons learned
- Easily shareable
- Efficient for communicating complex information

Cons:

- Take a lot of time and skill to create
- Can be too specialized to apply the knowledge broadly

6. Webinars

These online seminars can be very helpful in widely disseminating ideas throughout teams, branches or the entire company.

Pros:

- Can be recorded and reused
- Easy for all interested employees to attend

Cons:

- Take time and effort to plan, write and deliver
- Requires organization

Knowledge management process

In organizing the knowledge management for an organization, there is a four-step knowledge management process that can be followed.

1. Discovery

How will knowledge inside the organization be discovered?

In every organization, there are multiple sources of knowledge.

In this step of the process, the sources of knowledge are identified, as well as where critical knowledge is kept, what can be learned from this knowledge and if there are areas in which knowledge can be lost during the process.

The discovery process is helped by a solid understanding of the knowledge flow of the organization.

2. Capture

How will new and existing knowledge be stored?

Every organization contains a vast amount of knowledge, and it must be stored and organized in a deliberate manner.

By creating a system that is mapped and categorized, knowledge is more easily accessed and the organizational structure is increased.

This can include scanning documents, using metadata and indexing.

3. Process

How best can this knowledge be synthesized and incorporated?

This step involves a deep analysis of the knowledge gathered in the previous two steps.

The organization must organize and assess the knowledge to see how best it can be folded into the structure of the organization.

This step is when an organization should be establishing and promoting a cultural shift toward knowledge sharing and developing employees to be innovators.

4. Share and benefit

How best can individuals within the organization access this knowledge?

The point of knowledge management is to enable easy access to knowledge within the organization.

Building a system that works is the first step, but individuals need to understand how to use that system.

Implementing training programs can help increase the understanding of knowledge management systems.

Once the system is being used, the company benefits from increased efficiency, better decision making, and more innovative employees.

Knowledge management framework

- **People** - Knowledge management must be prioritized within the company, and an ethos of sharing knowledge must be built into the DNA of the company and incentivized.
- **Process** - There needs to be a clear system for all steps of knowledge management, while also leaving room for innovation.
- **Technology** - Technology supports knowledge management, allowing knowledge to be searched for, found, and accessed within knowledge management systems. Technology also allows people to communicate better.
- **Governance** - The organization's governance must prioritize and reward knowledge sharing. Without this step, instituting knowledge management systems will be a battle.

Organizations that take full advantage of knowledge management are better able to react quickly to changing market conditions, offer better services to their customers and increase their innovation and efficiency.

What are knowledge management systems?

Knowledge management systems are IT solutions that allow for the storage and retrieval of the information stored within the company, allowing for better collaboration and more efficient problem-solving.

Depending on what your company needs, they will have different features. Examples of knowledge management systems are:

- **Feedback database** - Everyone involved in a product, from designers to salespeople to customers, have the ability to share their feedback with the organization. All stakeholders are able to access the feedback, and thus can quickly make key changes armed with information.
- **Research files** - In developing projects and ideas, a company does market and consumer research to find out what is needed, what niches are yet to be filled in the market, and what trends can be forecasted. The files are then shared within the organization to allow all departments to benefit from the research conducted.

Shared project files - This system allows for greater collaboration and teamwork, especially across distances.

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**Published by : D. L. Shah Trust,
Room No. 16, 1st Floor, Gool Mansion,
Homji Street, Mumbai 400 001
email: dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in
Ph: 022-22672041
Subscription: Free on request
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