

Analyzing KM gaps

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[Editor's Note: This is sixth in a series on KM implementation techniques.]

As Charlie sat there, a small smile gradually crept to his face. Were any of his teammates watching, they would have thought him to be quite insane. For just moments ago, the division manager had tasked Charlie's team to put together a budget submission on the new commandant's top-priority weapon system. While some began to scurry around the team room to locate pieces of information that they would undoubtedly need, Charlie took a few moments to reflect on how much easier the task would be that day than it would have been five years ago. Charlie chuckled to himself as he remembered how in the early days of the knowledge management initiative (KMI), everyone had thought the deputy director had lost his marbles for relentlessly pursuing the latest craze-- knowledge management. Without his tenacity, none of what they now had at their fingertips would exist. Even the countless hours that Charlie spent with the integrated process team defining and refining work processes seemed amusing ... for it was payoff time!

Because of the importance of the task, Charlie was given access to several people who worked in the supporting staff organizations and were members of their respective professional communities of practice (CoP). By looking at the process flow diagram, he knew that he would need one person from contracts, one from finance, an engineer and a logistician, as well as a person from the information systems division. Charlie knew the most knowledgeable workers in each of those departments, but it was not as critical as it used to be to get the "right people" for the assignment. Much of the historical information was readily accessible through KMI. Additionally, everyone in the community of practice had gone through multiple iterations of team training, had been party to identifying the community's gaps and knew how to apply the best practices of working in a collaborative environment to close the gaps. They knew the role they played in the budget preparation process and where that fit into the greater scheme. Everyone would be focused on the quality and timeliness of the final product, and prepared to use all the knowledge at their disposal to make the job a success. Slowly but surely over the past five years, everyone bought into the new way of doing things or moved on.

But after another few minutes, reality began to set in. Some of the newer members of the organization were already seeking Charlie's guidance on the best way to develop an integrated plan for the management of the task ... but that too could be tailored from a similar effort that one of the other teams performed six months ago. If Charlie's team pulled this off, they would be honored at the Annual Team Recognition Day. Aside for a great dinner and obligatory plaque, the team members were given their choice of the latest laptop or PDA to use for the next year. With the most recent IT gear, you were recognized by others as a member of a high performing team.

Moving on

As described in our third article, after a community of practice is confirmed, we work with the core membership to construct a transition plan for moving the community from its current operating level to an enhanced knowledge-enabled capability. We have found that gap analysis is one of the primary areas where communities can fail to

properly develop their KM transition plan.

The concept is not new. Gap analysis has been a standard tool for strategic planners for several decades. Planners know that to effect improvement in an organization, they must first identify the aspects of their operational environment that will enable or deter them from achieving their business strategy. Called key success measures, strategic factors, driving forces or performance drivers, those factors identify what must be managed in order to succeed. Some examples of success drivers are teamwork, customer satisfaction, market share, size/growth, cost control or work force competency.

Planners evaluate those drivers and determine the operating changes they need to make to achieve their objectives. In strategic planning, gap analysis identifies the difference between what the organization is currently doing and what it needs to be doing. Gaps can occur because the organization needs something that is not currently available, such as a collaboration capability, or needs to remove something that exists, such as duplicate data repositories. Sometimes a gap occurs because something that once worked well, such as a best practice, must be changed because the environment has changed.

We have adapted the concepts of strategic planning to our practice of knowledge management because most people are familiar with it and can more easily integrate their knowledge strategies into their enterprise strategies. In our version, the knowledge gap analysis evaluates the viability of the CoP's performance drivers against eight key gap categories.

The CoP identifies its performance drivers as one of the workshop activities (described in article three). Every community is given three default drivers:

- management support and buy-in;
- community member value, and ;
- availability of necessary knowledge.;

The value to management is focused on contribution to attain the business strategy and goals. Value to the community membership involves improved job performance and quality of life. Necessary and available knowledge is derived from an assessment of the work activities that the CoP members perform. Each CoP will also identify additional drivers that are tailored to the domain and practice of the community.

The eight gap categories, shown in Figure 1 (Page 28, KMWorld), support a comprehensive evaluation of the community built on the systems foundation of people, process and technology. The gaps in those eight categories drive the development of gap-closing strategies in the subsequent step of the transition plan.

To provide consistency in the evaluation, we use our maturity model diagnostic framework (introduced in article four) as a reference model for evaluating KM gaps. What we have found is that most organizations are operating at Level 1 or 2. Our desire is to work with organizations to bring them to Level 3 or higher. That means that they have to move from a "project" perspective to an "enterprise" perspective, in which KM makes a fundamental alignment with the organization's business strategy, and specific changes in technology, processes and culture can be recommended.

The maturity model framework provides a greater degree of consistency to the gap analysis process. By having the discrete bands of KM effectiveness in contrast to an undefined continuum, people can more easily agree on the current state of their organizations.

The framework also provides more flexibility in the resulting KM strategy. The cost and time required to move from Level 1 to Level 5 all at once may be deemed prohibitive by many organizations. However, identifying a plan of action that takes the organization to Level 3 and then iteratively moves on to levels 4 and 5 may be much more

palatable to senior management.

Figure 3 shows one example of using the maturity model framework for evaluating gaps against the management support performance driver. For simplicity, we have only annotated Levels 1 and 5, but in practice we would identify the nature of activities at all levels.

Gap analysis has been proven, over time, to be an effective way to assess organizational deficiencies and chart a course for improving operations. It can be applied at any level of the organization from the grand enterprise strategy to the more tactical work team or community of practice transition plan. The results of gap analysis serve to align activities and provide a basis for allocating resources for knowledge enhancing skills and infrastructure. After the gaps are identified, the next step is to formulate a gap-closing strategy and action plan (to be discussed in a subsequent article).

Eight KM Gaps

People

- **Formal Business Structure** : Does the design of the organization inhibit or enable the CoP to perform its work?;
- **Training** : How effective is the training programs at establishing skills and competencies regarding the education of sharing information, new knowledge-sharing technologies and change activities?;
- **Roles/Responsibilities** : What authorities and accountabilities are established to ensure that the KM process can be sustained, measured, and nurtured?;
- **Culture** : What is preventing the culture from needed change to drive the CoP to adopt new behaviors prerequisite to effective results?;
- **Incentives & Rewards** : Is there compensation for sharing knowledge? What criteria is currently used to evaluate and reward employees for sharing knowledge?;

Process

- **Knowledge Content**: What combination of facts and judgment is needed by a CoP to perform its business activities?;
- **Policies/Processes**: Are the controls and mechanisms that contribute to the exchange of knowledge sufficient?;

Technology

- **Work Process Model**: What technologies are used to support the organization's work processes. ;

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