

With the explosive growth of interest in knowledge management, many different 'knowledge management frameworks' have been produced.

Only a few of these have reached prominence and a broad audience. Typically, the most successful frameworks have been developed by non-profit organisations, or industry bodies.

These frameworks build on the reputation of the organisations that have created them, and the depths of experience they offer.

There is considerable benefit to be derived from these frameworks, and this applies to both the knowledge management (KM) community, and to businesses looking to make use of KM.

This article will look at these KM frameworks, and outline some of the business benefits they offer.

Benefits

Offers legitimacy

While the benefits of applying knowledge management principles are well-defined, KM suffers from a lack of business recognition.

Much of this stems from KM's relatively recent creation, and its difficulty in clearly distinguishing itself from other management disciplines.

The organisations that have produced the leading frameworks typically has strong reputation within the industry. Having a knowledge management framework associated with their name provides considerable prestige and recognition.

About the author

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Use a framework to build the credibility of your KM initiative

The value of this should not be underestimated. In many cases, using a framework will provide a starting point for meaningful discussions with management.

Provides consistent language

A framework defines a consistent set of knowledge management terms and concepts. This helps to bring together all the stakeholders in a KM project, including:

- business management
- end users
- implementers
- vendors
- external consultants

In this way, any confusion is reduced, and effort can be focused on the project itself, not on discussions about the nature of knowledge management.

Outlines a process

All major knowledge management frameworks offer a high-level process to follow for KM projects.

This provides a direction to knowledge activities, and forms the basis for specific project management planning. In this way, the overall intent of the project is formalised, thereby simplifying the decision-making process.

Provides a checklist

The frameworks provide a checklist for a practical KM project. By working through the document, a project manager can be confident that all key aspects have been addressed.

This improves the consistency, quality and repeatability of KM projects, and helps to guarantee that business goals are met.

Offers a source of ideas

While not intended to outline the 'state of the art', the frameworks nonetheless list a number of practical processes and approaches which can be used in real-world KM projects.

Every KM project has something to learn from these frameworks.

Addresses non-technical aspects

Successful KM projects focus upon a number of key areas:

- analysis and planning
- knowledge sharing and acquisition
- culture
- processes

While this is well recognised within the KM community, it is less often followed in IT departments.

The frameworks provide a justification for including all these aspects in a project, thereby enhancing the final outcome.

Eliminate time-wasting arguments about KM terms

Framework for building frameworks

Large organisations don't just need a KM project, they need a *framework* of their own. This framework builds an approach to knowledge management that is specifically tailored to the organisation's environment, processes and goals.

Once such a framework has been developed, individual business units can then initiate KM projects, confident that they will integrate into a consistent global approach.

This is particularly relevant to multi-national organisations, or other geographically-dispersed businesses. With the difficulties of arranging face-to-face meetings, a documented strategy can resolve confusion, and facilitate communication.

The KM frameworks, with their very general approach to KM, provide an excellent starting point for developing a business-specific approach.

Limitations

The field of knowledge management is constantly evolving, and no published frame-

Use a framework to highlight the importance of people and process issues

work can hope to capture the latest developments and ideas.

Readers of the frameworks are therefore encouraged to conduct further research of their own, to identify specific techniques or ideas that will be of value in their project.

The frameworks also do not provide a complete step-by-step approach to KM, and it does not replace the need for careful planning or analysis.

Implementing knowledge management is hard, and while the frameworks make the process easier, there are still many challenges facing KM implementers.

Future steps

The current generation of KM frameworks were typically intended to be a starting point for further discussion and research in the KM community. They have admirably succeeded in this goal.

Taking this forward, there are a number of full KM Standard efforts now underway. These will culminate in the creation of a number of national KM standards and finally, it is hoped, an ISO Knowledge Management Standard.

These exercises draw heavily on the foundation laid by the first generation of frameworks, and they are expected to further 'generalise' the approach to KM, and to develop a broader model.

One such effort has been initiated by Standards Australia. This will culminate in the release of an Interim Standard, and finally an Australian Standard.

We look forward to seeing what will result from these efforts over the coming months.

Standards Australia Framework

In June 2001, Standards Australia released a handbook titled *Knowledge Management – A framework for succeeding in the knowledge era* (HB275–2001).

This Framework was the product of a collaborative effort, involving over a hundred members of the Australian knowledge management community.

Use a framework to develop a tailored approach for your organisation

The benefits outlined in this document have been drawn from our direct experience with this Framework. It is expected, however, that similar benefits can be derived from the other existing frameworks.

Beyond the general benefits provided by all the KM frameworks, the Standards Australia document offers several specific features:

Process model

The Standards Australia Framework is built around three main stages:

- Knowledge alignment

The starting point of a KM project is to involve all the stakeholders, and to define the goals of the project. This ensures that the outcome will match the strategic direction of the organisation.

- Knowledge processes

These are the practical 'tools' for achieving knowledge management goals, and centre on building self-sustaining business processes.

- Knowledge foundations

To ensure the success of the project, the 'people issues' must be identified and resolved. Sufficient IT infrastructure must also be put in place to support the KM processes.

This model has been used in a number of projects within Australia, and has withstood the scrutiny of the KM community. It is hoped that this model will continue to be used in the up coming Interim Standard.

Builds on risk management

The Standards Australia KM Framework is developed around the recognition of risk management, and its role in organisations.

This approach provides a practical way of matching KM processes to specific business needs and issues, and allows organisations to prioritise KM activities according to business risks.

Obtaining the Framework

More information on the Framework can be found on the Standards Australia website:

www.knowledge.standards.com.au

It is then possible to purchase either a downloadable PDF of the Framework, or a hard-copy version.

Other frameworks

There are a number of other knowledge management frameworks worthy of mention:

- **American Productivity & Quality Center** (www.aqpc.org)

Probably the other most popular knowledge management framework.

- **Global Knowledge Economic Council** (www.gkec.org)

Currently in the process of developing the ANSI standard on knowledge management.



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