

Knowledge management: practical aspects of implementation

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By Charlie Bixler

Development and access are only the beginning—Use is the real challenge!

Implementing a KM system can be complex and dynamic, no matter how well planned and developed. Inevitably a degree of organizational inertia is focused on the current rather than the new. Within an enterprise, personal and group interests can deflect the commitment needed to successfully implement such a system. The old adage surfaces: “If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it!” However, as my colleague and KM visionary Michael Stankosky has stated, “The new position for enterprises regarding KM should be ‘If it isn’t broken, brake it!’ and deploy KM to get the enterprise where it really needs to be—before it is too late.”

To successfully implement a KM program, seven critical success factors must be considered and are discussed below:

1. Vision and leadership: KM strategic plan

Develop a clearly defined, inspirational statement for the value of what the KM system is intended to accomplish within the enterprise. Success in implementing a KM solution within an enterprise relies on a well-designed KM strategy and an implementation approach tailored to the enterprise and its constituents.

Key to success: Throughout the planning, building and implementing phases of a KM system, formally facilitate strategic planning sessions with the enterprise’s leadership, mission area leaders and cross-functional representation as well as customer focus groups.

2. Organizational and communication training

Organizational processes, procedures and workflow are central to successful enterprise operations. The KM implementation strategy must be aligned with these organizational distinctions. Additionally, a well-developed enterprise communication system and learning system is necessary to facilitate effective KM implementation. Emphasis must be on the critical importance of collaboration.

Key to success: Develop an enterprisewide KM culture (knowledge sharing) through training and change techniques that instill the appropriate values of the KMS to the employees and the potential to enterprise and client success.

3. Business performance measurements

A KM system must absolutely be led by business drivers based on client demands, even if the enterprise itself does not recognize that. Leadership must define the business vision by demonstrating how a KM system will improve business processes and transform the enterprise. It needs to be recognized that KM implementation is not “business as usual.”

Key to success: Realistically measure the benefits of KM. Strive for ambitious business goals that can be measured in terms of both tangible (cost, schedule, performance) and intangible. Measure the changes in

the terms of the overall enterprise and its individual employees.

4. *KM mission interface and alignment*

The scale of KM demand requires simultaneous, coordinated activities within an enterprise and a foundation of unification based on the organization's management structure. This ensures that it is possible to achieve the overall business vision of a KM system without compromising current service levels and existing business.

Key to success: Focus on aligning the KM system to the existing enterprise's culture, mission, goals and business strategies.

5. *KM architectures and infrastructure* KM tools and the required infrastructure are essential and central to a successful KM system—but it is not everything. KM technology tools are the enablers of a KM system.

Key to success: Conduct a formal KM system tool and infrastructure study. Review existing architecture, infrastructure and IT systems for KM applicability to avoid unnecessary costs. In evaluating KM system alternatives, develop a cost vs. operational effectiveness and capability to determine best-value solutions for your enterprise.

6. *KM integration and resourcing*

KM system integration within the enterprise is essential and requires proper resourcing. Senior management must commit to proper and practical levels of resource allocation to effectively manage and maintain a KM system and integrated program.

Key to Success: A systems approach based on planning, building and managing throughout the complete KM system life cycle is paramount to successful KM implementation.

7. *Governance: policies and procedures*

Develop KM system processes, methods and technologies based on universal and standardized processes to the maximum extent reasonable. KM system governance is essential, and proper focus on future system interoperability should be considered to sustain enterprise value over time.

Key to success: Form a KM executive steering group to best identify and disseminate KM policies, procedures and best practices. Focus on establishing continuous KM system improvements and overall usage.

A final thought

Not all KM system development and implementation programs require major (or even minor) dismantling of an enterprise; the existing core culture and processes are often valid and even superior. The challenge is to infuse KM and a KM system into an enterprise for true benefits and to meet specific value propositions. The best way to ensure KM system value and overall proper implementation is to focus on enterprise performance as it relates to customer benefit.

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