

A systematic literature review by the Cochrane Effective Practice and Organization Group found that the passive dissemination of information rarely changes practice. They concluded that to take evidence into practice a strategic and systematic approach is needed to identify interventions that effectively address barriers to implementing best practices. How to do this has been studied further through analyzing lessons learned from a number of successful quality improvement programmes and reviewing a variety of Knowledge Management strategies. It has been found that to be effective, information can not be imposed from outside the service delivery system. The systematic approach should aim to build on local experience, meet felt needs for knowledge, which in turn should be adapted and used to introduce change through a process that is driven from within the system.

Knowledge Management

In very general terms, Knowledge Management has been defined¹ as the conscious strategy of placing tacit and explicit knowledge into action by creating context, infrastructure and learning cycles that enable people to find and use the collective knowledge of the enterprise. Many corporations have employed the principles of Knowledge Management to meet business objectives such as reduced cycle time, reduced costs, more efficient use/reuse of knowledge assets, enhanced functional effectiveness, increased organizational adaptability, increased value of existing products and services and to create new knowledge intensive products, processes and services. One of the important reasons that organizations have focused on KM is because it employs a holistic approach through the acquisition, creation, organizing, sharing and applying of knowledge. Through this process, the transfer of *best practices*, the “best way” to identify, collect, evaluate, disseminate and implement information and monitor outcomes is realized. Key enablers and drivers which create a conducive environment for a KM system to flourish include leadership, organization culture, measurement and technology.

Pioneers of Knowledge Management have gone through several learning stages. Some common themes that have emerged from the corporate world, which would help any KM initiatives are 1) having champions of KM initiatives present and engaged with the “unconvinced” and the late adopters; 2) neutralizing the nay-sayers with quick early wins; 3) researches and developers need to build on existing core competences, a firm commitment from the top of supporting agencies involved 4) when knowledge sharing, if early qualitative feedback such as testimonies, success stories, anecdotal evidence from the end-user are positive and the degree of separation between the knowledge source and end-user has been reduced, 5) the ROI (return on investment) of a Knowledge Management system has proven its initial value. Before embarking on the development of a knowledge sharing system, it is critical to identify why people do not share knowledge. These factors include: cognitive limitations related to how knowledge is stored/processed; the difficulty or inability to articulate tacit knowledge; motivational

¹ It is important to note at the outset that many terms applied in the field of Knowledge Management have no single definition. Specifically, the terms Knowledge Management, Tacit or Explicit Knowledge, Best Practices, Evidence-Based, Knowledge Mapping, are among the terms that have been overused in the past decade, the meaning has been diluted by use.

The definition of Knowledge Management, in particular, says nothing about technology. While KM is often facilitated by technology, technology itself is one enabler, it is not KM. However, the role of technology should not be underestimated as it is required throughout the process in KM for any subject matter. In reality, the KM process receives its kick-start from individuals or groups of individuals with knowledge for specific business objectives. Managing knowledge has now reached the ubiquitous stage, and is now fundamental for success in the new knowledge economy.

limitations; competition or other disincentives to knowledge sharing; lack of acknowledgment for the contributor of knowledge, IT system not intuitive or conducive to sharing, and the lack of relevance of centralized, top-down decision making are some reasons.

In order to share knowledge, one requires tools or processes: Expert locator systems, communities of practice (formal and informal), distance learning information-sharing tools, emergent expertise, storytelling, knowledge repositories, conferences/workshops/seminars, e-learning applications, virtual communities are some of the methods one can use to disseminate knowledge.

Characteristics of an effective team should include being diverse, balanced and establishing creative abrasion, a term developed by Jerry Hirschberg. Team members should challenge each other and options debated. The more options that are generated, generally better the eventual solution. Examples are given on KM team structures one can consider such as Homogeneous vs. Heterogeneous, spider web teams.

The role of technology in Knowledge Management and Best Practices is a two-edged sword. On one hand it delivers information to the right person at the right time. On the other side, technology could become a distraction if not managed properly. Any Best Practice system and KM tools requires two enabling components. Technology and the social requirements of people need to be met for high impact knowledge sharing. If technology is a way to retrieve explicit knowledge, then community interactions is a way to retrieve tacit knowledge. There are five process areas that contribute to knowledge sharing: capability, commitment, contribution, collaboration and conscience.

A potentially fruitful new frontier for the application of Knowledge Management principles, concepts, and useful corporate experiences is the area of reproductive health, especially in the developing world. Over the last few decades, considerable resources have been expended to develop and enhance reproductive health programs to improve access to and quality of reproductive health services so as to increase use of modern contraception, and to reduce maternal mortality, infant mortality, and the incidence of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. Considerable evidence exists for the effectiveness of specific interventions and there is a myriad of proven tools, materials, and techniques. Yet, each day, new tools and materials are developed, often without the benefit of the enormous body of evidence and the materials that exist.. Knowledge Management strategies for the health sector should reflect how it can create added value for the end-user and how the value supports the knowledge model of the "organization." The inherent need to share knowledge and collaborate on key global health issues amongst health care professionals, researchers and end users provides a robust opportunity for helping developing countries in the area of Reproductive Health. *Knowledge Management provides an innovative way to minimize the degrees of separation between the end-user and the knowledge source, thereby, accelerating human and process development by accessing best practices, valuable tools and lesson learned from other countries.* All this can be done without countries having to re-invent everything themselves. It also allows countries to identify their own best practices and lessons learned to share with others.

Some strategies include capturing and recycling structured knowledge, capturing and sharing lessons learned from practice (collaboration), identifying sources and networks of expertise, structuring and mapping knowledge needed to enhance performance, assembling and managing internal knowledge and synthesizing and sharing knowledge for external sources. The challenges are formidable because of limited access to

computers and frustrating connectivity, but the opportunities on the horizon are enormous.