



FORUM

A. Panel Introductions

Following the keynote address, forum participants were given the opportunity to listen to, ask questions of, and interact with a panel of eight experts in the domain of knowledge management. Prior to the question and answer round, members of the panel were asked to introduce themselves and share one thing going on in KM in their respective organizations.

1. **Dr. Thomas Menkhoff** of Singapore Management University shared that in his line of work, which is teaching, one KM activity is the holding of regular sharing circles. He explained this by describing circles of trust where one can share effective teaching strategies, discuss what works and what does not work in teaching, and develop teaching effectiveness skills. A good environment, not technology, is required to get into KM, he added.

2. **Mr. Nestor Mijares IV**, Deputy Director General of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) in the Philippines, mentioned that their agency is establishing a knowledge emporium on their website for other government agencies to utilize. This portal that will lead to information on best practices and research findings will hopefully lead to increased productivity.

3. **Mr. Frank McCosker**, Managing Director—Global Strategic Accounts of Microsoft Corporation, said that the focus of their KM efforts is not so much on information sharing, but on 'precision questioning'. According to him, KM is not about access, since everyone has access anyway. For him, it is about getting the right information at the right time to the right people. This, he maintains, keeps their competitive edge in the market.

4. **Ms. Kim Henderson**, Knowledge and Information Manager, Bureau for Development Policy of the United Nations Development Programme, discussed her institution's efforts in building knowledge networks. In overseeing global communities of practice, she stressed the need to focus on a knowledge culture rather than on knowledge governance and to link experts with practitioners as well as policy with practice. She also emphasized the importance of leveraging local knowledge globally.



5. **Mr. Mike Pereira**, Director—Global Online Communities of Development Gateway Foundation, shared with the participants his organization's KM activities, which focus on leveraging ICT for development,

Members of the panel (L to R): Thomas Menkhoff, Singapore Management University; Nestor "Ting" Mijares, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA); Frank McCosker, Microsoft Corporation; Kim Henderson, UNDP; Mike Pereira, Development Gateway; Erik Johnson, World Bank Institute; and Abdunasser Minkara, Islamic .

providing high impact solutions, and the provision of a global knowledge sharing and collaboration platform.

6. **Mr. Erik Johnson**, who leads the Knowledge for Development (K4D Program) of the World Bank Institute, talked about the internal KM issues facing the Bank. He underscored the need to assess whether or not thematic groups are still functioning and to determine how they can be in the frontlines of KM. The Bank's thrust is on identifying new products, meeting client demands, and developing knowledge clusters to drive innovation in the organization.

7. **Dr. Abdunnasser Minkara** of the Islamic Development Bank's Office of the Vice President—Corporate Resources and Services informed the group that the KM program of their institution is focused on oral history. In a region where most countries are oral societies, the Middle East has a definitive advantage to gain in utilizing oral history in the context of KM. Dr. Minkara talked about capturing tacit knowledge—the human aspect of knowledge such as feelings and values through the use of different methods and techniques. According to him, the use of oral history as a KM tool covers three dimensions: administrative, technical/ professional, and internalization.

B. Plenary Discussion

Following the panel introductions, participants were asked to confer among themselves and come up with key questions that concerned them. These questions were taken one at a time and members of the panel who wished to respond did so. The following section captures the highlights of this discussion.

1. **Libraries and KM: What's the fit?** One of the participants commented on the apparent lack of interest in libraries nowadays, the lack of resources given to them, and raised the question of how libraries fit in with the KM strategies adapted by the panelists' organizations. Responses to this question were as follows:

- a) KM involves developing demand from consumers. Current consumers look for swift results, thus setting up a digital library was one of the solutions.
- b) In another institution, they relabeled their library a 'knowledge center', converted materials using a thematic base, and utilized information technology for ease of access and networking. This made it easier for clients to source out relevant materials effectively and efficiently.
- c) Libraries give an impression of static information, whereas knowledge is dynamic. As such, libraries do not seem to fit into a knowledge-based organization. Furthermore, these organizations need to consider the social dimensions of libraries in order to determine what kind of information is really needed.
- d) There is a need to give the library an active role in KM; more activity in the library would give it a big boost.
- e) Converting journals and other texts into digital form allows developing nations to bridge the knowledge gap with developed countries.

2. **Knowledge sharing between beneficiaries and end users, mechanisms involved?** Another question posed to the panel was regarding the promotion of knowledge sharing between beneficiaries and end users.

- a) In one organization, the KM channels are still very informal; they rely on basic interpersonal relationships and a little less on the formal organization to advance KM.

- b) Another institution decentralized the process of aggregating content. They brought in the community as full partners and gave them incentives to participate. In their experience, they found that there is little else to be done except provide a venue for people to connect and communicate with each other. There is also a need to have identified versus anonymous users to give the process credibility.

3. **Ensuring effective networking to avoid overlaps and information overload?** A query directed at the UNDP was how they ensure that their communities of practice (CoP) and thematic groups are effectively networked to other organizations to avoid overlaps and avoid information overload?

- a) Having competent and dedicated facilitators leading an internally focused CoP is a major contribution. In centralized systems for knowledge sharing, there is open access to all. Information per se is not that important but rather, how it is used. It helps to centralize systems depending on their functional roles to avoid duplication. Collaboration, and not only individual efforts, should also be recognized and rewarded.
- b) Organization of share fairs, good facilitation, and archiving of lessons.
- c) Bridge gap between internal communities and clients. Work with clients to develop communication.
- d) Organizations must be willing to exchange information. Sharing and transparency are crucial for KM to move forward.



The panelists as they listen to a question from a participant.

4. **How to get support from management?** Another topic of interest was how to get an organization's management to support a KM plan.

- a) To get management support, one must prove the benefit of being involved in KM. A KM Plan should be useful if it is to be sustainable. It is also crucial to have leaders who will sponsor or promote such an endeavor. In a particular agency, they did not label their plan

“knowledge management”; instead, they called it “conversions of intellectual capital into social capital”.

- b) Success with management stems from a bottom up approach; if there is strong demand at the bottom, management will listen.
- c) Winning management support is not easy. The age factor is a big one. There is a sense of urgency to capture knowledge of elders and to share it with the younger generation. The benefits of doing this should be emphasized to management.

5. **Tools in knowledge capture and sharing?** Some participants were curious as to what specific tools were being used in knowledge capture and sharing.

- a) There is no single product that one can say is the best. Look at the available tools: examine content lifecycle, portals, collaboration tools, and information security; ask what tools allow the attainment of individual impact (what do people wish to achieve?).
- b) The focus should be on an organization's culture rather than tools; the latter is secondary to the culture within an institution.

6. **Role of blogging in KM?** Another question that arose during the discussion was the perceived role of blogging in knowledge management.

- a) In one organization, they were able to obtain permission from their Board to allow blogging as long as the content of these blogs conform to the terms and conditions set. By so doing, a place is created wherein individuals can speak openly and freely; as such, it becomes a rich source of data for that institution.
- b) Another observation was that blogging is a very popular activity among students and other youth. In light of this, it may be useful to leverage on information derived from blogging and learn how to use such information.
- c) Blogging is a tricky issue because the information one gets is from a single individual alone. It may be hugely valuable, but if taken out of the organizational context, this may be risky.

7. **How to handle sensitive issues?** With regard to the topic of oral history, there was a question on how one handled emotional or political issues.

- a) Revealing of emotions provides a true reflection of staff members and institutions; thus, it is something not to be ignored. In terms of handling such information, there are different levels of confidentiality applied. A great deal of sensitivity is called for in dealing with such issues.
- b) Sometimes, one needs to capture feelings and not only information, so that one can tap into this reservoir of passion and emotion and feel connected to the organization they work for.
- c) There will always be interplay between political decision makers and bureaucrats. It is therefore vital that proper documentation be done of how a decision was reached in order to put into context and understand what led to certain actions.

8. **Good practices in grassroots networking?** Some participants were interested in hearing about good practices of grassroots networking and how these were translated into national programs that served rural communities.

- a) It helps to form linkages and provide signposts to guide people on how specifically to participate and what advantages they will gain from joining KM endeavors. It takes time to get the word out, but once people discover such venues, they will join in.
- b) When stakeholders feel secure and welcome, they will participate. The key is in building trust.
- c) There is a need to apply competency mapping—match people who need certain competencies with people who have those competencies.

9. **Need for indicators and the KM Initiative: can they coexist?** A concern for some participants was, having to reconcile the need for having indicators without killing the KM initiative. Panel members had varied responses to this problem.

- a) Indicators do not matter too much to the user. As long as they are benefiting from knowledge, tangible indicators are not needed. A simple indicator such as the hit rate would be good.
- b) Client satisfaction and methodologies for tracking this is important.
- c) Development of indicators requires a shift in thinking from physical assets to human assets.
- d) Indicator development is an imperfect science; one needs to be strategic in determining what indicators are needed. Study the target audience. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators may be called for.
- e) Create an analytical framework by which to present anecdotal feedback, or valuation categories to map certain types of feedback. Anecdotes are one of the most persuasive evidences of impact.

10. How can creativity be applied in knowledge sharing?

- a) Creativity involves taking risks, and allowing mistakes to happen. This will bring about a culture of information sharing and will allow people to share honestly and openly.
- b) The term ‘knowledge management’ is not evocative of creativity; “knowledge creation” might be a better term to use.
- c) There are two schools of thought in KM: technology-oriented practitioners and people-oriented practitioners; one should find the middle ground. Creativity comes when talent is nurtured in an organization. The presence of knowledge-sharing infrastructure is also crucial. Without this, people cannot be creative.



Peter Malvicini, (stage, far right) facilitates the forum discussions.

12. What will happen to your organization if KM is not addressed?

- a) The organization might not exist.
- b) You are doing things right but not the right thing.
- c) Will lose competitiveness as an organization; will reduce productivity; will lose institutional memory, digital information and continuity;
- d) Hard to imagine a world without KM; there would be costly mistakes and massive duplication.
- e) Will lose competitive edge.
- f) Will miss huge opportunities, especially in development work.
- g) Will fail to achieve mission of having Singapore develop as a knowledge-based economy (KBE).

C. Forum Highlights: Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities

At the end of the plenary discussion with the panel, Mr. Rory Chase, Managing Director of Teleos, provided a synthesis of the morning's discussion by highlighting key points and identifying potential topics to be addressed in strengthening KM work.

He noted the wide range of comments and contributions stemming from both experts and the audience, pointing out that this experience only goes to show the complexity of knowledge management. Noting that KM has been around for only the past 20 years, Mr. Chase gently cautioned the group against looking for "off the rack" solutions to KM issues.

In applying KM theories to development organizations, it is important to note that many definitions, frameworks, and guidelines come from the business sector; and these are sometimes difficult to apply to nongovernment organizations (NGOs). Another point he made is that what is essential is not trying to find what works best in other organizations, but to discover what works best within one's own institution. In this respect, one cannot say that there are "right" or "wrong" KM methods. A customized KM solution is better than finding a generic one.

With regard to people issues, certain topics such as Communities of Practice, the aging workforce, and the loss of institutional memory were on top of the list. The issue of trust was highlighted as a critical concern.

Mr. Chase also delved into the issue of blogging and how this serves to illustrate the gap between workers in their 30s, 40s, and 50s and the younger ones. He called for open mindedness and willingness for older workers to try other social networking tools.

In the area of challenges facing KM work, he mentioned several: (i) organizational structures that are built like hierarchies and therefore do not promote knowledge sharing; (ii) how much freedom is given to share information; (iii) security of information passed around; (iv) decentralization; and (v) personal and legal issues. In a knowledge-driven economy, these are concerns that affect not only individual organizations but nation states as well.

In closing, Mr. Chase congratulated everyone for their presence and participation and invited them to engage actively in moving the KM agenda forward.

D. KM4Dev Community of Practice and Website

Mr. Erik Johnson talked briefly about the KM4Dev Initiative, which introduces opportunities for professionals in development work to exchange thoughts, experiences, and expertise via the web. He walked the participants through the KM4Dev website (www.km4dev.org) and expounded on its various sections.