



STAGE FIVE: Looking Back for Lessons Learned, Looking Ahead to the Future of Knowledge Management

The bank's knowledge management journey is not yet complete, but the next stage is set, and is guided by the lessons of past endeavors. Here are six lessons learned:

Lesson 1. ADB's corporate strategies played a significant role in jumpstarting knowledge management reforms.

These strategies had a ripple effect in other significant aspects of the organization, such as people, processes, and ICT. ADB's corporate strategy, along with the KMAP, remain the most important documents articulating ADB's knowledge agenda.

Lesson 2. Knowledge management was borne out of client demand for solutions to development challenges.

Responding to clients' evolving needs is key to ADB maintaining its relevance as a development bank. This means continuously generating innovative solutions, adapting them from one setting to another, and adopting the right mix of proactive and reactive problem-solving strategies.

Lesson 3. ADB's capacity to respond to DMCs' demand for knowledge depends on the financial and human resources dedicated to knowledge management.

Sometimes competing priorities adversely affect the progress of knowledge management reforms, but financing for this crucial area of the bank's work must be protected. This includes investment in ICT infrastructure, which should allow a more efficient, bankwide, cross-sector, and cross-thematic knowledge capture, storage, retrieval, and reuse.

Lesson 4. Leadership and incentives matter.

High-level knowledge management guidance and direction raises awareness and brings people together to share knowledge. At the same time, staff need incentives to contribute to knowledge capital, and their efforts need to be recognized and rewarded.

Lesson 5. Evaluation is key to identifying issues, challenges, and areas of reform for knowledge management.

IED's evaluations of knowledge management within the bank are good springboards for developing solutions to improve ADB's knowledge processes. For example, experience showed that as ADB grew, it became harder to locate critical expertise. Understanding this points to a need for partnership tools that enable project teams to find out who knows what, within and outside the bank.

Lesson 6. Only a bankwide knowledge management policy can institutionalize the necessary processes across the bank.

Various knowledge management initiatives are being carried out in different departments, each following processes unique to them. A policy that will not only define roles and responsibilities, leadership, and incentives, but also integrate best practices from various departments into one coherent system will enable knowledge management to become assimilated within the bank's operations.



The Future of Knowledge Management at ADB

In the mid-1960s, when President Watanabe envisioned ADB's role as a family doctor, he did so in the era of doctor-knows-best medicine. Just as the doctor-patient relationship has evolved to become more collegial and collaborative, so too has ADB's approach to knowledge changed with the times. Being a family doctor means DMCs participate in diagnosing their development problems and find solutions to them together with ADB. At the same time, DMCs have become more demanding in terms of the experience and expertise they expect ADB to bring to the table.

ADB's evolving role means that it must now become the regional "advisor" that supports DMCs with bespoke solutions on their long-term sustainable development paths. The good news is the sheer volume of knowledge at ADB's disposal now compared to the early days of the bank represents an unprecedented opportunity to work together with DMCs and for ADB to achieve its vision of a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific. The ongoing challenge is how to marshal those resources to ensure that everyone in the organization relies not only on their own experience and expertise but can also quickly call upon that of anyone else at ADB. That ability hinges on a sound knowledge management action plan.

ADB's Knowledge Management Action Plan 2021–2025

The Knowledge Management Action Plan 2021–2025 will support Strategy 2030 to enable the bank to produce tailored knowledge solutions to DMCs. ADB's knowledge management journey will be guided by five key principles:

1. A differentiated approach: knowledge services across DMCs address different needs.
2. Balance: knowledge services that are demand and supply driven, top-down and bottom-up, contribute to sustainable development in DMCs.
3. Culture and learning: the importance of organizational culture and learning is recognized and is reflected in all process and systems in the organization.
4. Technology-enabled: ICT is leveraged and used well.
5. Focus on results: the results of knowledge work are monitored and measured.

The COVID-19 pandemic has allowed us to take full advantage of our ICT infrastructure. We must find a way not to leave this behind in 2023 when we're back to a more familiar time.

The Knowledge Management Action Plan 2021–2025 envisions continuous process improvements, and ADB transitioning from a knowledge bank (“know what”) to a solution bank (“know how”). Rather than focusing on the number of knowledge products and services produced, it calls for measuring the impact of knowledge solutions applied to complex problems across DMCs. The process of managing knowledge is shifting, from collecting and capturing knowledge, to co-creating and curating knowledge solutions across ADB, with partners, and advancing innovation through iterative processes. In parallel with this, knowledge silos and repositories will be replaced with knowledge solution networks.

The new action plan supports a theory of change, outlining how ADB can “become a leading and trusted provider of knowledge solutions and contribute to better-informed policies, innovative programs and projects, and operations in DMCs.” The theory of change outlines a set of causal relationships that determine how a set of actions will bring about the most desired outcomes for intended beneficiaries and the theory anchors actions on people, processes, and relationships.

Its expected outputs are as follows:

1. People and culture incentivized to create and promote knowledge solutions (including through a value-based culture transformation initiative, talent management, recruitment and learning programs).
2. Processes and systems streamlined for client-oriented knowledge creation, flow and use such as stronger country knowledge programming, collaborating with the resident mission, and implementing an ADB Digital Agenda.
3. Relationships built and nurtured across departments within ADB and with knowledge partners in DMCs and beyond, including through ADB partnership tools and modalities for engaging knowledge partners.

Cross-departmental initiatives include an innovation framework; a digital agenda; a CPS reform and review action plan; a review of resident mission operations; leadership, staff learning, skills and talent development programs; and a culture transformation initiative.

The future of knowledge management will rely on innovation, but also on repurposing existing knowledge from across sectors, themes, countries, and regions. To adapt to local realities, knowledge solutions have to be easily retrievable where and when they are needed, and that relies on modern ICT infrastructure embedded into a learning organization. ADB's agility in terms of producing knowledge solutions and influence critical reforms to address current socioeconomic problems will face its biggest task yet, as DMCs begin their process of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.