KEY POINTS

• ADB’s Knowledge Management Action Plan (KMAP) 2021–2025 builds on decades of knowledge management and responds to changing client preferences, to foster sharper and more relevant policy dialogues and better knowledge products and services. The plan was created through a participatory process to establish clear knowledge management goals.

• Under the KMAP, there are three pillars of change—people, processes, and relationships; it is aligned with ADB’s Strategy 2030 and synchronized with all ongoing reforms that could drive knowledge management, such as ADB’s innovation and digital agendas.

• ADB’s experience in developing its KMAP shows that consultation is key to defining common ground, and that a clear theory of change is key to setting the future direction. The process needs perseverance and patience but it can also be fun and energizing for those involved.

How ADB’s Knowledge Management Action Plan 2021–2025 Will Deliver Better Development Impact

I. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge management is a systematic approach to generating, sharing, and recording knowledge and making it available to others when they need it, in formats that are timely, useful, and relevant. Knowledge is more than facts, data, or information. It is the capacity to apply judgment, experience, skills, and context. In the development context, this means:

(i) making good, value-based financing decisions, especially as the impact of climate change, human capital development, and sustainable economic growth need to be addressed;

(ii) designing and implementing effective and resilient development solutions for a changing world;

(iii) learning from experience;

(iv) accessing or creating new knowledge to be faster-acting, smarter, and more adaptable; and

(v) developing the capabilities of staff to adapt knowledge to local contexts.

This requires recognition that knowledge resides within people and in their relationships with each other.1

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Beyond Information

Human beings are good at small-scale collaboration but do not naturally collaborate well at large scale. A key challenge in large organizations is that, if collective knowledge is not intentionally managed, it often gets trapped in silos and within individuals. It can be difficult to know where to go or whom to ask to get the knowledge needed. Moreover, wisdom and experience are lost when individuals move on. Lessons learned from experience are not translated into new modes of working.

To overcome these challenges, organizations need to be clear that knowledge management goes beyond information and content management, and puts people at the center. It embraces the ways in which people share knowledge and collaborate, to create, apply, and transfer knowledge.

The knowledge of individuals is cultivated through skills networks and communities of practice. By supporting both face-to-face and virtual sharing, we take knowledge off the desktop, to exactly where it is needed.

Knowledge Management Done Right

Sound knowledge management sets in motion a virtuous cycle (Figure 1). It increases efficiency and effectiveness because knowledge can be reused and built upon. It improves the quality of knowledge by fostering expert networks and peer review. Most of all, it stimulates innovation through the recombination of old and new knowledge, and its application to problem-solving and learning.

Knowledge management can be transformational for development impact. By fostering innovation in development, countries can leapfrog, skipping incremental stages of change. Good knowledge management can speed up the pace of development because it facilitates rapid learning and wide transfer of solutions. Better internal coordination can improve the responsiveness and timeliness of programs. Moreover, knowledge management can bring value for money, ensuring that scarce resources are deployed to have maximum impact.

ADB’s Knowledge Management Journey

ADB has been a knowledge organization since its founding in 1966. Recognition of the need for active management of knowledge grew steadily over the bank’s first 4 decades, leading to the creation of a knowledge management framework in 2004. When Strategy 2020² was launched, it was clear that ADB would play a larger role in harnessing and sharing knowledge to promote development across the Asia and Pacific region.

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How ADB’s Knowledge Management Action Plan 2021–2025 Will Deliver Better Development Impact

Strategy 2030\(^3\) is a renewed call to action for ADB to solidify its role as knowledge solutions provider. It amplifies the shift in perception that ADB is not just a financier but also a provider of knowledge for development. ADB’s Knowledge Management Action Plan (KMAP) 2021–2025 answers this call and builds on decades of knowledge management. The KMAP moves the bank from a transactional mode—i.e., counting knowledge products and services—to a transformational mode, whereby knowledge management has a positive impact on ADB’s lending, and its loan effectiveness.

A Fundamental Shift in How ADB Perceives Knowledge Management

Aside from financing products, ADB’s developing member country clients want knowledge solutions from ADB that are less theoretical and more practical and accessible. They need the contextualization of good practices, both for demonstration projects and for replication. They want knowledge that they can use for policy, project and program design, and implementation. In this context, the relational aspect of knowledge is important. Trusted relationships cultivated over time create an enabling environment for knowledge transfer and knowledge blending—whether it is knowledge of local context, deep technical knowledge, or knowledge in solution design and implementation.

In response to changing client preferences, particularly among developing member countries that are progressing to middle-income country status, ADB aims to become a knowledge solutions bank, to:

(i) further sharpen the relevance and capitalization of its policy dialogues;
(ii) increase the use and range of knowledge products and services; and
(iii) find new channels to better exploit and reuse these products and services.

These goals are also at the core of ADB’s new corporate values—i.e., to be a bank that is trustworthy, client-centric, and transformational.

A Transformation of Knowledge Management

To do this, ADB’s knowledge management programs also have to shift focus and transform. A bank-wide approach has been adopted, focusing on:

(j) ADB’s critical knowledge assets and their impact;
(ii) modern ways of disseminating knowledge;
(iii) facilitating knowledge transfer and growth by connecting people and communities; and
(iv) breaking down the barriers between silos of expertise within the bank.

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ADB is shifting from delivering disconnected knowledge products and services to designing a structured knowledge program that aligns and integrates government national objectives with ADB’s financing products. This means going the extra mile beyond the preparation of a knowledge product or service, to tracking, evaluating, and learning from its impact on the ground.

This strategic role for knowledge management has implications for ADB’s internal knowledge management programs. ADB’s operational knowledge management pertains to the knowledge that governments need and how ADB produces solutions to meet that need. ADB’s internal knowledge management programs have to support this. The application of modern technology and management’s directive to open up silos are transforming ADB’s culture into a more collaborative one. The focus of ADB’s organizational knowledge management is to build upon this, and improve its internal systems, processes, and culture to ensure that the bank is geared to deliver on the knowledge needs of its developing member country governments.

Hence, the KMAP reinforces ADB’s innovation and digital agendas (Figure 2). Through its people and culture focus, it promotes change management, digital fitness, and good data management. It promotes the interoperability of data systems and the automation of reporting and searchability across the bank, and fosters internal and external partnerships in support of digital excellence and innovation.

**II. THE ROAD TO ADB’S KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN 2021–2025**

**The Starting Point: A Theory of Change**

Effective knowledge management entails stewardship of three types of precious organizational assets in support of the organization’s strategy and goals:

(i) people and culture;
(ii) organizational processes and systems; and
(iii) relationships.

Because knowledge management occurs at multiple levels—individual, group, and organization—it is complex and dynamic. With development banks like ADB, increasingly, members are asking not just for finance but also for know-how in applying that finance. For organizations in the development space, good knowledge management spells the difference between development effectiveness and poor value for money; between meeting the needs of partner countries and falling short in relevance.

ADB’s KMAP 2021–2025 is underpinned by a theory of change (Figure 3). This provides a comprehensive description and concrete illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. This helps the team understand how to prioritize and sequence actions for the KMAP and communicate the underlying

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**Figure 3: ADB’s Knowledge Management Action Plan 2021–2025 Theory of Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-term result</th>
<th>Improved development results in Asia and the Pacific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB recognized as leading and trusted regional knowledge organization</td>
<td>Better informed policies, programs, projects, and operations in developing member countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>Developing member countries and knowledge partners requests to ADB on finding solutions to development challenge increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring results</td>
<td>Developing member country tailored knowledge solutions channeled through projects, technical assistances, policy dialogues, research papers, workshops and events, ADB websites and social media, and interactions with various knowledge partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate result</td>
<td>Improved institutional culture for incentivizing, creating and promoting knowledge solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key action areas</td>
<td>Enhanced ADB process and systems for client-oriented knowledge creation, flow, and utilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People and Culture</td>
<td>Process and Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 actions 10 sub-actions</td>
<td>3 actions 10 sub-actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Strengthened ADB’s knowledge partnerships and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 actions 4 sub-actions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ADB = Asian Development Bank.
Source: ADB.
assumptions and conditions for the desired change to be realized. This theory of change maps out where ADB is now, and what conditions must be in place to achieve the desired long-term goals.

The three types of organizational assets—people, processes, and relationships—are the pillars of change that will shift ADB from being a transactional organization based on volume into a transformational one based on impact. This theory of change was developed through a participatory process involving a wide representation of key staff across strategy, human resources, operations, information technology, and knowledge advisory departments. Thus, the KMAP is based on a common understanding of where we are now, and a common vision of the goals of knowledge management at ADB.

Alignment
The formulation of the KMAP was aligned with Strategy 2030 and synchronized, for the first time, with all ongoing reforms that could influence or drive knowledge management, such as ADB’s innovation and digital agendas. The KMAP enhances effective collaboration by forging comprehensive knowledge programming together with developing member countries to reduce the constraints of organizational silos and improve the quality and focus of knowledge work. This also improves the visibility of ADB’s knowledge offerings and the alignment with developing member countries knowledge demands. This will in turn significantly increase ADB’s impact in the region as a solution provider that knows its clients.

Collaboration
ADB created a core working group across several departments to develop the new action plan, over a 2-year period (Figure 4), and to anchor it in key corporate reforms. The group consisted of representatives from the bank who embody the three pillars that drive knowledge in the theory of change—i.e., people and culture, processes and systems, and relationships.

Participation
Participation has been key to the creation of the KMAP, and is so also to its implementation. To make knowledge management every staff member’s responsibility, implementation of ADB’s KMAP draws support from all departments. The core knowledge management team of 12 staff has been joined by dozens of knowledge champions and reform project leaders. There has been an extensive examination of the current state of play, to evaluate ADB’s knowledge management work to date and how it compares with that of other multilateral development banks.4 There has been widespread consultation in multiple forums not only within the

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Figure 4: Participatory Process behind the Knowledge Management Action Plan 2021–2025

KMAP has been developed with wide inputs from inside and outside ADB

**Team**
- Core team of 12 staff from across ADB
- Wider team of 88 knowledge focals from all departments and over 150 staff from the Innovation Task Force

**Review**
- Analysis of good practices and ongoing ADB initiatives and reforms
- Benchmark with other multilateral development banks and participation in multilateral development bank knowledge management group
- Review of independent evaluation department report
- Review of ADB’s previous knowledge plans

**Consultations**
- ADB Knowledge Forum 2018
- Consultations with 225+ government client representatives as part of country partnership strategy and country operational business plan, and over 30 specific consultations on ADB’s knowledge work
- Continuous consultation with staff from 2018 to 2020
- Consultation with other international finance institutions and other development partners
- Consultation with academia and private sector
- Dialogue with the ADB Board of Directors (Board and Management Retreats, Deep Dives, Informal Board Seminar)

ADB = Asian Development Bank.
Source: ADB.
bank but also with partners and clients. What has come out of this is a new vision for knowledge management in ADB. This vision has been further sharpened using futures thinking and foresight tools.

Benchmarking
To supplement this participatory process, ADB held a benchmarking roundtable with renowned and reputable knowledge management experts, assessed other multilateral development banks’ knowledge management systems, and ran the American Productivity & Quality Center’s Knowledge Management Capability Assessment Tool. The tool evaluates the maturity of an organization’s knowledge management efforts by assessing competencies across 12 capability areas that fall along four categories: strategy, people, process, and content and information technology. ADB has also aligned the KMAP with the ISO 30401 standard for knowledge management systems requirements. The knowledge management team is now preparing for an ISO 30401 audit, and this will be used to track ADB’s progress in knowledge management.

Key Knowledge Management Goals
The KMAP 2021–2025 addresses five key needs for ADB that were identified through this participatory process:

(i) to move from a focus on counting knowledge products to providing knowledge solutions to clients;
(ii) to reduce knowledge silos, connect people, and increase collaboration;
(iii) to enhance the relevance and quality of knowledge throughout the knowledge management life cycle, from knowledge creation to knowledge application and learning;
(iv) to strengthen the capacity of country teams—including resident missions—in knowledge management; and
(v) to optimize the knowledge contributions and learning of staff, consultants, and partners to the organization.

Translation into Work Plans
The KMAP guided the formulation of knowledge management road maps for each department. These translate the KMAP goals into internal departmental action plans, focused on addressing the knowledge management issues to support and improve their effectiveness. The Knowledge Advisory Services Center supported each department by running and analyzing department surveys to identify priority areas, by leading focus group discussions, by advising on appropriate solutions to meet priority needs, and by reviewing the draft road maps.

About 500 out of more than 3,000 staff participated in the surveys run by 13 departments; six held focus group discussions and two conducted user journey workshops. As of the end of 2021, out of ADB’s 25 departments, 21 had completed the preparation of their knowledge management road map. Through these road maps, management provides greater motivation and focus for knowledge work, and for learning and development opportunities for employees as well as the organization.

III. LESSONS LEARNED

Six Lessons Organizations Can Learn from ADB’s Knowledge Management Journey

1. Knowledge management is also change management.

The KMAP links into culture transformation. Unless staff attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors around knowledge are fundamentally changed, impact on the ground will be limited. This is why the KMAP is closely aligned with the ongoing cultural transformation initiative within the bank. Knowledge is social, and knowledge use depends on embedded habits and routines. Opening up new knowledge flows requires new attitudes and habits around collaboration and sharing.

Knowledge management is not an end in itself. It gains in value and contributes value by being applied to organizational and personal goals. It must have a clear value proposition that can motivate people to change their habits, and an ultimate objective of serving clients better. For example, in the case of ADB, a major objective is to implement Strategy 2030 (footnote 3) and to meet the climate commitments that the bank has made. Futures thinking techniques can create the vision that then drives policy.

Communication is key to culture transformation. Such communication must be continuing, consistent, participatory, empathetic, and inclusive. The benefits from knowledge management must be clearly identified to each stakeholder group. This is particularly so in an environment where there is effort involved in transitioning to new modes of working, and where knowledge management can be seen as added labor. Communicating realized benefits can renew energy and motivation for the change.

The change management process should produce a balance between clearly communicated policies and expectations, combined with flexibility, local adaptation and relevance, and maintaining principles-based common ground. Because knowledge management brings together the knowledge of various disciplines, it can take advantage of how each discipline contributes to change.

Effective change is participatory and has common ownership. At ADB, knowledge management is a shared responsibility, put into practice through the development and implementation of department knowledge management road maps. Departments take stock of current initiatives and aim to improve those that are already underway within the overall KMAP framework. This helps build trust by showing quick wins. There are 88 knowledge champions (“knowledge management focals”) across 25 departments. These focals devote at least 10% of their time to knowledge management and have clearly defined responsibilities (Figure 5).

2. Inclusiveness is the key to defining common ground.

Inclusiveness is key in an action plan that will engage the effort of every staff member in the bank. The KMAP uses the phrase “every ADB employee is a knowledge worker.” At ADB, this inclusion was
How ADB’s Knowledge Management Action Plan 2021–2025 Will Deliver Better Development Impact

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achieved through the extensive consultation process driven by a participatory approach. Many consultations were held, including:

(i) a bank-wide Knowledge Forum in 2018;
(ii) consultations with representatives of governments as part of country partnership strategy discussions and specific consultations on ADB’s knowledge work;
(iii) continuous consultation with staff over a 3-year period;
(iv) a benchmarking roundtable bringing in external views;
(v) dialogues with the ADB Board of Directors; and
(vi) consultations with external stakeholders and partners.

3. A clear theory of change identifies gaps and sets the future direction. Grounding the KMAP in a prior evaluation of how ADB delivers its knowledge solutions was important to ensure that management would take the KMAP process seriously. This is how the knowledge management team managed to obtain buy-in for the extensive consultation process and to set up clear goals for what that consultation process should focus on.

Anchoring the KMAP in a robust framework and a theory of change helped bridge the gaps that were identified in the prior evaluation, and in the subsequent consultation process. This was essential to map out the concrete vision for knowledge management, the stages to achieve its aims, and the evaluation processes that would guide it.

KMAP monitoring is now part of ADB’s Corporate Results Framework, with 13 performance indicators drawn from the general framework in addition to 13 customized ones. While it takes time to measure the impact of an improved knowledge management approach, it is essential to identify clear deliverables with a phased approach and assigned responsibilities to achieve them. An independent audit of results against the knowledge management road map is a core part of this. This audit process should align with the ISO 30401 standard on knowledge management systems.

4. Focusing on quick wins helps build momentum. Focusing on quick wins helps accelerate growth and innovation and helps build a community of highly motivated knowledge management champions. Understanding human behavior plays a key role. While knowledge management implies effort in transitioning to new modes of working, it can also be highly rewarding, fun, easy, attractive, social, and timely.

For example, staff can be helped to make knowledge resources more bite-sized and easy to digest, such as in the form of innovation and knowledge talks, videos, blogs, infographics, and flyers. ADB has a knowledge management community site for sharing ideas on this. High-profile events help too, such as the now biennial ADB Knowledge Forum, where internal and external expertise in knowledge management can be brought together and spotlighted in the context of the goals and challenges facing ADB and its partners.

Apart from the provision of motivating factors, barriers to knowledge management should also be identified and removed. The KMAP advances ADB’s organizational maturity and has built-in risk management to mitigate for risks and barriers such as staff–skills mismatch, increased administrative burden, information overload, and competition for resources.

5. Distributed governance can increase the capacity for innovation and change. ADB is a large, complex, and distributed organization. The KMAP advocates for bank-wide implementation at all levels, from the Board to the knowledge management focal points throughout the bank, and from headquarters to all resident missions. It aligns knowledge management with ADB’s core client services (Figure 6). It supports dynamic country knowledge programming to better respond to country knowledge needs and ensure ADB’s knowledge supply and developing member countries’ demands match up. Operational knowledge management must be aligned with organizational knowledge management.

How such diverse knowledge management needs and contexts could be governed and directed through a common framework is an important question. While individuals and groups in an organization have the capacity to create knowledge,


Source: ADB.


Source: ADB.

Figure 5: Knowledge Management Focals Terms of Reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE

PEOPLE
• Get knowledge management certified
• Develop knowledge management, learning plans for departments
• Promote good knowledge management practices

PROCESS
• Lead department KMAP roadmaps
• Support dynamic country knowledge plans

RELATIONSHIPS
• Actively promote “One ADB” approach
• Build strategic knowledge partnerships

10% time dedicated to knowledge management

it is organization-level mechanisms that develop knowledge, based on emerging conditions. In turn, these conditions determine an organization’s capacity for innovation and change. It is at the organization level that the full benefits of localized knowledge management can best be realized.

Hence, the KMAP is also the instrument through which knowledge management is centrally orchestrated across ADB, while allowing context-relevant and decentralized implementation through the department road maps. The challenge is how to balance an ADB-wide strategy with decentralized implementation. This is where governance comes into play.

Traditionally, organizations have leveraged knowledge through experts and domains of specialized competence. In ADB’s case, these are the sector and thematic groups and sector divisions.

In the past, ADB’s leadership would set the strategic direction for ADB and then leave it to functional groups and experts to develop the required knowledge in line with that overall direction. This was an effective method of leveraging knowledge in conditions that were known, stable, and predictable. However, as developmental challenges are now becoming increasingly complex and fast-moving, this former way of governing knowledge in a highly decentralized manner is no longer appropriate, considering competition for resources and an already stretched staff.

In this context, ADB has set up a knowledge governance group to oversee the knowledge management system and check that it supports, and remains aligned with, organizational goals and emerging challenges. This group’s role is to:

(i) guide the implementation and midterm review of KMAP 2021–2025;
(ii) oversee the development and implementation of departmental knowledge management road maps;
(iii) support cross-department fertilization, knowledge management learning, and knowledge resource-sharing;
(iv) monitor the progress of knowledge management at department and bank-wide levels;
(v) direct the provision of guidance and advice on approaches, methods, and tools in knowledge management; and
(vi) direct the support of centralized, bank-wide knowledge management initiatives.

The group advises on emerging knowledge needs, and how the knowledge advisory and support departments can better align their work with client services. These are all based on a distributed governance model (Figure 7).

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Implementation of the KMAP can succeed only with active participation across all departments, and the formulation of department knowledge management road maps provides distributed accountability under the overall KMAP. Department heads endorse the implementation of these road maps, which are in turn reviewed and approved by the knowledge governance group. To ensure that department road maps are harmonized and meet a certain standard, all department knowledge management foci and key managers receive training in knowledge management.

6. Keys to success: patience, perseverance, follow-through, and fun! Change is not easy, and it takes time to bring everyone along and to see lasting and sustained effects. Messaging must be consistent over time, and communicated at every level, not just top-down. Knowledge management champions at every level of the organization, both formal and informal, can have an impact. Positive stories need to circulate. Incremental change adds up over time, and needs to be highlighted so it is not missed. All of this also requires a commitment of resources, including dedicated staff time and inclusion in the annual budget.

To follow an adage from the field of medicine, “see one, do one, teach one,” while the ADB knowledge management team was working on the KMAP, its members also worked with the Philippines’ National Economic Development Agency and assisted the team there to develop a knowledge management strategy with an implementation mechanism. This honed their ability to apply their experience to different contexts, and built their experience in guiding teams along the knowledge management and change journeys. It is important to see the benefits of our knowledge contributions.

At the end of the day, knowledge management is about people and their interactions and behaviors. Scientific evidence states that, when cultural or organizational factors do not interfere, people intrinsically enjoy knowledge sharing and learning: these activities can release dopamine, a neurotransmitter that provides positive feelings. Also, working as a team on a long journey together can be exhilarating and gratifying, whatever the obstacles along the way, as long as the teams are given time to pause, reflect on progress, and celebrate successes, however small.

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About the Asian Development Bank
ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

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