# Knowledge Management: Myth and Reality

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**Abstract**: *This article explore the phenomenon of knowledge management as an emerging concern of an organization. The basic of knowledge management including knowledge and the various categories of knowledge have been briefly discussed. Objectives, principal and process of knowledge management have also been covered. The synergy of knowledge management has been traced. Apart from that the various tools and techniques involved in different context of knowledge management are identified. The article also provides quick insight into the prevalent myths and reality of knowledge management.*

*Keywords:* *Knowledge management, Knowledge and its type, KM process, KM synergy, KM tools and techniques, KM myth and reality.*

## 1. Introduction:

The concept of Knowledge Management got popularity since late 1990s, first in business section and then in other fields. In the new millennium under continuous change and tough competition between organizations in every field, knowledge management has been emerging as a dominant force that supports organizations to achieve their goals and improve performances. For promoting innovation and for realizing every sphere of life knowledge management has become a powerful tool today. In the competitive society of the modern age the value of knowledge management relates directly to the efficiency of organizations to create their better future. Modern organization are taking their knowledge and using it to redefine the way the work is performed. They are beginning to understand how various forms of knowledge can be used to improve their efficiency, effectiveness and ability to innovate a new way of managing knowledge with the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The industrial revolution in late 18th century taught that machine and other technology had to be primed, maintained and managed to stay running and generate profit. Later 21st century taught to keep it running, the fuel is needed which is within every organizations i.e. tacit knowledge, which must be accessed, organized and manage, and its energy is to be utilized properly for the overall development of the organization. And knowledge management is the response to this challenge.

## 2. Knowledge Management Basics

To understand what knowledge management is, it is necessary to understand about knowledge. Knowledge is not merely an information or raw data. It is a synthesis of various information contents received over time. Knowledge evolves from information that is combined with the experience of the user for specific purposes within a particular framework.

Knowledge is cultivated information, but the same information may not give rise to knowledge to every individuals. Knowledge is formulated on the basis of individual's conceptualization and ability to extract facts, which can be utilized to achieve goals or objectives. The concept of knowledge can be categorised as follows;

a) Object Knowledge
b) Meta Knowledge
c) Explicit Knowledge
d) Tacit Knowledge
e) Cultural Knowledge

**Object Knowledge** is how humans understand and mentally represent the world around them through objects. It is what we know about thing or things. **Meta Knowledge** is knowledge about knowledge. It is knowledge about what we know. **Explicit Knowledge** is what is expressed or recorded. It can be codified or communicated. It can be find in books, documents, diagrams, presentations, videos, databases, webs, e-mails etc. It is expressed itself in human actions in the way of judgements, attitudes, point of views, memories, values, believes, expertises etc. **Tacit Knowledge** is personal, remain unspoken or understood. It is difficult to formulize record or articulate and it is stored in the minds of the people. Tacit knowledge can be transformed to explicit knowledge if the person who owns it wishes to share it to other. **Cultural Knowledge** is a special type of tacit knowledge and made up of culture general and culture specific knowledge. It is all about social, political and other environmental related issues.

## 3. Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is the process which strategically, systematically and continuously caries knowledge from human resources to building organizations to improve its efficiency in operations. It is about enhancing the use of organizational knowledge assets into enduring value. It is a system for managing the gathering, organizing, refining, analysing and disseminating knowledge in all its form within an organization. Moreover, knowledge management is more than this; it is also about managing the process that act upon the assets. The process includes generating and developing knowledge, preserving knowledge, using and sharing knowledge. It involves in identification and analysis of required knowledge assets and relative processes. It is a means, not an end. It focuses on doing right thing instead of doing things right. Core of knowledge management is tacit knowledge which is being possessed by human staff. Knowledge management strategies rely on staff to contribute ideas and knowledge. It is the vital resource, as a fuel needed for every organization to run smoothly. The knowledge management strategies would never be successful until a proper goal is set and then an implementation strategy is designed accordingly.

## 4. Objectives of Knowledge Management

The primary objective of knowledge management is to provide right knowledge to the right person at the right time in order to take the most appropriate decision. The objectives are as follows;

a) To create knowledge repositories, which store both knowledge and information, often in documentary form;
b) To improve knowledge access, or to provide access to knowledge or to facilitate its transfer among individuals;
c) To enhance the knowledge environment so that the environment is conducive to more effective knowledge creation, transfer and use;
d) To manage knowledge as an asset and to recognized the value of knowledge to an organization.

## 5. Principles of Knowledge Management

Thomas H Davenport has formulated ten principles of knowledge management as listed below:
a) Knowledge Management is expensive
b) Effective management of knowledge requires hybrid solutions of people and technology
c) Knowledge Management is highly political
d) Knowledge Management requires knowledge managers
e) Knowledge Management benefits more from maps than model, more from markets than from hierarchies
f) Sharing and using knowledge are often unnatural acts
g) Knowledge Management means improving knowledge process
h) Knowledge access is only the beginning
i) Knowledge Management never ends
j) Knowledge Management requires a knowledge contract

## 6. Knowledge Management Process

The knowledge management process starts with identifying and collecting knowledge. The distribution of acquired knowledge is possible only when such knowledge is organized, and if necessary refined, in an effective manner. In bringing knowledge management into an organisation, we shall need to select and implement a number of processes that will help our organisation to be better at creating, finding, acquiring, organising, sharing and using the knowledge it needs to meet its goals. T A Beckman (1997) proposed knowledge management process in an eight stage process. These are as follows;

| 1 | Identity stage | Deals with determination of core competencies which are critical to success. |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Collect stage | Concern with acquiring existing knowledge, skills, theories and experiences needed to create the selected core competencies and knowledge domains. |
| 3 | Select stage | This stage takes the continuous stream of collected, formalized knowledge and assesses its value. |
| 4 | Storage stage | The storage stage takes the nuggets of knowledge and classifies them and adds them to the organizational memory. |
| 5 | Share stage | The share stage retrieves knowledge from the corporate member and makes it accessible to the users. |
| 6 | Apply stage | This stage retrieves and uses the needed knowledge in performing tasks, solving problems, making decisions, researching ideas and in learning. |
| 7 | Create stage | The create stage uncovers new knowledge through many avenues such as observing customers, customer feedback and analysis, benchmarking and best practices, lessons learned from various projects, research, experimentation, creative thinking, automated knowledge discovery and data mining. |
| 8 | Sell stage | In this stage a new products and services are crafted from the intellectual capital that can be marketed external to the enterprise. |

Some knowledge management processes are fairly new to organisations but many are not – they are simply being considered from a new perspective, that of focusing on

knowledge. It is recognized that there is no perfect process nor is there a one size that fits all. The choice of processes will depend on the nature of the organisation.

## 7. Synergy of Knowledge Management

The whole world of knowledge management revolves around synergy of three aspects. First much knowledge is embedded in people's minds that cannot be owned and controlled – *People*. Second that people are harnessed and deployed by organization to earn maximum benefits – *Organizational Process* and the third the use of information and communication technologies for its support – *Technology*.
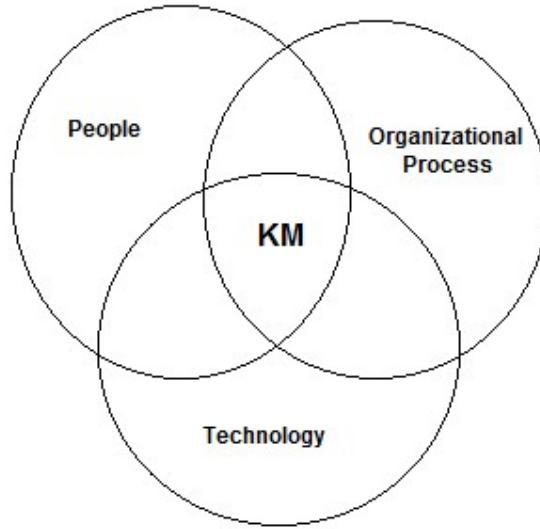


**Fig. 1. Knowledge Management Synergy**

## 8. Knowledge Management tools and techniques in different contexts

Key types of knowledge related tools and techniques in different contexts are given below which is effective in managing and handling information and knowledge and thereby maintaining the knowledge base organization:

| In the context of infrastructure | In the context of gathering and discovering knowledge | In the context of organizing and storing knowledge | In the context of Knowledge worker support | In the context of application specific | In the context of creating and discovering (creativity techniques) | In the context of sharing and learning | In the context of organizing and managing (knowledge centers) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| -Groupware -Intranets/ Extranets -Document Management | -Search engines -Data mining -Intelligent agents | -Data warehousing -Metadata -XML | -Decision Support -Workflow -Case-based reasoning - | -Customer Relationship Management -Competitive intelligence | -Text mining -Environmental scanning -Bussiness simulation - | -Learning Networks -Sharing best practices -After | -Knowledge mapping -Information audit/inventory |

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| | | | Communi-ty support Simulation | -Expertise profiling | Knowledge elicitation -Content analysis | action review -Share fairs -Structured dialog | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

## 9. Knowledge Management Myths

There are number of prevalent myths surrounding knowledge management and how it affects organizational activities;

a) Knowledge is a company's only and the most important resources.
b) Knowledge can be perfectly codified and its sharing institutionalized.
c) Knowledge management applies only within an organization.
d) All of organization's knowledge grows monotonically.
e) Knowledge management is same for all organizations.
f) Knowledge is owned by one or two groups in the organization.
g) Knowledge management is expensive to implement and makes no difference to the bottom line.
h) There is a perfect solution to knowledge management.
i) Knowledge management is only the document management.
j) Knowledge management is the same as data warehousing.
k) Knowledge management is all about technology and it is technologist's task.
l) Knowledge management needs a chief knowledge officer.

## 10. The reality of Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is really for everyone. It is not owned by any one profession or any particular industry or company or any group in an organization. Every organization irrespective of their sizes and operation can practice knowledge management for their overall development. The leverage of knowledge resides in the people's mind is the concern of every organization.

The core of knowledge management is tacit knowledge as being in the minds of individuals or embedded in the culture of an organization. Codification, abstraction, recording and diffusion are the processes which can transform tacit knowledge into explicit and shared with other people. But it becomes clear in practice that tacit knowledge cannot easily be codified and transformed into explicit knowledge. This would result in lack of knowledge sharing practices within an organization.

Knowledge management stands on the belief that it is the collective organisational knowledge, rather than that of any one individual, that matters. The objective of knowledge management is to ensure that as workers join or leave the organisation, this intellectual capital stays where it belongs: within the organisation for its ongoing benefit. If the capturing and retention of intellectual capital is successfully managed, then the organisation obtains a competitive advantage.

Knowledge management should also not be confused with document management. While the document management is an integral part of knowledge management, it is basically that — a subset of knowledge management. Document management is a tool to assist with the filing and retrieval of documents. Document management is good for the short-term in helping peoples find documents that have been stored away.

Knowledge is an asset, but its effective management requires investment of other aspects like money or labour. Considering the advantage of knowledge management practices

the initial investment for implementation would be little higher, but in the long run it yield more profit to an organization. The organization have to suffer more for not knowing or ignoring the knowledge available within the organization while determining the value of poor quality end product or services.

Knowledge management is not same as data warehousing. A data warehouse is a subject-oriented, integrated, time-variant and non-volatile collection of data which serve to support the management's decision making. It is considered as one main component of knowledge management systems. The data contained in a data warehouse represents a large part of an organization's knowledge. It helps in gaining new knowledge by delivering well integrated data to organization's decision support system which lead to enhance the organizational success.

There is wide belief that knowledge management is a technology driven software product. It is also frequently mistaken as a technologist's task. However, it is important to recognise that knowledge management goes beyond mere systems. It does not even start with technology. It involves human intervention to ensure that the raw information is processed in a manner that adds value to its user. The systems simply cannot capture the tacit knowledge that resides within people. Technology is only the supporter of knowledge management. Information technology if well resourced, deployed or implemented provides a comprehensive knowledge base that is speedily accessed, interactive and immediate value to users.

Knowledge management stressed for concerted efforts to manage knowledge systematically. Instead of appointing a Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO), managers or person responsible at all levels shall be charged to implement knowledge management in their respective units so that a network of knowledge management manager will take place. This helps for not only gathering knowledge existing currently in their units but also knowledge relevant to their operations from other units or departments of an organization. Knowledge management can be started from either bottom-up or top-down or in the middle of management. A concerted effort will definitely ensure better efficiency. No matter where it starts, knowledge management will surely increase the operational efficiency of an organization.

## 11. Conclusion

Knowledge management represents a quantum shift for most organizations. Libraries, as information-based services should understand it as a purposeful management technique with multiple dimensions and impacts. Librarians are always involved in a continuing search for excellence in organizing and codifying information sources. Therefore, with limited budget and human resources, libraries should fully utilize the current management structure and technology to implement knowledge management to increase operational efficiency and cater to the ever increasing needs of the society.

It is a fact that knowledge has become increasingly important as a contributor to every organization. It has become necessary to manage knowledge and retrieve them as and when needed. In today's competitive environment, organizations are striving to meet or keep up their stands in the market. The learning and creating new knowledge will never stop in an organization. So, practising knowledge management is very crucial to an organization. It is an art of creating value from an organization's intangible assets. Information and communication technology enlarges the scope of knowledge management to the great extent. Technology if well resourced, deployed and implemented provides a comprehensive organizational knowledge base. The importance of knowledge management tools and techniques for organizational development is increasing day by day. Despite of some prevalent misconception, knowledge management has been proved to be a good management practices for providing right knowledge at the right time in the right location.