

IKM Summaries

Monitoring and evaluation in knowledge management for development

Knowledge management (KM) continues to be an evolving discipline. There is still no real consensus about the theory, concepts and language of KM. Confusion and debates abound. Yet despite these issues, the universal importance of knowledge in the emerging global knowledge economies and societies is pushing the widespread and growing interest in KM across a wide variety of sectors and user groups, including knowledge management for development (KM4D).

This study by Serafin Talisayon aims to:

- articulate the theoretical assumptions and conceptual issues and gaps behind corporate KM practice
- clarify these issues and attempt to fill in some of these gaps
- translate these theoretical assumptions from corporate practice into approaches and useful guidelines that can be applied to the development sector
- identify conceptual and operational gaps specifically in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in KM4D that require either suggested operational guidelines or further research.

KM practice is well ahead of KM theory

KM started in the private sector and not in the academic sector and, for this reason, KM practice is well ahead of KM theory. However, the confusion and lack of consensus in concepts and theories were carried over when KM was also adopted by the development sector. The author concludes that, among KM practitioners, the term 'knowledge' means the capacity for effective action. Thus, information that is not actionable is not knowledge. Knowledge encompasses whatever helps a knowledge worker do his or her job well.

Alongside the challenge of achieving consensus about KM4D terms and concepts is the additional challenge of the complexity of the development sector as a whole. For example, unlike the corporate sector, the development sector has to deal with many different actors, asymmetries in power, cross-cultural communication gaps, a diversity of knowledge and learning styles, and a multitude of problems that are both urgent and complex. For this reason, while the development sector can and should learn from KM experiences in the corporate sector, it may have to develop perspectives and tools that are better suited to its own special needs and contexts. This makes the development sector a challenging field for the application of KM.

One size does not fit all

The KM4D community, including the IKM Emergent Research Programme in particular, has an opportunity to help develop a KM discipline that is adapted to the development sector. KM4D will need to adopt and build upon the wealth of KM experiences from the corporate sector but, more importantly, it will also need to develop new KM perspectives and tools that can be applied to more complex and diverse development situations.

In KM4D, it is very common to copy best/good practices. However, knowing what *not* to copy/do is just as useful as knowing what to copy/do, yet very few worst/bad practices are shared. So, from a KM perspective, there are two types of ignorance in the development sector: ignorance of what does *not* work; and ignorance of what works *better*.



Four basic problems in monitoring and evaluating KM4D

Given this set of complex challenges, how does one go about monitoring and evaluating KM4D? The first step, argues the author, is to address the four basic problems that currently beset monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in KM4D:

- confusion about the terms 'knowledge' and 'knowledge management' (epistemological problem)
- the complexity arising from multiple actors in development, each with their own different world-views, interests, values, power and development agendas (sociological-political problem)
- the current medley of approaches and tools for measuring or assessing the magnitude, utilization and impact of use of intangible assets including knowledge (methodological problem)
- the issue of how to use knowledge to demonstrably create value or other desirable development outcomes (operational problem).

A first attempt to address these issues is made in this study. The author provides an inventory of M&E tools for KM but stresses that this is based solely on his personal and professional experiences in KM practice so far and will have to be continually updated based on other KM practitioners' experiences.

In the private sector, value creation is measured by the unit price paid by consumers less unit production/distribution costs, while in the development sector the 'end-consumer' is the beneficiary community and all its individual members. Therefore, first and foremost, the satisfaction of the consumers who are the members of the local beneficiary community must be measured. An extensive list of the many different tools available to do this – from interviews and questionnaires to studies of local proverbs – is provided.

A simple, generic KM framework

The author proceeds to propose a simple but generic KM framework, the goal of which is to link KM to the performance of a development worker as well as to the development goals of an organization or network. The utility and versatility of the KM framework are illustrated through a variety of examples. Then an initial inventory of M&E tools in KM is compiled, and its uses and limitations are discussed. In particular, the study reviews approaches and solutions that were tried in highly complex and unstable development environments, such as conflict zones, in order to begin the process of understanding if and how KM can be applied under such conditions.

Further areas for research

The study recommends the following areas for further research:

- Adopting a KM framework and vocabulary with definitions or redefinitions that will be accepted by the KM4D community
- Establishing a repository of M&E in KM4D tools that uses and adapts M&E tools from the corporate sector
- Adopting a user-driven approach to KM based on the 'quality management' principle of the private sector
- Using scorecards to simplify M&E
- Using participatory community assessment tools
- Examining KM *in* medium and small-scale enterprises (as opposed to KM *for* medium and small-scaled enterprises)
- Exploring how to apply KM in administratively and culturally complex environments.

About this IKM Summary

This *IKM Summary* provides an overview of the following *IKM Working Paper*

Serafin D. Talisayon (2009) Monitoring and evaluation in knowledge management for development. *IKM Working Paper* No. 3, July 2009, 50pp.

<http://wiki.ikmemergent.net/files/090817-ikm-working-paper-3-monitoring-and-evaluation-in-knowledge-management-for-development.pdf>

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