

Knowledge Management: A short overview of definitions

This sheet gives a short overview of definitions in the context of knowledge management. Definitions are always contested, so are not to be read as ‘the only truth’ but rather to give a sense of direction.

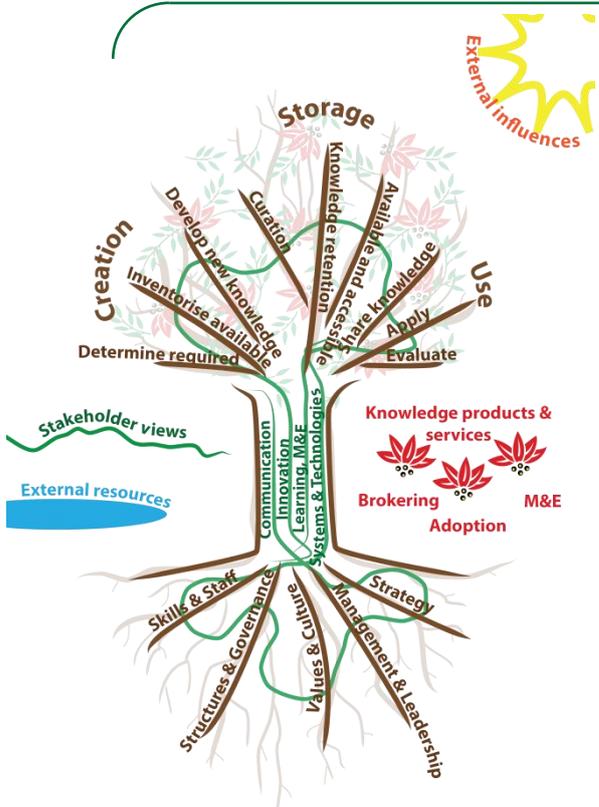
What is Knowledge?

Knowledge can be seen as a function of the experiences, skills and attitudes of a person or group of people and how they use the information that is available and accessible.

$$\text{Knowledge} = f_n ([\text{Experience, Skills, Attitude}] * \text{Information})$$

Knowledge can thus be seen as a continuum ranging from tacit to explicit. So it continues from an individual’s experiences and attitude, personal and network interaction via e.g. social media to data and repositories.

Expertise refers to the degree to which a person (an expert) can be distinguished from novices or beginners on the basis of his knowledge (mostly skills and attitude) in a subject area.



What is Knowledge Management?

In the approach explained here, knowledge management (KM) is the set of specific actions to develop and foster an optimal knowledge intensive environment, or a so-called knowledge ecosystem, so that the knowledge (ranging from tacit to explicit) of an individual or a group reaches the individuals or groups of people who can benefit from it, in a timely manner. This involves the creation of an *environment* that encourages the systematic *creation, storage* and *use* of knowledge in order to deliver specific *knowledge products & services*, for internal use as well as for external service provision to target audiences

An integral knowledge management approach consists of the balanced set of specific actions to (a) develop the knowledge foundation; (b) enable the optimal creation, storage and use of knowledge; (c) optimise the internal enablers as well as (d) include the external context to (e) deliver the right knowledge products & services.

Knowledge management started off as practice and has evolved into an academic discipline.

Why Knowledge Management?

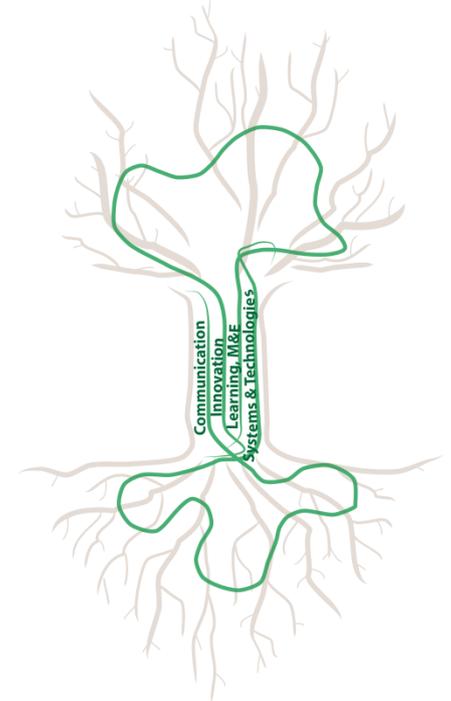
Knowledge management is about improving the ability to achieve your objectives in a knowledge intensive environment, the so-called knowledge ecosystem. It addresses the ever changing dynamic environment of the individual or the organisation/network where adaptation and change are a constant need. Knowledge management can be a key driver of learning and innovation. In order to do fulfil this role, it needs to be tailored towards the specific objectives of the individual, the organisation, the network, or of the community. Important drivers of knowledge management are, amongst others, strategic vision, leadership and shared values.

What is Information Management?

Information is on the explicit side of the knowledge continuum. It is the written as well as digitized data and content that can be transferred in books, databases, online content, audio, video, etc.

Within the scope of the integral knowledge management definition, information management involves the creation of an *environment* that encourages the systematic *creation, storage* and *use* of explicit knowledge in order to deliver specific explicit knowledge *products & services*, for internal use as well as for external service provision to target audiences. Thus information management addresses one dimension of the knowledge continuum to create an optimal information intensive environment.

From a more practical perspective, information management can be seen as developing the systems and technologies enabler in the knowledge management tree. So it focuses on the ICTs, applications and technologies like web2.0 and social media as well as accompanying rules and procedures. It enables building and maintenance of the knowledge organisational foundation and the knowledge processes in the knowledge ecosystem.

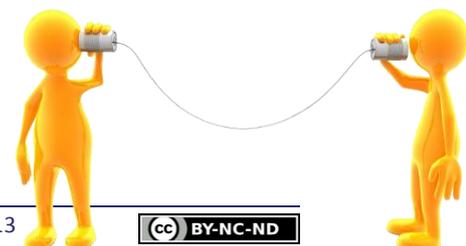


What is Communication Management?

In general, communication is a means of connecting people or places. Communication is the process of exchanging or transferring information and knowledge between a sender and a receiver via some medium. Communication is a two-way process in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information, ideas and feelings, but can also create and share meaning.

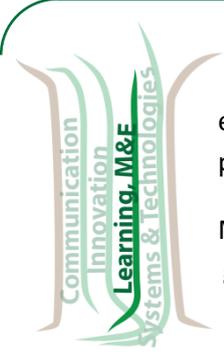
Communication can thus be seen as the means through which knowledge is created, retained and used between individuals and between groups of people. Any organization cannot operate without communication between individuals or groups of people, both internally and externally.

Communication management thus encompasses all the means and channels through which the knowledge *environment* (ecosystem) is created and through which knowledge processes operate. If and when these means and



channels operate well, communication is the key-enabler in the knowledge environment.

Communication management in the knowledge management tree approach can be seen, on one hand, as focussed on optimising the internal communication processes and accompanying rules and procedures to equip the knowledge foundation and the knowledge processes and to include external influences. On the other hand, externally focussed communication management in the knowledge management tree is part of brokering, facilitating adoption as well as monitoring and evaluation of knowledge products and services delivery.

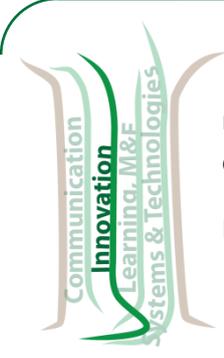


What is Learning and Monitoring & Evaluation?

In general, learning can be seen as acquiring new, or modifying and reinforcing existing knowledge. This includes skills, values, experiences, attitude, behaviours or preferences and may involve synthesizing different types of information.

Monitoring & Evaluation can be seen as assessments of changes occurring within a given implementation (i.e. a project, programme etc.) and changes that occur in the environment as a result of this implementation. Monitoring is the continuous collection of data that provides insight in important aspects, and adapting the implementation when needed. Evaluation is done on set moments (a midterm evaluation and an end evaluation are most common) where indicators from a baseline are compared to those measured during the evaluation.

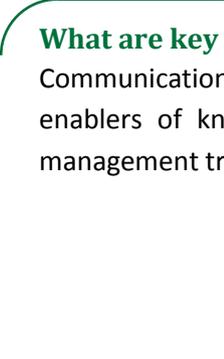
Within the scope of the knowledge management tree, learning and M&E are those active processes and procedures that enable monitoring and evaluation of current and past actions, and use of the experience and lessons to continuously learn, to inform and improve current and future actions.



What is Innovation?

Innovation can be defined as the application of new solutions that meet new requirements, inarticulate needs, or existing needs. This is accomplished through effectively changing or renewing products, processes, services or technologies.

Innovation within the scope of the knowledge management tree refers to renewing or changing internal processes, based on creativity and out of the box thinking.



What are key enablers for Knowledge Management?

Communication, systems & technologies, learning and M&E, and internal innovation are the key enablers of knowledge management, the flows of sap running in the veins of the knowledge management tree.