Knowledge management and multiple knowledges: a multi-case study within the development sector

Paula Zirschky
The Netherlands

About IKM Emergent

In April 2007, a five-year research programme was approved for funding by the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS), part of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme, Emergent Issues in Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) and International Development, will be known as the IKM Emergent Research Programme.

The objective of the programme is t*o improve development practice by promoting change in the way the development sector approaches the selection, management and use of knowledge in the formation and implementation of its policies and programmes. It aims to achieve this by:*

- raising awareness of the importance of knowledge to development work and its contested nature;
- promoting investment in and use of Southern knowledge production of all types and origins;
- creating an environment for innovation, supported by research on existing and emergent practice, for people working in the development sector to raise and discuss means of addressing these issues; and
- finding, creating, testing and documenting ideas for processes and tools which will illustrate the range of issues which affect how knowledge is used in development work and stimulate thought around possible solutions.

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About the author

Paula Zirschky currently works as a Policy Officer at the Customs Office in the Netherlands. She is attached to the Strategic Intelligence department where her focus is on knowledge management. Paula has a strong interest in knowledge management and social networks. She studied at the VU University Amsterdam where she received a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Policy, Communication & Organization (2005/2006) and an Master's degree in Business Administration: Knowledge Management & Networks (2008). Recently her master thesis 'Knowledge Management Strategies and Multiple Knowledges' was published as a book.

email: *paulazirschky@gmail.com*

Acknowledgements

Introduction

The development sector is a knowledge intensive sector. Indeed, ineffective use of development resources can often be put down to poor management of organizational knowledge resources, leading for instance to the so-called phenomenon of 'reinventing the wheel'. In response to the sector's recognition of the importance of knowledge to its core practices, the attention for knowledge management has greatly increased (Hovland, 2003; Ramalingam, 2005; Ferguson & Cummings, 2008; McFarlane 2006).

The relevance of knowledge management for the development sector is emphasized by the complexity of both the working field as well as the organizational objectives. The number of parties involved in practice is often large, and so the question remains "Who should be involved in the knowledge management initiatives and what results can be realized when key development stakeholders are excluded from those initiatives?"

The crucial point about 'knowledge' in relation to development is that there is no universal understanding of what it is (Powell, 2006). The understanding of knowledge is subjective, constituted in the mind, relationally defined, and therefore not easily transferable (Thompson & Walsham, 2004). How life is known – that is, how it is experienced and understood - is related to the context, which varies from person to person (Powell, 2006). The differences in context, perspectives, cultures, norms and values lead to different 'knowledges'. From this perspective, development organizations need to think about how to act effectively in an environment of such 'multiple knowledges' among its stakeholders. Therefore, a variety of knowledge bases and perspectives need to be understood and integrated in a knowledge management strategy.

Reality shows that the practice of development cooperation displays a marked lack of context sensitivity and has failed to recognize the fundamental significance of conception of knowledge, and use of knowledge (Molenaar, 2006; Powell, 2006; McFarlane 2006). Nevertheless, within the development sector it is very important to take these different cultures, perspectives, 'knowledges' into account while developing and applying knowledge management initiatives. When ignored, development knowledge will be seen as a 'one size fits all' solution (Ferguson & Cummings, 2008:2), failing to resonate with local realities, and the needs and opportunities of the recipients of aid (Escobar 1995; Briggs & Sharp 2004).

This paper describes a study that has been conducted in the development sector and deals with the question: "To what extent do knowledge management strategies take multiple knowledges into account?". In order to answer this question, we also explore the knowledge needs, and attitudes towards knowledge sharing, of development professionals.

Abbreviations and acronyms

BLO	Bilateral organization
CoP	Community of Practice
DGIS	The Netherlands Directorate-General for International Cooperation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IKM Emergent Programme	Information and Knowledge Management Emergent Research Programme
INGOs	International non-governmental (development) organizations
KM	Knowledge Management
MLO	Multilateral organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization

Theory

An elaboration of several theoretical concepts related to multiple knowledges and knowledge management is necessary in order to gain a greater insight into the concept of multiple knowledges. This section provides this elaboration by discussing the theory regarding the development sector, knowledge management strategies, needs and attitudes.

Multiple knowledges and the development sector

Development agencies differentiate themselves primarily through their ability to access, generate and leverage specialized knowledge (Ferguson & Huysman, 2009). The sector can therefore be characterized as 'knowledge-intensive' (Powell, 2006). However, there is no universal understanding of what knowledge is exactly, and whose knowledge 'matters'. This means that knowledge is subjective, as the meaning of any objective knowledge will always remain a product of the person in whose mind it is constituted. *We all 'know' the world through a combination of our education, language, culture, and belief and, just as importantly, our actual physical realities – gender, location, socio-economic environment* (Powell, 2006:521). These differences in perspectives, cultures, norms and values lead to different 'knowledges' (Briggs & Sharp, 2004). Additionally, the ultimate beneficiaries of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are not necessarily the same people as those of the donor organizations, which leads to different knowledge needs and demands (Hovland, 2003). This makes knowledge difficult to transfer and difficult to operationalize (Thompson & Walsham, 2004). Working in a development environment requires an awareness of these differences in knowledges and an understanding of how to act effectively in an environment of 'multiple knowledges'. Nonetheless, development solutions are still often devised by Northern NGOs, based on Northern perceptions of realities and solutions, whereby the knowledge of the intended beneficiaries is neglected (Thompson, 2004).

The importance of recognizing the existence of different knowledges is that strategic choices in knowledge management initiatives from all stakeholders need to be made. In order to allow them to be successful in achieving their organizational goals, these stakeholders need to act across the many barriers of class, gender, language, culture, religion etc. (Powell, 2006). By ignoring 'multiple knowledges', a focus on internal organizational needs within Northern NGOs evolves, rather than a focus on the Southern knowledge deficits (Hovland, 2003; King & McGrath, 2004). A bias persists, favouring knowledge and values that are developed in the North, over the local knowledge, concepts, language and understanding of civil society and staff in the South (Powell, 2006; Briggs & Sharp 2004). A prioritization of internal, often headquarters-oriented, information and knowledge management issues comes into existence; this phenomenon leads to a distraction from the Southern realities (Escobar, 1995) that organizations aim to change.

Because of this preoccupation with Northern concepts of development, non-western voices, indigenous insights and local perspectives (Molenaar, 2006) risk being overlooked or even ignored. In order to take advantage of innovative, locally-devised approaches to pervasive global development

challenges, development practice could benefit from taking the multiple knowledges of its development constituents into account. A practice-based perspective on knowledge, which takes into account the contextual embeddedness and social practice character of knowledge, is supportive of such an approach.

Practice-based perspective

According to the practice-based perspective (Orlikowski, 2002; Gherardi, 2006), knowledge gains value and meaning through the way people use it; it gains meaning in the context of interaction, therefore comprising a component of collectiveness (Powell, 2006; Brown & Duguid 2001). By focussing on the processes that support people in their pursuit as well as internalization and application of knowledge to their business practice, knowledge is understood as multi-layered and multi-faceted. The practice-based perspective is strongly related to the concept of multiple knowledges as it emphasizes the concept of context dependency, which means that the specific context in which knowledge is localized is taken into account (Ferguson, Mchombu & Cummings, 2008).

Two central concepts related to the practice-based perspective require a more detailed explanation before elaborating further on the strategies by which development agencies are going about 'managing' their organizational knowledge processes: Social Capital and Communities of Practice (CoPs).

A focus on social capital in relation to knowledge sharing shifts the attention from individuals sharing knowledge, to *communities* as knowledge-sharing entities (Huysman & Wulf, 2006). Social capital refers to social networks that create opportunities for fostering norms, trust and mutual understanding. These factors bind the members of these networks together and enable participants to pursue shared objectives. Social capital can be divided along three dimensions; the structural, relational and cognitive dimension. The structural dimension refers to the overall pattern of connections between actors, that is, who you reach and how you reach them (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The relational dimension refers to those assets created and leveraged through relationships, such as trust and identification (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The third dimension is cognitive social capital, which refers to those resources providing shared representations, interpretations and systems of meaning among parties (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

By focussing on social capital the attention shifts from individuals to communities as knowledge-sharing entities, in other words, *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998; Brown & Duguid, 1991). Communities of Practice (CoPs) are a central concept to the practice-based perspective and can be seen as: *practitioners' groups generating know-how, and providing a framework for looking at work, learning, knowledge and work identity formation* (Ferguson & Cummings, 2008:10). Communities of Practice (CoPs) can enable the sharing of (tacit) knowledge among peers, which means that: ...*the knowledge that people have is embedded in and inseparable from the (collectively based) activities that people carry out* (Hislop, 2005: 57). Such groups of interdependent participants provide a work

context in which members construct and share their knowledge, and in which the specific context of knowledge is emphatically taken into account.

Knowledge management strategies

Knowledge management is about getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time so that they can make the best decision in order to achieve their organizational goals (Hibbard, 1997). There are different organizational dimensions encompassed in KM strategies.

Firstly, knowledge management strategies can be focused on sharing knowledge *internally* in the organization between colleagues. This is the internal knowledge of an organization, whereas external knowledge reflects the knowledge from sources outside the organization (Haas, 2006).

Secondly, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) often play an important role within knowledge management strategies. In geographically dispersed organizations in particular, communication is mediated primarily through technology, as face-to-face contact is difficult in such contexts (Newell, David & Chand, 2007).

Thirdly, a particularly important characteristic of the development sector is the geographical *dispersedness* of many development organizations, with headquarters in the North and local offices in the field (Roberts, Jones & Fröhling, 2005). Knowledge sharing between headquarters and field offices is an important bridge that needs to be crossed in order to realize common development goals. For instance, when dispersed teams need knowledge situated at a site other than where the problem occurred, they must first recognize and adjust for local-specific practices within which that knowledge is embedded before they can use it (Sole & Edmondson, 2002:17).

Fourthly, *external* knowledge sharing is an important aspect of knowledge management strategies. As knowledge derives from work practices, access to relevant knowledge means that all stakeholders involved in these work practices need to be considered. This means the inclusion of knowledge that resides beyond or at the boundaries of given agencies.

Lastly, *management vision* influences knowledge management strategies and knowledge sharing. Most literature on knowledge management is focussed on the "knowledge" part and treats the "management" aspect as something that is either self-evident and unproblematic or even black-boxed and unexplicated (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001). However, management influences the vision on, and amount of attention given to, knowledge management, and can exert considerable influence in terms of facilitating or hindering knowledge sharing.

Knowledge needs and attitudes

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, it can be assumed that development interventions are likely to be more responsive to the needs of the recipients of aid, when knowledge management

strategies take multiple knowledges into account. In order to be able to integrate multiple knowledges in knowledge management strategies it is important to be aware of the differences in 'knowledges', deriving from the differences in local circumstances and 'world views'. This is to prevent knowledge from one situation being used as a 'blue-print solution' for problems in another situation. A practical way of exploring whether development professionals experience an awareness of multiple knowledges is to analyse their knowledge needs and attitudes towards knowledge sharing.

Current KM literature posits that people will only share their knowledge if they have a personal motivation to do so (Huysman & De Wit, 2004). In other words, beneficiaries' knowledge needs and attitudes are formative in terms of knowledge sharing practice. Knowledge needs derive from the cognitive or mental states of development workers, their desire to learn, to take on new ideas and their need to develop skills in order to be effective in their commonly assigned roles (Nikoi, 2008).

The practice-based perspective suggests that a focus on knowledge flows and knowledge needs, rather than on capturing and transferring knowledge (Ringberg & Reihlen, 2008, Ferguson & Huysman, 2009), is more conducive to enabling individuals to gain relevant knowledge while carrying out their tasks (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001).

Knowledge needs and attitudes towards knowledge sharing are related in that the desire for fulfilling a knowledge need is likely to positively influence staff attitudes towards sharing knowledge. Differences in work practices suggests the importance of analysing how people in their ongoing practices constitute knowing and how they engage and act towards multiple knowledges. Three aspects relate to attitudes towards knowledge sharing. *Willingness* can be seen as the extent to which an individual is prepared to grant other group members access to his or her individual capital. *Eagerness* is defined as the extent to which an individual has a strong internal drive to communicate his individual capital to other group members (De Vries, Van den Hooff and De Ridder, 2006). Finally, the basis for establishing a positive relationship with another person, providing the basis for knowledge exchange, is *trust* (McEvily,Perrone & Zaheer, 2003).

The attitudes of development professionals and their knowledge needs provide more insight into the awareness of multiple knowledges. This awareness is necessary in order to integrate various sources of knowledge into knowledge management strategies, which influence not only the internal knowledge sharing within headquarters, but also knowledge sharing with field offices and external partners. Moreover, management is responsible for putting the focus internally, or externally, and indicating what the role of ICT will be in this strategy. The abovementioned theoretical concepts are encompassed in figure 1. The model provides a guideline to analyse the extent to which multiple knowledges are integrated in knowledge management strategies. We will address this issue in the next section.
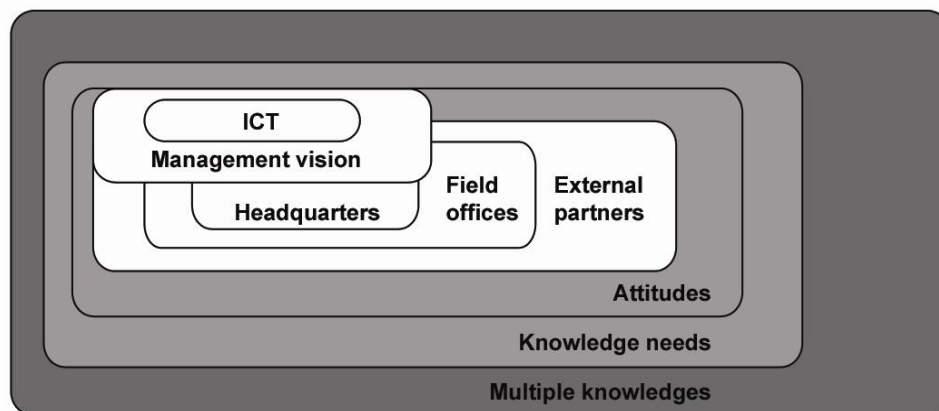
Figure 1. Dimensions of knowledge management

Research approach and organization settings

The concept of 'multiple knowledges' is relatively new within existing literature. Therefore, we conducted an exploratory study to gain insights into the dynamics of the concept and the relation of this concept to knowledge management strategies. We conducted case studies across three levels of development organizations to allow cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2003). Their aim was to map the different strategies, approaches, needs and attitudes.

The first organization is a *multilateral* organization which is part of the so called 'UN-family', oriented towards human rights and social justice. The second participating organization is a large *bilateral* development organization that is focused on, among other things, poverty reduction, civil rights, education, healthcare and the environment. The third organization participating in this research is a Dutch non-governmental organization (NGO) focused on basic social services, fair economic development, democratization and peace building. The NGO is currently reorganizing, devolving towards the South in an effort by management to give Southern beneficiaries more influence in determining the organization's policies. The organizations will be referred to respectively as the multilateral organization (MLO), the bilateral organization (BLO) and the NGO.

The research combined qualitative and quantitative methods and included four methods of data collection: a literature study, analysis of archival data, a standardized survey (KM scan) and in-depth interviewing. The literature study provided a general characterization of the development sector and explores the idea behind multiple 'knowledges' as well as its relation to knowledge management strategies, knowledge needs and attitudes towards knowledge sharing. An analysis of archival data, combined with the standardized survey, made it possible to collect first impressions of the three participating organizations. The survey results were then used as input for the 37 semi-structured interviews that were conducted with development professionals within the three organizations. Subsequently, cross-case analysis allowed us to draw conclusions in terms of the research objectives,

focused on the awareness and integration of multiple knowledges into the knowledge management strategies and approaches of the organizations.

Findings

The findings of the research will be presented by discussing each of the dimensions presented in figure 1. In addition, the different knowledge management strategies of the organizations will be discussed.

KM strategies

The research demonstrates that the formulation of a knowledge management or learning strategy increases the awareness of knowledge management within the organization. However, formulating this strategy is not enough; follow-up is necessary for a coherent knowledge management approach and an effective implementation of the strategy. For instance, the multilateral organization has one knowledge management strategy, but knowledge sharing initiatives stand alone; they are not yet applied organization-wide. Within the bilateral organization every department is responsible for its own strategy, which leads to an incoherent knowledge management approach within the organization. The NGO is reorganizing, from a centralized organization with one head office in the Netherlands, to a decentralized one with a number of regional offices. Only within the NGO a learning strategy with a clear focus, communicated throughout the whole organization, leads to a coherent knowledge management approach.

Internal knowledge sharing

All three cases reflect several factors that can undermine the existence of a trusted work environment where people feel comfortable enough to share knowledge with colleagues in the organization. Firstly, hierarchical barriers prevent employees from approaching colleagues, in the bilateral organization for instance. Conversely, in the NGO the hierarchy is perceived by employees as low, and this appears to stimulate knowledge sharing.

> 'When somebody in a higher rank states something, an employee in a lower rank will easily go into discussion with that person as we know of each other that we have the same level of education and experience.' NGO

Secondly, the career structure can hamper knowledge sharing. The career structure of an organization influences the way people deal with each other and whether they share their knowledge. Some employees consider sharing as additional work or are afraid of what may happen if they share; people feel they can 'lose their power', or are afraid of someone else taking their place. This sentiment was reflected particularly in the BLO, and to lesser degrees in the other organizations we studied.

> 'Most of the knowledge is clustered between the older generation of colleagues and between the younger generations. There seems to be a kind of a divide where knowledge does not get passed on easily.' MLO

Thirdly, a "generation divide" decreases the trusted work environment and creates knowledge sharing barriers. This was particularly apparent in the MLO. On the one hand, senior employees are more protective of their work, reflected in the higher resistance to new

work methods, while young generations and newcomers tend to be more excited and positive about knowledge sharing. On the other hand, internal knowledge sharing takes mainly place via face-to-face contact and is based on personal networks. Access to knowledge determines with whom knowledge will be shared. Therefore, more senior staff members, who have been working in the organization longer, are better equipped to access relevant knowledge. It takes a while for newcomers to create such a personal network and having other building trust, in other words building up structural as well as relational capital.

Fourthly, due to the fact that personal networks are used to share knowledge, the sharing remains isolated within these networks; knowledge sharing is not institutionalized on an organizational level, as is the case in all three organizations studied. Within all three organizations knowledge sharing between departments is weak and the existence of 'knowledge silos' is mentioned.

> '*I might have a colleague right down the hall who is doing a project in the same country as I, and I don't know about it.*' MLO

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

All three organizations use a "personalization" strategy (Nonaka, 1994) whereby knowledge sharing is mainly based on face-to-face contact and personal networks. Only within the multilateral organization, ICT has an enabling function as it positively influences knowledge sharing, but none of the organizations has an internally institutionalized ICT basis. The research points out that this is a missing aspect as it can make some practices more effective and can stimulate the creation of structural capital; an important component in forming personal networks. The intention to integrate ICT more in daily work practice as a facilitating instrument is strongly present in the NGO, but not everyone sees the benefit of these instruments supporting them in daily work activities.

> '*a lot of the knowledge management discussion you hear says that knowledge management isn't really about databases, and it isn't. But a body has to have a head and some vital organs. And one of the vital organs in the body of knowledge management would be information systems*' MLO

Regarding the use of ICT for external knowledge sharing, the NGO and the multilateral organization reflect awareness of differences between the North and the South related to use and availability of technological means. By putting the focus on increasing and improving Southern ICT facilities, instead of only improving Northern ICT systems, the organizations prioritize Southern needs and challenges. Across our research sample we encountered awareness of the impediment of ICT to grasp the meaning of knowledge; ICT-based projects are revised and adapted based on the idea that knowledge comes to expression through human interaction. In general, clear structures for ICT are missing in the organizations, while ICT can provide an added value in facilitating knowledge sharing processes.

> '*if you start working at headquarters after working at a field office, you notice that here at headquarters everyone is very focused on higher management layers and multilateral connections, whereas field offices are focused on the national side. There is a big difference in focus and work field.*' BLO

Headquarters and field offices

The connections between the headquarters and field offices present a major and enduring challenge. The BLO and MLO follow a strategy in which headquarters set out broad guidelines and policies and initiate dialogue in terms of knowledge management

approaches, to avoid incoherence across the organization. Field offices do however take command of the actual implementation.

Within field offices there is a lot of local knowledge, as local employees know the country a lot better than those working at headquarters. Local employees work for a longer period at field offices; this is where the 'institutional memory' resides. Particularly within the BLO and to a lesser extent within the other organizations, the research shows that this knowledge is often underrated and neglected by headquarters, and there is a gap between local staff and head office staff, inhibiting a mutual knowledge base to be developed and undermining knowledge sharing. Perspectives and insights are not exchanged, understanding of mutual work methods and environment is often lacking. Moreover, within the BLO the first focus of field offices is towards the local country and not towards headquarters, while headquarters is focused on the top layers of the organization; hence, again a gap exists between headquarters and field offices.

Although it is difficult to exchange knowledge between headquarters and field offices, the MLO demonstrated that CoPs appear a useful organizational mechanism to exchange knowledge. These CoPs prevent field staff from feeling isolated as they have contact with colleagues with the same problems and access to the same information resources as people at headquarters. The CoPs facilitate awareness of each other's perspectives and insights of work processes and stimulate the integration of these perspectives into local practices. Informal contacts within CoPs have a big impact on the contact between headquarters and field offices. Especially when people have met face-to-face, the contact becomes easier and more frequent. These informal contacts are very functional for knowledge sharing; however, such knowledge sharing remains ad hoc, and not institutionalized.

> '*I certainly have less contact with projects that are going well.*' MLO

External knowledge sharing

Within the development sector, strategies are frequently explicitly aimed at external knowledge sharing, i.e. targeting the organizations' partners in the South. In our research, the MLO and the NGO perceive external knowledge sharing as essential for doing their job. This vision is less prevalent within the BLO, where employees perceive knowledge sharing with local stakeholders as being rather irrelevant to diplomatic practice, and additional to their core business practices. Even so, all three organizations try to stimulate knowledge sharing with external partners in their strategy, by stimulating dialogue and cooperation. By fulfilling the role of mediator, organizations try to encourage collaboration to increase structural capital among external partners. Facilitating dialogue is not always an effective means to come to a conclusion, however they are geared towards promoting openness in knowledge perspectives and discussion with stakeholders. Another important method to create mutual understanding of work practices is the usage of field visits. The organizations are aware of the risk of knowledge misuse due to the lack of understanding of local circumstances. Field visits increase the cognitive capital of employees as more understanding of work practices and context is gathered.

> '*Talking with farmers about the cocoa beans which you are holding in your hands, is a totally different dimension from working, which you almost forget sitting here behind your computer.*' BLO

The research shows that sharing knowledge with external partners is perceived to be highly necessary in order to work effectively for several reasons. Firstly, the organizations do not have offices or teams in every country. Therefore, they need to rely on networks of partner institutions. Secondly, the work field of the development sector is very dynamic. The three organizations need to be aware of what is going on around them in order to respond appropriately, and therefore recognize the need for a wide and well-informed network of people to help them develop such awareness. Thirdly, the organizations work increasingly with external partners, hence knowledge exchange beyond the organization's boundaries is inevitable. However, explicitly interacting and communicating with others who possess different world views and understandings is not common for everyone. For instance, some employees in the BLO see their work as consisting of knowledge transfer to other countries or as gathering knowledge, rather than building a mutual knowledge base. The lack of openness to each other's work practices impedes the integration of these practices and perspectives into their own work practice.

Although development organizations are motivated to exchange knowledge frequently with external partners, there is a strong tension between sharing as much as possible and 'hoarding knowledge' due to competition for recognition and funding. This competition inhibits knowledge sharing, which makes it difficult to achieve jointly overarching objectives (as articulated for instance in the MDGs). Parties that want to 'plant a flag' usually have a different agenda, which makes collaboration difficult. Moreover, the organizations are willing to share with other parties, but experience difficulties using knowledge from outside in their work practices, particularly in terms of turning learning into policies and practices. Hence, lessons learned and external knowledge remain isolated within projects.

Management vision

Although it is questionable if knowledge is manageable, especially because it is not just an organizational asset, management has an important role within knowledge management strategies. Management communicates – directly or indirectly – what is expected of staff members. It is important that management has one clear vision in their strategy and communicates this frequently throughout the rest of the organization. By having a clear vision of knowledge management, management sends signals that it is on the agenda and deserves priority. Only the NGO does this, with knowledge sharing as part of their vision. Employees see knowledge sharing more as part of their function as there is more and time and space created for knowledge sharing. Moreover, employees experience the benefit of the knowledge management strategy as it contributes to the effectiveness of their daily tasks which are aligned to the core organizational goals.

In the two other organizations this is not the case and knowledge sharing is not integrated into job responsibilities. Most perceive it as additional work to the core tasks which they are

> '*If we lose contact with what's happening outside, then we're cutting our knowledge, we will be sort of isolated. And that is really bad for an organization like us, because we put our value on knowledge; we're a knowledge-based organization. So this is the area that we can't afford to lose*'. MLO

> '*You are not willing to share all your knowledge with others that could take your project and donors in your place. That is a problem*'. MLO

> '*Work activities take place on the basis of competition with each other; hence, there is less interest for knowledge shar-ing, it is a market where we all work for the same donor funding*'. NGO

> *We're not very good at learning and collecting experiences and integrating them in our work activities*' BLO

> '*If the top and the board don't define knowledge management as a priority it will be very difficult for the rest of the group to push it forward to the next level.*' MLO

> '*It is difficult to actively learn and share knowledge when there are no incentives for doing it and when you are rewarded for other activities'.* BLO

evaluated on, and it is left up to the staff members' own responsibility to do something with their own knowledge and with the knowledge of others.

By emphasizing knowledge sharing and the integration of other insights and world views in work activities, it becomes clear for employees what management expects. The reorganization of the NGO stimulates the integration of diverse knowledges into daily practices. Moreover, the NGO recognizes that Southern parties have a better insight into problems in the work field, and therefore involve them directly in policy formulation and work practice. Within the other two organizations, employees are less motivated to share and exchange knowledge, and the perspectives of other, external stakeholders are not explicitly taken into account. So while access to information is facilitated, processes that strengthen mutual understanding tend to be neglected.

Knowledge needs

As discussed earlier, knowledge needs derive from the desire to learn, to take on new ideas and the need to develop skills in order to be effective in assigned roles. This relates to people's *willingness* to share and exchange knowledge. The relevance of CoPs to facilitate knowledge sharing is recognized in each organization. In the MLO as well as the BLO, the importance of connecting employees with differences in experience plays a significant role when looking at the content and operation of CoPs. In both organizations, the possibilities of a mentor-tutor system, in which younger employees are more closely connected to employees with more experience, shapes and facilitates knowledge exchange aimed at improving the knowledge base of the organization. The informal networks within the MLO are perceived to positively influence the exchange of experiences and learning abilities of employees, which generates the discussion about differences in work practices due to differences in surroundings and contexts. Stimulating CoPs makes it possible to learn from, and put questions to, other colleagues, in which the more experienced are able to act as 'mentors' to the new employees. Furthermore, the integration of knowledge 'flows' from outside the organization into the daily work practices, is highly important in all three organizations. This is expressed in the need for more in-depth specialist knowledge and the desire for integrating learning and evaluation methods. Reflection and feedback sessions emphasize the sharing of perspectives and insights of work processes with other stakeholders and stimulates the integration of these perspectives into their own practices.

Attitudes towards knowledge sharing

Attitudes towards knowledge sharing represent the ability and readiness of a person to take the view of another person into account. Being aware of another person's perspectives and views reflects an awareness of diverse 'knowledges'. The research results show that newcomers often displayed a greater enthusiasm to share knowledge, while negative attitudes mainly came from the more experienced employees in the organizations, who perceive

> *'In the past, the vision in the development sector was; we bring the money and the knowledge to the South, but as we realize now more and more, we can learn a lot from the South, that is why we need to search for a more equal relationship'* NGO

> *'One of the things that we do quite well is knowledge sharing with our constituents. Of course that is the nature of our organization, but we are quite bad at turning learning into policies and practices. We share a lot of knowledge outside, but to pull this together into some-thing that is usable again and transform it into policies...We are not doing quite that well.'* MLO

> *'A lot of people are talking about the 'older' employees who do not want to share what they know, maybe because it gives them power and things like that.'* MLO

> *'When I share my knowledge I give others the opportunity to use this knowledge'* BLO

knowledge to be 'powerful'. For instance, within the BLO, some people said that they were nervous about participating in CoPs because it is not clear who 'the boss' is and how the whole activity is coordinated. The lack of willingness to share knowledge among employees was also often informed by the perspective of 'knowledge is power'. Underlying this is an absence of trust within relationships.

A lack of willingness, eagerness and trust blocks out an awareness of multiple knowledges as such awareness builds on openness towards the idea that the creation of knowledge comprises a social-practice component, i.e. that it is a collective activity which depends on people's contextual embedding. Moreover, it appears that where management is not openly presenting the importance of knowledge exchange and knowledge sharing activities, and rewarding employees for such activities, then employees are less likely to form a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing and the relevance of alternative perspectives and world views to their work.

Furthermore, the BLO reflects a fairly 'closed' culture, in which employees are wary of the perspectives of others, quickly perceiving it as criticism, which could hinder their progress through the organizational hierarchy. Conversely, employees from the NGO consider it important to share their knowledge and develop relationships with partners in the South because it contributes to an improvement in their own work improvement and a better understanding of local knowledge. Employees are positive about knowledge activities and are relieved to discover that they are not the only ones who have to cope with a certain problem. The positive attitude towards the sharing of knowledge explicitly reflects regular communication and interaction with stakeholders, in which perspectives and views can be regularly exchanged.

Overall, positive attitudes towards knowledge sharing arise when this is stimulated via knowledge activities, when a vision in the changes and the culture of the organization is created, and when feelings of solidarity and recognition among employees are stimulated. Negative attitudes arise from the perception that 'knowledge is power'.

To sum up, the research demonstrates that different approaches to knowledge management are applied to integrate multiple knowledges in daily practices, although the extent to which such integration is in fact realized varies greatly between the fairly closed, conservative BLO, to the more open MLO, and the NGO, which has strong ties to local beneficiaries and recognizes the relevance of integrating 'multiple knowledges'. It becomes clear that multiple knowledges exist throughout all the different dimensions as demonstrated in figure 1, but the way in which organizations integrate or reject them as relevant to their work varies. In the next section, we discuss how these dimensions might be seen to interrelate, by proposing an integrated framework.

Towards an integrative framework

The most important findings regarding strategy, needs and attitudes are presented in the following framework. Figure 2 illustrates which conditions stimulate knowledge sharing, and which needs and

attitudes require attention in order to share and create awareness of multiple knowledges. Together the findings reveal a number of forces which influence knowledge sharing processes. These forces will be discussed in the following section.
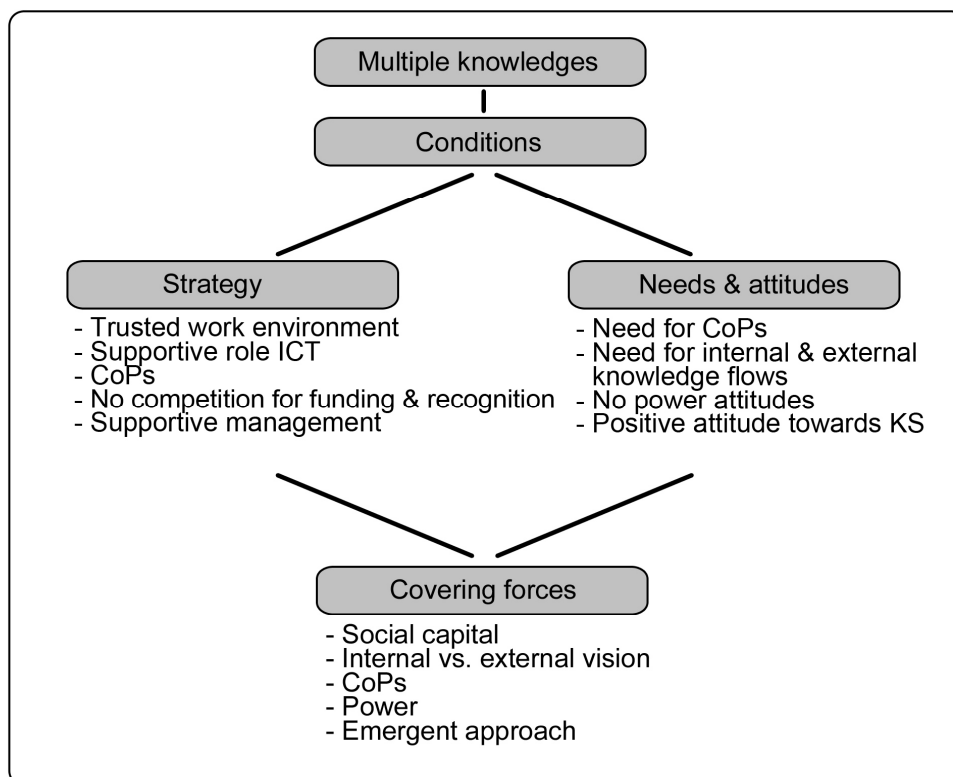

Figure 2. Integrative framework

Social capital

Social capital influences knowledge sharing within an organization directly. The research demonstrates that all three dimensions of social capital play a crucial role in knowledge sharing processes.

Firstly, structural capital provides the personal and informal networks to facilitate knowledge sharing. Within the network-based culture of our cases, and the development sector at large, knowledge sharing is possible when you know whom to contact about what information and knowledge. Hence, access to knowledge, i.e. structural capital, is crucial for doing your job. Knowledge of networks is thus essential job-related knowledge. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) cannot grasp tacit knowledge or contribute to full knowledge transfer, but it can facilitate the creation of structural capital. Secondly, relational capital is necessary in order to share knowledge, as it takes a while to have other people trust you in order to exchange knowledge with them. Employees need to have a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing and trust each other in order to share. The research demonstrates that a lack of trust is a barrier for knowledge exchange.

Thirdly, cognitive capital, i.e. a joint knowledge base, is highly important to knowledge sharing, as access alone is not sufficient. Human interaction is necessary to generate meaning (Thompson & Walsham, 2004). Face-to-face contact stimulates communication of tacit knowledge and makes the local aspect of it visible. The cases we studied are aware of the risk of knowledge misuse due to the lack of understanding of local circumstances. Field visits increase the cognitive capital of employees, as employees that have seen each other have a greater understanding of work practices, and consequently context is gathered. This will increase relational capital, i.e. trust and willingness to share with each other, as well as cognitive and structural capital.

Internal vs. external vision
In defining a knowledge management strategy, all relevant knowledge that is used to achieve the overall goals of the organization should be addressed. As knowledge derives from work practices, one would assume that the inclusion of an organization's stakeholders would benefit their efforts to achieve organizational goals.

Multiple knowledges derive from daily practice, hence exist internally as well, for instance due to differences in years of service, generation and hierarchy. Current theory mainly focuses on a development environment of multiple knowledges, meaning the Southern local context and insights, but has so far overlooked the existence and relevance of the multiple knowledges *within* the organization. Our research shows their significance to internal knowledge sharing processes.

Moreover, the research shows that Southern beneficiaries are the focus of work activities, which indicates that internal knowledge sharing is not perceived as part of the daily work activities. However, the lack of internal knowledge sharing indirectly leads to difficulties for integrating knowledge from external partners, i.e. integrating multiple knowledges into the work practice. Hence, lessons learned and external knowledge remain isolated within projects or persons due to the lack of institutionalization of knowledge management. This prevents knowledge from being applied organization-wide, and relevant knowledges remain isolated and are not integrated into policies.

In short, the research confirms that there is a difference between internal and external knowledge. Organizations share with external partners, but encounter difficulties in using this external knowledge and sharing this internally due to internal barriers and a lack of awareness of internal multiple knowledges. Furthermore, it is important to note that, by focusing only on the knowledge flow from the outside to the inside and not vice versa, a mutual learning approach is missing, which is highly important in order to create an awareness of multiple knowledges. Internal and external knowledge need to be shared and integrated in knowledge management strategies in order to create awareness of multiple knowledges.

Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Communities of Practice (CoPs) can contribute to knowledge sharing as they provide a basis for an awareness of each others' perspectives and insights into work processes, and the integration of these perspectives into their own practices. They have a particular value when an organization has to deal with multiple knowledges, when there are different interpretive frameworks, and when there is a need to draw on different (local) information and knowledge (Becker, 2001). By creating a supportive environment for CoPs, in which they have autonomy, management stimulates the integration of multiple knowledges in the daily practices.

The need for CoPs in order to exchange knowledge is apparent in each organization. The driver to participate in a CoP comes primarily from internal motives, personal reasons and attitudes towards knowledge sharing (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). Furthermore, CoPs encourage the development of all three dimensions of social capital, which stimulates knowledge sharing.

Although CoPs are very important in sharing knowledge, the research reveals two significant barriers for participation in CoPs. The first barrier is that 'power' issues come into play, because sometimes employees are overly calculating in terms of which knowledge to share and which knowledge not to share. The second barrier is that CoPs do not seem to create an immediate value, and are thus perceived as (overly) time-consuming, without adequate stimuli for staff members to stay actively involved.

Power

The research results confirm the fact that power and knowledge are closely interrelated. Power is something which is produced and reproduced within and through the dynamics of evolving social relationships (Hislop, 2005). Power issues hamper knowledge sharing in our cases of organizations from three different dimensions.

Firstly, on an individual level it appears that some employees are reluctant to share because they are afraid of what may happen if they share; people feel they can 'lose their power', or are afraid of someone else taking their place. A reluctance to sharing knowledge may be due to concerns that one is giving away what makes one powerful, or from a desire to prevent certain individuals/groups gaining access to one's knowledge (Hislop, 2005). This aspect influences the way people deal with each other and whether they share their knowledge.

Secondly, on a more organizational level it appears that power issues also hamper knowledge sharing. Organizations have divergent interests which can lead to conflicts and political struggles. Some parties want to 'plant a flag' and usually have a different agenda, which makes collaboration challenging. In this sense, competition is an important hindering factor. The research demonstrates that development organizations are motivated to exchange knowledge frequently with partner

organizations, but there is a strong tension between sharing as much as possible and protecting knowledge due to competition for funding and recognition.

Thirdly, fundamental power issues in the donor-recipient relationship hamper knowledge sharing. The research demonstrates that it is still often the donor in the North who decides what happens. This type of donor-recipient relationship prevents Southern input from being integrated in, for instance, strategy formulation and policy decisions. Currently, Northern organizations often take initiatives and have ownership. The recipients are not always in a position to contribute different insights, perspectives and worldviews, as they are mostly dependent on the goodwill and resources of the donor. Overall, while all organizations are aware of the limitations of this situation and indicate their willingness to overcome them, the donor still has a significant influence on what happens, which priorities are set, and which knowledges are included.

Emergent approach

Although it is questionable whether knowledge itself is manageable, this research demonstrates that management plays an important role in formulating and implementing a knowledge management strategy to guide organizational knowledge *processes*. Even though management may not be actively involved in learning processes and knowledge management initiatives, they communicate – directly or indirectly – what is expected of staff members (Ramalingam, 2005; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001). Research shows that management following an emergent approach regarding knowledge management, in which strategies are focused on the social dynamics between organizational members, and the nature of their daily tasks, stimulates knowledge sharing (Van den Hooff & Huysman, 2009). The research indicates that, at the same time, a lack of top-down initiatives leads to incoherent and non-institutionalized knowledge management initiatives. Within the emergent approach the role of managers is on the periphery, providing opportunities for people to exchange knowledge, fulfilling a more facilitating role (Huysman & De Wit, 2004).

Management which is devoted to implementing knowledge management and willing to engage employees in this process is essential for effective knowledge management (Kalseth & Cummings, 2001). It is important that management not only implements tools, but also has a clear vision which is frequently communicated throughout the rest of the organization. Moreover, by recognizing and rewarding knowledge sharing behaviours directly, a strong signal is sent to employees that the organization values knowledge sharing; employees are more likely to see sharing as integrated in the daily practices for which they are evaluated.

The emergent approach uses a process perspective of knowledge. By focusing on the processes that support people in their pursuit, as well as internalization and application, of knowledge to their business practice, knowledge is understood as multi-layered and multi-faceted. This perspective covers the idea of context dependency, which means that the specific context in which knowledge is localized is taken into account; hence, awareness of multiple knowledges is created. If management

does not openly present the importance of knowledge exchange and knowledge sharing activities, then employees are less likely to form a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing, which, in turn, does not reflect the view that the perspective of another person is taken into account. However, by creating a supportive environment for participation in CoPs, undertaking field visits, and fostering cooperation and dialogue, management stimulates the integration of multiple knowledges into daily practices, where insights and experiences can be exchanged, and more relevant development solutions can be sought with, and for, development recipients.

Practical implications

This research has several practical implications. The development sector can be characterized as a knowledge-intensive sector with many stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and insights. The aim of the research is to provide an insight into whether and how development organizations integrate these multiple knowledges into their knowledge management strategies. The results reveal five forces which affect knowledge sharing within development organizations. These forces present the main points of attention for the management of organizations when developing knowledge management strategies that contribute to the integration of multiple knowledges into knowledge-sharing processes.

In addition to these strategies, management needs to be aware of the fact that multiple knowledges are present in every layer of the internal organization as well as its external environment. In other words, not only the differences in knowledge between the South and the North are important, but internally as well it is important to be aware of differences in knowledge between, for instance, different generations, people of different hierarchical status, or years of tenure. A mentoring strategy could decrease the impact of these divides, strengthening for instance newcomers' social capital through targeted collaboration with more experienced colleagues.

The lack of internal knowledge sharing indirectly leads to difficulties in integrating knowledge from external partners into the work practice. All organizations demonstrate difficulties in turning learning into practices. As internal knowledge sharing is not institutionalized, learned lessons remain isolated within projects or persons. Therefore, multiple knowledges also remain isolated and are not integrated into policies and, in the long run, the organizations' development impact is weakened.

To sum up, the research clearly demonstrates that multiple knowledges exist throughout all the layers of the organization, although awareness and integration thereof is highly divergent. If organizations aim to become more responsive to the needs of the recipients of development aid, the different organizational dimensions which strengthen awareness and the integration of multiple knowledges deserve management attention.

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Sarah Cummings, Communications Coordinator
IKM Emergent
Context International Cooperation
Cornelis Houtmanstraat 15
3572 LT Utrecht
The Netherlands

phone: + 31 30 2737508
fax: + 31 30 2737509
email: sarah@ikmemergent.net

www.ikmemergent.net
http://thegiraffe.wordpress.com
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