IKM Summaries

Communicating information and knowledge management: challenges and approaches. IKM Emergent workshop at Healthlink Worldwide, London, on 22-23 October 2007

We saw some challenges, but sense that we need to be positive about them. We need to address existing cultural issues around barriers to learning and reflection. We need to find champions, but it is not clear who those champions might be. We need to see mainstreaming as a process not just a product, there need to be new views, attitudes and behaviours, and there also needs to be cross-organizational effort. (Workshop participant)

It is not so much a communication strategy as an influencing strategy, which the communication strategy will fall out of. We need to identify the areas where the programme would most like to have an influence and through that come a set of changes. So who are the actors that we would have the most influence on? And beyond that there may be a wider group in the sector that we want to communicate with. (Workshop participant)

The IKM Emergent Research Programme held an exploratory two-day workshop in October 2007 to look at change processes within the development sector and the challenges involved, and to help inform the development of its communication strategy. IKM Emergent advocates that by using knowledge more effectively, particularly knowledge produced in the South, working practices will be better informed and thus bring about more effective and sustainable development. Embedding this idea in the development sector requires that IKM Emergent engages with many different stakeholders, and to develop a series of tailored messages.

This workshop brought together 15 information professionals who drew on their wealth of experience from a combined total of over 260 years working in development to enter into lively discussions, initiated by a series of prepared case studies and accompanying questions, in which they explored a range of viewpoints and opinions. Some key ideas around the role of knowledge sharing for development emerged from the workshop and some potentially major challenges were explored.

One key idea was that rather than a single strand of knowledge, there are multiple knowledges developed by different stakeholders within a given project or programme and that knowledge management is about engaging with all these knowledges. Another was the role of human relationships in knowledge sharing for development and the differences between those based on trust and on mistrust.

Among the anticipated challenges for IKM Emergent, participants used documented examples from past development experience to consider meaningful ways of measuring the impact and effectiveness of a programme, and to identify some of the areas for consideration when seeking to mainstream an issue within development. From discussions around this emerged the need to find champions within the development sector who can offer a range of communication skills and techniques that will be important in influencing different audience groups. Space was also created during the workshop to identify some of those key audiences and, in particular, how the communication strategy might be made iterative and experimental. Once group of participants conducted an initial key stakeholder analysis, by first mapping all the stakeholders for IKM Emergent and from there identifying the five key stakeholders and then used a tool to gauge what their interest, influence and attitude to the programme might be. Another group examined key target groups of policy advisers and senior

programme managers. These primary audiences had been identified in the draft communication strategy for IKM Emergent.

Drawing on their many years of experience, workshop participants acknowledged the relevance of IKM Emergent in seeking to raise awareness of the importance of knowledge to better inform development policy and practice; of the need for improved Southern-produced knowledge and information on development related issues; and of the need to provide a more holistic view of development discourse in the North and the South.

The workshop made progress towards each of its objectives. A number of current management tools and processes were identified and their implications for IKM Emergent were discussed. The workshop also experimented with a number of tools to help it analyse the environment that IKM Emergent is seeking to change. Several problem areas were identified: issues of relationships, accountability and the difficulties of getting the 'development juggernaut' to accept and mainstream the need for change in areas such as disability. These discussions illustrated the complexity of the sector and the way in which changes to one aspect, in this case the handling of multiple knowledges, will by influenced by and in turn need to influence other aspects of organizational behaviour which would not immediately appear to be connected.

On shaping the communications strategy for IKM Emergent, time was spent on seeking to identify those who most need to be influenced in order to bring about a change in the sector. This discussion was far from completed. However the importance of champions, people who have the motivation, necessary skills and know the most suitable methods of communicating with particular audience groups, was very clear. From this, and an associated need to identify information products which can first reach and then support such champions, a communications strategy can be developed. However, another conclusion was that nothing is static and that these key audiences and information products may need to be re-visited during the lifetime of IKM Emergent as the ideas it promotes become more widely understood within the development sector and embedded in practice.

About this IKM Summary

This *IKM Summary* provides an overview of the following *IKM Working Paper*Deepthi Wickremasinghe (2008) Communicating information and knowledge management: challenges and approaches. IKM Emergent workshop at Healthlink Worldwide, London, on 22-23 October 2007. *IKM Working Paper* No. 2, April 2008, 29pp.

http://wiki.ikmemergent.net/files/080426-ikm-working-paper-2-communicating-information-and-knowledge-management.pdf

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