

Knowledge Management for Development Journal

Call for Papers

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Collaborative learning: the role of organisational knowledge management strategies¹

The Knowledge Management for Development Journal (KM4D Journal) is an open access, peer-reviewed community based journal on knowledge management for development² – for and by development practitioners, researchers and policymakers. The journal is closely related to the KM4Dev community of practice [www.km4dev.org], and is openly available at www.km4dev.org/journal.

Volume 4, Issue 2, to be published in December 2008, will focus on organisational knowledge management strategies and their role in facilitating learning among and between Northern and Southern partners. Many development organisations have knowledge management and/or learning strategies but these are often not known outside the organisation itself. Where these strategies have been shared outside the organisation, they have been publicised informally and not widely distributed to a broader public. Learning about how other organisations are undertaking knowledge management is a way to hold up a mirror to our own practice and experience.

Guest Editors comprise: Ewen Le Borgne, Catherine Vaillancourt-Laflamme and Ivan Kulis, working with Chief Editor, Sarah Cummings. This issue will be produced in the context of the IKM Emergent Research Programme [www.ikmemergent.net].

Rationale

Knowledge and learning strategies in development organizations need to be clearly and realistically positioned within the broader dynamics of organizational life, as well as in the context of international development efforts as a whole. Perhaps most challenging, but equally unavoidable, is the need to locate efforts in relation to the specific knowledge and learning needs of organizations and beneficiaries in the South, such that the idea of knowledge transfer to the South is increasingly replaced by learning with and from the South (Ramalingam 2005: 38).

A key assumption underlying this issue's rationale is that mutual learning between Northern and Southern stakeholders is an important success factor, not only for knowledge strategies, but also for development processes overall. Therefore strategies aimed at facilitating mutual learning need to be woven into the very fabric of the development organization. However, it is not clear how knowledge strategies have so far contributed to mutual learning and, if they have, what indicators they have used to account for this.

Indeed,

Organizations appear to place a greater emphasis on the potential of knowledge management rather than on the tangible benefits it has already achieved. This may be driven by necessity – a result of the specific stage of the knowledge programmes in question, or it may be due to a lack of (monitoring and evaluation) (Ramalingam 2005: 25).

One of the reasons for the focus on the potential of knowledge strategies is probably that they are relatively new and the frameworks and mechanisms needed to develop an evidence-base have not yet been fully developed, tested or publicised. There is, therefore, a need for *evidence-based* answers to the question of what knowledge and learning strategies are achieving in terms of organizational *and* development impact. In order to do this, impact studies need to move away from exogenous indicators focused on accountability and rather explore such issues as inclusiveness, responsiveness, mutual learning and epistemic diversity. To do this, new frameworks and mechanisms are needed.

This issue

Many development organisations have elaborated knowledge management and learning strategies that are – implicitly or explicitly – designed to strengthen Southern counterparts' abilities to respond more effectively to their daily contingencies, and participate more equally in decision-making processes. In reality however this is rarely realized, and knowledge strategies contribute primarily to the organization's internal knowledge capacities rather than to those of their counterparts or to the capacity of handling knowledge together. Where a Southern component is explicitly included, this still more often provides knowledge benefits to donors or development organizations than to the Southern development partners themselves. Indeed, their participation often proves instrumental rather than being driven by effective participation of all stakeholders in the development process.

This issue of the journal aims to explore how knowledge strategies within development organisations are designed. It will particularly focus on whether and how the Southern component is included in KM strategies, and what knowledge benefits these strategies comprise for different development stakeholders (donors, development organizations, Southern development partners, etc.). Moreover, the issue aims to provide insight into how KM strategies (intend to) contribute to development goals.

This issue of the journal aims to showcase studies of knowledge management for strategies, and how these facilitate and catalyse reciprocal learning among different types of development organisations – NGOs, bilateral and multilateral organisations, community-based organisations, etc. – in different locations, both North and South.

We invite studies of individual organisations but also particularly welcome research that compares the knowledge management strategies of a variety of different organisations. Papers in this issue should address one or more of the following issues:

- What are the main objectives of explicit knowledge management activities in multilateral, bilateral and non-government development organizations? How are these motivated, and are they achieved?
- What differences and trends can be identified in terms of the phases and generations of knowledge management approaches and implementations, between different types of organizations, and how might these be explained? [For a more detailed discussion of this, please consult Ferguson *et al.* 2008]
- Are there any differences between KM interventions in Northern and Southern-based development organisations? If so, which ones, and why?
- How is KM strategy instrumental in facilitating learning, both *from* and *with* partners?
- To what extent are knowledge management for development strategies aligned to and supportive of other organizational processes and how can this be improved?
- How do different types of development organizations (formal institutions, community-based organisations, networks and communities, etc.) cultivate knowledge creation, knowledge sharing and knowledge leveraging?

Authors are encouraged to structure their papers according to a loose template, in order to allow for cross-organisational comparison. The proposed structure below should further provide a consistent analysis framework that allows comparing the various studies while leaving room to highlight each organisation's specific approach. However, we do not aim to be prescriptive and papers with differing structures can also be accepted for the journal.

Proposed structure for description of individual development organisations' knowledge and learning strategies

1. Theory and/or perspective

What are the theoretical premises from which the approach is derived? In the case where the approach is not based on a specific theory, what perspective or philosophy drives the approach (e.g. a business-driven approach to maximise competitive edge, an ICT-driven approach aimed knowledge transfer, the conception of an organisation as a 'learning organisation', etc.)? How might the theories or perspectives be improved?

2. Objective

What are the main objectives – stated and implicit – of the knowledge management / learning approach? Are these internally or externally focused? (How) do they align with the core organizational development goals? How are the knowledge needs of Southern parties (partners, beneficiaries, field offices) taken into account?

3. Form or structure of the approach

What methodology has been used to develop the knowledge strategy? What structure does the strategy follow? What tools and approaches are being employed to implement it and how were they selected? How effective are these, and how is this tested?

4. *Reciprocal learning and integration of multiple perspectives (see below)*

To what extent does the knowledge or learning strategy pay attention (both in the strategy document and in practice) to various ‘knowledges’ that may affect the organisation? (How) is reciprocal learning achieved?

5. *Organizational and development impact of multiple perspectives and cross-partner learning*

How have multiple knowledges impacted the organisation and its partner(s)? Have these allowed for more innovation (for example, in terms of launching new initiatives, or in building additional organizational capabilities)? Or do epistemic and cognitive differences entail negative consequences on the organisation, leading to suspension of reciprocal learning? What other obstacles have been encountered in terms of promoting learning with partners?

6. *Advantages and drawbacks*

Judging from experience with implementing the strategy, what are the theoretical and practical advantages and drawbacks of the approach (and to a lesser extent what opportunities or issues has it brought forward)?

7. *Sources used*

What sources of inspiration (theories, strategies, frameworks, exercises, books/articles) have helped develop the knowledge management or learning approach studied?

In particular, we would like to invite potential authors to consider the organisation that they are studying in the light of what we consider to be ‘multiple knowledge variables’. These knowledge variables may have an impact on the way knowledge processes (from creation through sharing to application) are experienced and have the potential to lead to a greater empowerment of development actors.

Among these knowledge variables are: gender; generation and/or seniority in the organisation; worldview based on a specific belief system (referred to in IKM Emergent as *cosmovision*, such as a religion or a particular ideology); social class; proximity to the field or headquarters; working function; educational background; language; specific organisational culture, systemic knowledge. Any other variable felt as relevant can be included in the studies.

About the Guest Editors

Ewen Le Borgne is a project officer at IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, where he works on a number of projects in West Africa and Ethiopia, specifically on communication, learning and knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation activities.

Catherine Vaillancourt-Laflamme is Youth Employment Knowledge Sharing Technical Officer at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva.

Ivan Kulis is Programme Officer, KM4Dev at European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM); Researcher, United Nations University-MERIT (UNU-MERIT). His

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Submissions deadlines

Submission deadline for the title and abstract	15 September 2008
Acceptance of paper proposal	30 September 2008
Submission of paper	31 October 2008
Peer-review completed	15 November 2008
Final version of paper submitted	10 December 2008
(e)-publication date	31 December 2008

If you would like to submit a paper, or be actively involved in this initiative in any other way, please send your abstract (minimum one paragraph – maximum one page) or your message by email to km4dj-editors@dgroups.org

Guidelines for authors are available on the journal website:

<http://www.km4dev.org/journal/index.php/km4dj/about>

References

- Julie E. Ferguson, Kingo Mchombu and Sarah Cummings (2008) *Management of knowledge for development: meta-review and scoping study*. IKM Working Paper No. 1, April 2008, 45pp. <http://ikmemergent.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/080421-ikm-working-paper-no1-meta-review-and-scoping-study-final.pdf>
- Ramalingam, Ben (2005) *Implementing knowledge strategies: lessons from international development agencies*. Working Paper 244, ODI: London
<http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/publications/Documents/WP244.pdf>

¹ Much of the text of this ‘Call for Papers’ is derived from Ferguson, Mchombu and Cummings 2008

² All articles published in the journal must have a *knowledge management* component and relate to *international development*. Development in this specific context relates to such topics as aid/assistance to developing countries, international cooperation and poverty alleviation (full definition below). Examples of sub-sectors are health, agriculture, education, gender empowerment, policy issues, and so forth.

Development is understood to be a process involving a broad palette of human factors, concerned with individual people living in very different conditions across the world. As such, development efforts are aimed at strengthening people's abilities to respond to the challenges they encounter in their environment at individual, family, community and wider societal levels. It is a process of empowerment of marginalized people, which involves the transfer, development and leveraging of knowledge in such a way that they are better informed of their personal development possibilities and livelihood opportunities, and better equipped to capitalize on these. From this perspective, development initiatives can succeed only if there is a thorough understanding of the cultural and socio-economic environment of the intended beneficiaries: development depends to a large extent on how well knowledge of these factors is applied.