

KM / KS: Opening Doors to a World of Opportunities

IMPLEMENTING A KNOWLEDGE CULTURE WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION WILL DRIVE KNOWLEDGE SHARING, LEAD TO BETTER DECISIONS, AND DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE YOU BRING.

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Having worked outside of libraries much of my career, I've learned first-hand how our librarian/information professional skill set can be strengthened and expanded to ensure we are relevant and essential and contribute to the return on investment (ROI) of our organizations or clients. As we shed or expand our more traditional roles and assume new ones, we are beginning to be seen as part of the solution rather than part of the overhead.

Knowledge services is a logical extension of our existing skill set and positions us to move into the parallel world of knowledge management and knowledge services (KM/KS). Sadly, most organizations do not look to librarians when they consider knowledge services

initiatives. IT folks are being asked to do this work, even though we already know how to do it or can ramp up our current skill set or competencies to tackle it.

By performing knowledge services, we can become invaluable to our organizations and clients and contribute positively to the bottom line. We can demonstrate our value and relevance by being results-oriented and opportunity-focused and turning tacit information (the stuff that lives in people's heads) into strategic, reusable knowledge that creates value through sharing.

What is Knowledge Services?

One major issue that increasingly challenges organizations and business and enterprise leaders is the management of

intellectual capital. Every day, employees leave organizations, taking their "brain trust" with them. As Jonathan Spira (2006) put it, "With the dramatic shift from an industrial to a knowledge economy during the last 25 years, a company's success is predicated on being able to tap into its biggest asset—the knowledge of its employees."

That is where KM/KS comes in. What is knowledge services? Knowledge services is the act of putting knowledge management to work—in effect, it's the practical side of knowledge management. Knowledge services is an enterprise-wide service delivery function that enables companies and organizations to achieve excellence, both through the performance of internal staff and through interactions with

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external customers.

KM/KS guru Guy St. Clair defines knowledge services as "... an approach to the management of intellectual capital that converges information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning into a single enterprise-wide discipline. Its purpose is to ensure the highest levels of knowledge sharing within the organization in which knowledge services is practiced." (2016)

Implementing Knowledge Services

As with any such initiative, implementing knowledge services requires putting a foundation in place. This foundation should include, at a minimum, the following:

- clear objectives that you communicate to management to obtain their support;
- a team in place that includes senior management (to model behavior, provide support, and reward participation);
- a sense of urgency, with a timeline, milestones, assignments, and accountability; and
- sufficient human, financial, and technological resources.

Once you have this foundation in place, you are ready to move on to the next step: the knowledge services audit. The knowledge services audit is an integral part of the KM/KS strategy. Guy St. Clair (2016) describes the KS audit as combining "the methodologies of the standard needs analysis (asking what knowledge resources and servic-

es community of practice participants require to do their work), the information audit (which determines how knowledge assets are actually used), and the knowledge audit (which looks at knowledge assets, how they are produced, and by whom)."

The information collected in the audit provides a snapshot of the knowledge culture (the quality of knowledge developed and shared in the organization) and measures the organization's knowledge-sharing "health." Knowledge services audit findings provide both an "opportunity focus" and a "results focus" (to use Peter Drucker's descriptions) for the knowledge strategy team and for organizational management. It's a foundation or starting point.

Having conducted your KS audit, you can now begin to establish a knowledge strategy. A knowledge strategy brings together the many "discrete disciplines" working with information, knowledge,

and strategic learning. The goals of developing a knowledge strategy are to—

- utilize organizational knowledge/ intellectual capital in support of the organizational mission;
- enable all stakeholders to focus on the organization's purpose, business, and values;
- provide a blueprint for action (aka a "knowledge roadmap");
- identify milestones for monitoring achievements in knowledge development, knowledge sharing, and knowledge utilization and assess knowledge initiatives; and
- build awareness—that is, "open the discussion" so more people can connect with and participate in the organization as a knowledge culture.

As the knowledge strategy in your organization begins to take hold, the intellectual capital that lives in employees' heads becomes an organizational asset that can be codified and thus reproduced and shared. You can then begin to use social media and technology to drive knowledge sharing so it becomes an accepted and normal part of your organization's culture.

For some employees, this phase can lead to feelings of loss of control, more

Knowledge Audit Strategy: Reactive > Proactive > Interactive/Integrated

	Needs Assessment	Information Audit	Knowledge Audit
How to do what I'm doing better (reactive)	x	x	x
Opportunities to be proactive		x	x
Opportunities to be integrated and affect culture			x

Source: The Knowledge Audit: Evaluating Intellectual Capital, SLA Knowledge Management Certificate Course, SMR International (Guy St. Clair, Dale Stanley, and Deborah Hunt)

(and possibly unwanted) visibility and/or responsibility, or a diminution of the “expertise” that makes them feel valued and secure in the organization.

As knowledge strategists, we have both an opportunity and responsibility to enable a new and “accepting” frame of reference for employees with respect

to social media utilization, value network analysis, and knowledge sharing. We can also leverage the management team we created as part of our

Becoming a Knowledge Strategist

Special librarians/information professionals possess a unique understanding of organizational knowledge needs because we work across organizations at many levels. We can connect knowledge services to an organization’s mission, vision, and values. We are passionate about what we do and imbued with intellectual curiosity and generosity.

We know that organizational success is more readily achieved through the development, implementation, and utilization of a knowledge culture. The question we must ask ourselves is this: Are we going to sit on the sidelines, or are we going to be part of the action?

If your answer is the latter, you don’t need to do this alone. You can be part of a team or even the team leader, but by all means, be part of KM/KS in your organization. Here are just some of the roles you might take on in a KM/KS initiative: strategic knowledge professional, knowledge facilitator/consultant/in-house expert, knowledge coach, or knowledge thought leader.

Are you prepared to be the knowledge strategist—the knowledge thought leader—for the company or organization in which you are employed. If so, why? If not, why not?

Think big and lead the change, or at least be part of it. Change is inevitable. Seize the opportunity to make a difference in the knowledge services process at your organization or with your clients.

Invest in Your Career Success

For most of us, moving to a parallel career in our profession requires a

willingness to invest in ourselves—financially, of course, but also in terms of effort and time. Many of my colleagues bemoan the fact that their employers do not subsidize their professional development or pay their expenses to attend conferences.

For most of my career, I was self-employed or worked for employers who paid little (if anything) toward my career development. I took it upon myself, as a professional, to invest in myself. That is how I became a certified Enterprise Content Management Practitioner. I saw a gap in my skill set, and I filled it.

Remember, you may lose your current job next year, next month, or even next week, so you want to be sure you are always armed with the skills employers want and need and are willing to pay generously to acquire.

The Librarian’s Skillbook: 51 Essential Skills for Information Professionals (which I co-authored with David Grossman) outlines six sure-fire strategies for acquiring and developing new skills: reading; attending classes, webinars, and workshops (including SLA’s Knowledge Management/Knowledge Services Certificate Program classes); writing and blogging; networking; mentoring; and participating in volunteer and mid-career internship opportunities.

The SLA Competencies and KM/KS

I was very excited last year when the revised SLA Competencies for Information Professionals were published. They are an invaluable

resource for articulating our skill sets and competencies to employers and serve as a checklist for professional development. If you have not read them, I encourage you to do so and put them into action in your career.

The SLA Competencies provide an excellent roadmap to follow as we develop our skill sets to be indispensable to our organizations. Four of the six “Core Competencies” section headings contain the word *knowledge*, and the introduction to the competencies makes a compelling case for special librarians as leaders of knowledge management and knowledge services:

Data, information, and knowledge are critical to the functioning of modern organizations and today’s society. . . More and more work is knowledge work, and many professionals of all types have responsibility for elements of knowledge and information management.

Establishing a knowledge culture is a long process, but one that will bring great success to the organization and spotlight the rightful place of nimble, ever-learning librarians and information professionals whose expertise and influence lead to change for the better. As we express our value-add to our organizations or clients and demonstrate expertise and value, they will turn to us as the experts who connect them to what they need and see us as essential to the success of the organization. **SLA**

The KM/KS team must plan a communications strategy to bring everyone up to speed, answer questions, and quell fears that often surround change.

KM/KS foundation to model knowledge-sharing behavior and provide incentives for participation.

Measuring Success

The next step in the implementation process is to develop a KS measurement strategy to ensure that the value of knowledge in your organization's operational and functional structure is quantified and recognized. The types of measures include input, process, output, and outcome.

A good place to start is to state the objective and purpose of the measurement effort: to identify and codify the central value proposition for knowledge services. Be sure to ask two questions for every metrics development activity. Identify who will be receiving the information (and making decisions based on the metrics) and what these people want or need to know.

Implementing and measuring the success of a KM/KS initiative will introduce changes in your organization's culture and processes. In my experience, a shift in organizational culture is often the biggest obstacle to success for any initiative. Change is hard, we are creatures of habit, and we often resist change because it means we have to go outside our comfort zone, learn new things, and perhaps expose our resistance to change.

This is where sponsors and champions are invaluable. Choose those who have the power and can communicate the changes desired, model the behavior, and reward those who adopt the new initiative. You'll also want to identify "change agents" who will be the early adopters and bring along fence-sitters and those resistant to change.

Good communication is imperative

to successful change. The KM/KS team must plan a communications strategy to bring everyone up to speed, answer questions, and quell fears that often surround change.

"Change, change management, and change are all part of the KD/KS/KU process," says Guy St. Clair (2016). "If managed properly and with an eye toward long-term improvement, change is desirable as well. This recognition continues and will continue to be vital to how the organization's knowledge strategists—and the people for whom knowledge services is delivered—succeed."

Putting KS in Context

When discussing knowledge services with sponsors, champions, and colleagues, I characterize it as "putting knowledge management to work," or the practical side of knowledge management. Just as you cannot manage love or friendship, you cannot manage knowledge, but you can put knowledge to work.

Success comes most readily to organizations that have the best access to organized, strategic knowledge and know how to wield it most effectively. These advantages lead to contextual decision making, accelerated innovation, strengthened research, and excellence in knowledge asset management. We, as knowledge strategists, can (and should) be the knowledge thought leaders in our organizations. **SLA**

REFERENCES

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