

# Glossary of Knowledge Management

by Olivier Serrat

The knowledge management discipline can be cryptic. These *Knowledge Solutions* define its most common concepts in simple terms.

## **Communities of practice**

Networks of people who work on similar processes or in similar disciplines and who come together to develop and share their knowledge in that field for the benefit of both themselves and their organization. Communities of practice may be created formally or informally, and members can interact online or in person.

## **Core knowledge activities**

Knowledge activities that have been identified as most widely used by an organization, often also called the knowledge life cycle or the knowledge value chain. They are to identify, create, store, share, and use knowledge, often in a two-way exchange. Two important requirements have to be fulfilled to achieve improvements from these activities: (i) the activities should be aligned or integrated into business processes; and (ii) the activities should be balanced in accordance with the specificities of each process and organization. A knowledge management solution should not focus only on one or two activities in isolation.

## **Data**

Discrete and objective facts, measurements, or observations that can be analyzed to generate information.

## **Explicit knowledge**

Knowledge that can be codified in formal, systematic language and shared in discussion or writing. Examples include a telephone directory, an instruction manual, or a report of research findings.

## **Information**

Data that have been categorized, analyzed, summarized, and placed in context in a form that has structure and meaning.

## **Information management**

The management of an organization's information resources to improve performance. Information management underpins knowledge management, as people derive knowledge from information.

### **Information technology**

A term encompassing the physical elements of computing—including servers, networks, and desktop computing—that enable digital information to be identified, created, stored, shared, and used.

### **Intellectual capital**

The value, or potential value, of an organization’s intellectual assets (or knowledge products and services). Attempts to place a financial value on knowledge often define intellectual capital as the combination of human, structural, and technological capital.

### **Know-how**

Skill or capability derived from knowledge and experience.

### **Knowledge**

A combination of data and information, to which is added expert opinion, skills, and experience, resulting in a valuable asset that aids decision making. In organizational terms, knowledge is generally thought of as being know-how, applied information, information with judgment, or the capacity for effective action. Knowledge may be tacit, explicit, individual, and/or collective. It is intrinsically linked to people.

### **Knowledge assets**

The parts of an organization’s intangible assets that relate specifically to knowledge such as know-how, good practices, and intellectual property. Knowledge assets (or products and services) are categorized as human (people, teams, networks, and communities), structural (the codified knowledge that can be found in business processes), and technological (the technologies that support knowledge sharing such as databases and intranets). By understanding the knowledge assets it possesses, an organization can use them to better effect and identify what gaps may exist.

### **Knowledge audit**

Systematic identification and analysis of an organization’s knowledge needs, resources, flows, gaps, uses, and users. A knowledge audit usually includes a review of people-based knowledge, capability, and skills as well as information. It also examines critically an organization’s values, vision, culture, and skills from the perspective of its knowledge needs.

### **Knowledge base**

An organized structure that facilitates the storage of data, information, and knowledge to be retrieved in support of a knowledge management process.

### **Knowledge economy**

An economy in which knowledge plays a dominant part in the creation of wealth. The four pillars of a knowledge economy framework are: (i) an economic incentive and institutional regime that provides good economic policies and institutions that permit efficient mobilization and allocation of resources and stimulate creativity and incentives for the efficient creation, dissemination, and use of existing knowledge; (ii) educated and skilled workers who can continuously upgrade and adapt their skills to efficiently create and use knowledge; (iii) an effective innovation system of firms, research centers, universities, consultants, and other organizations that can keep up with the knowledge revolution and tap into the growing stock of global knowledge and assimilate and adapt it to local needs; and (iv) a modern and adequate information infrastructure that can facilitate the effective communication, dissemination, and processing of information and knowledge.

### **Knowledge flows**

The ways in which knowledge moves around, and into and out of, an organization.

### **Knowledge harvesting**

A set of methods and techniques for making tacit knowledge more explicit so that it can be shared more easily.

### **Knowledge management**

The explicit and systematic management of processes enabling vital individual and collective knowledge resources to be identified, created, stored, shared, and used for benefit. Its practical expression is the fusion of information management and organizational learning.

### **Knowledge management tools**

The methods and techniques that are used to support or deliver practical knowledge management. These can be either information technology systems, e.g., databases, intranets, extranets, and portals; methodologies; or human networks, e.g., communities of practice.

### **Knowledge management strategy**

A detailed plan that outlines how an organization intends to implement knowledge management principles and practices to achieve organizational objectives.

### **Knowledge manager**

A role with operational and developmental responsibility for implementing and reinforcing knowledge management principles and practices. Often acts as central owner of taxonomies and content standards and knowledge processes. Works to promote access to information, intelligence support, expertise, and good practices.

### **Knowledge worker**

A staff member whose role relies on his or her ability to find, synthesize, communicate, and apply knowledge.

### **Learning organization**

An organization skilled at identifying, creating, storing, sharing, and using knowledge, and then modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge.

### **Lessons learned**

Concise descriptions of knowledge derived from experience that can be communicated through methods and techniques, such as storytelling and debriefing or summarized in databases. These lessons often reflect on what was done right, what one might do differently, and how one might improve processes to be more effective in the future.

### **Mentoring**

A one-to-one learning relationship in which a senior staff member of an organization is assigned to support the development of a newer or more junior staff member by sharing his or her knowledge and wisdom.

### **Organizational culture**

The specific collection of values and norms shared by individuals and groups in an organization that controls the way they interact with one another and with people outside the organization.

### **Storytelling**

The use of stories as a way of sharing knowledge and helping learning in an organization. Stories can describe complicated issues, explain events, communicate lessons, and/or bring about cultural change.

### **Tacit knowledge**

The personalized knowledge that people carry in their heads. Tacit knowledge is more difficult to formalize and communicate than explicit knowledge. It can be shared through discussion, storytelling, and personal interactions. There are two dimensions to tacit knowledge: (i) a technical dimension, which encompasses the kind of informal

personal skills or crafts often referred to as know-how; and (ii) a cognitive dimension, which consists of beliefs, ideals, values, schemata, and mental models that are ingrained in individuals and often taken for granted.

### Further Reading

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### For further information

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#### Asian Development Bank

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