

Personal Knowledge Management: a DIY Guide to Knowledge Management – Part 2

By Patrick Lambe

In last month's article we looked at some fairly simple things you can do with your team to make yourselves more effective in managing knowledge – without the aid of professional knowledge managers or consultants. In fact, you'll be able to make better use of these professionals for bigger things, once you've sorted the more basic things out.

In this article, we're going to focus more narrowly on developing the knowledge skills that every knowledge worker now needs to have. It's a new approach, it's only been around for about two years, and it's called personal knowledge management. If you like acronyms, and, like me, have strict word limits, you can call it PKM.

Most people treat PKM as if it's a full suite of skills that everybody now needs to have: skills like identifying sources of knowledge, searching, navigating, analyzing, organizing, linking, mapping, converting back and forth between tacit (head) knowledge and explicit (written down) knowledge, relationship building skills, communication, presentation, knowledge packaging, and so on.

But in fact, like most things, different people have different personality types, and different personality profiles in relation to their personal knowledge affinities and capabilities. The six C's of PKM have been developed by Straits Knowledge, and take one approach to classifying the different (useful) PKM personality types. Each type (bar one) fulfils a valuable role in a knowledge-based team.

Take the short questionnaire below to find out which type(s) you're closest to, and then see which PKM roles you're likely to excel at, and which ones you're likely to struggle at. There are only six questions, so it'll give you just a brief flavor of what PKM means. But when you've done that, you'll realize that Personal Knowledge Management is not so much about an individualistic approach to KM, but another way of looking at how members of teams can support each other's knowledge work at the simplest working levels.

Select only one option in each question that best fits your viewpoint.

1. You've been asked to help your team plan a new project. Given a choice, you'd prefer to:
 - a) get yourself up to speed by doing a web/database search to collect background research on the project's subject area
 - b) talk to people you know who've done similar projects
 - c) wait for the briefing, and more specific instructions
 - d) wait for the briefing, and work out which features of the proposed project are likely to be most/least successful

- e) give the briefing
 - f) use the project to apply some original ideas you've been working on
2. Which activity would you be most comfortable doing?
- a) watching TV
 - b) writing a book
 - c) organizing your files
 - d) telling a story
 - e) having a long conversation
 - f) figuring out the true politics behind the news
3. Which question are you most likely to be asked by your colleagues?
- a) Did you see that soap opera last night?
 - b) Where can I get information about...?
 - c) Do you know anyone who....?
 - d) Can you help us with our strategy?
 - e) Who should we believe on this?
 - f) Can you write this up for us?
4. What's your most preferred communication situation?
- a) one to one, wide-ranging conversations
 - b) one to many interactions with you taking the lead
 - c) meetings where you get to shoot things down
 - d) professional discussions with other experts
 - e) finding somebody willing to give you advice
 - f) knowing just where to find some information when somebody asks you
5. Which piece of praise are you most likely to hear in a professional context?
- a) "You're so good at expressing yourself"
 - b) "You are very diligent"
 - c) "You're very easy to talk to"
 - d) "You have a brilliant mind"
 - e) "How do you know so much?"
 - f) "We can always trust your judgement"
6. Which of the following do you fear most at work?
- a) You lose your address book with email and telephone numbers
 - b) You lose your personal document archives and web page bookmarks
 - c) You develop a stutter
 - d) You lose your ability to concentrate
 - e) You lose your mentor

f) You lose your ability to evaluate information

Now transfer your scores to the following table by circling the options that you answered. Add up your scores to identify your dominant knowledge personality types. A higher score means a higher predisposition towards that type.

Q.1	(a) Collector	(b) Connector	(c) Consumer	(d) Critic	(e) Communicator	(f) Creator
Q.2	(a) Consumer	(b) Creator	(c) Collector	(d) Communicator	(e) Connector	(f) Critic
Q.3	(a) Consumer	(b) Collector	(c) Connector	(d) Creator	(e) Critic	(f) Communicator
Q.4	(a) Connector	(b) Communicator	(c) Critic	(d) Creator	(e) Consumer	(f) Collector
Q.5	(a) Communicator	(b) Consumer	(c) Connector	(d) Creator	(e) Collector	(f) Critic
Q.6	(a) Connector	(b) Collector	(c) Communicator	(d) Creator	(e) Consumer	(f) Critic

	<i>What's your biggest score?</i>
Collector	
Connector	
Communicator	
Creator	
Critic	
Consumer	

The Collector

Often mistaken for the ideal PKM type, the Collector does just what the name implies. They have huge appetites for information and knowledge, collecting the most bizarre things. It's fairly easy to identify a Collector: they are the people you go to when you want to know unusual and out of the way things. Collectors have intricate systems for organizing their knowledge – even if outsiders often don't understand their systems. They classify, organize, index, make links, give shape to clusters of knowledge, chart relationships between different things. They are uniquely qualified to build maps, models and frameworks into which large collections of knowledge can fit. They are also good at finding their way round other people's frameworks, and are extremely efficient searchers: they know all the best places to go and get information, and they are superb at ferreting out valuable stuff from unusual places. If you want a guide to any knowledge landscape, whether it be a research task or a first visit to a large trade show, find a Collector, set him loose, and try to keep up.

The Connector

Only now being recognized as one of the most valuable knowledge personality types, you'll remember the Connector from last month's article. Connectors collect relationships, and their enduring value is their ability to link people. When you need to know something, where a *Collector* will point you to a website or an article, or a piece of information in a database, a Connector's first instinct is to point you to a *person*, and

she'll even make the introductions for you. Connectors love to use their relationships and grow the vitality of their networks, by introducing people with complementary knowledge needs. Connectors have a lot of conversations, and keep casual email correspondence and bulletin boards buzzing, because they need to know what you know, as well as the sort of things you like to know. They are curious people; the richer the conversations they have, the more they'll be able to anticipate, link and recommend valuable people when you're in need. Connectors are especially valuable in a team when they know lots of Collectors as well – for obvious reasons.

The Communicator

Communicators are born storytellers. They may not be especially good at original research, but give them a mass of indigestible information, and they are extremely good at packaging it into something that will make sense for whatever audience you point them at. Communicators excel at creating reports, presentations, meeting records, briefing papers and discussion documents. If anybody is putting stuff into your company's knowledge base, make sure it's the Communicator who gets the job, and make sure they know who the target audience is. If you're looking for someone who can take a lot of tacit, unspoken knowledge out of somebody's head, and turn it into an elegant procedure, process manual, or case study, then the Communicator is the person for you.

Communicators *mediate* knowledge for different audiences. And because they need to know their audience in order to frame the message, you'll find that they are also extremely good at listening. There are lots of synergies between Communicators and Connectors.

The Creator

These are much rarer knowledge personalities. They are the true knowledge originators. Creators are the experts you turn to for advice (this is advice you would pay for), they are the ones who produce theories, models and systems that other people follow. They write articles, books, and trail-blazing reports. They do daring experiments. Creators make a lot of knowledge that Collectors collect (and integrate into the frameworks of their "libraries") and that Communicators "translate" for different people and different roles. Most of us know Creators only through Communicators or Collectors, because they often operate at a level of expertise and time constraint that keeps them quite distant from us. Connectors tend not to connect knowledge Consumers with knowledge Creators, but they can play a valuable role in connecting Creators to each other.

The Critic

This role sounds like a party-pooper role, and sometimes it is. However, the Critic is extremely valuable in high speed, high information supply environments, where you don't have time to validate what you're working with. The Critic is highly tuned to the trustworthiness of knowledge and intelligence. This is both an intellectual as well as a relational skill. They have strong analytical skills to spot internal inconsistency or flaws; they maintain good networks of informants whom they can use to cross-check and authenticate knowledge. They have a keen eye for risk as well as opportunity, and they regularly scan their knowledge landscapes for both. They sometimes call it intuition, but it's more like a bundle of habits: observation, curiosity, speculation, questioning,

checking, experimenting. The Critic is especially valuable in a decision support role, because they can spot the really crucial knowledge and strip out the superfluous. Apply the Critic to your Connector and Collector networks, and you're really onto a good thing.

The Consumer

Well, in one sense we are all Consumers. The bad news is, that this is a dying species in its pure form. The more we rely on knowledge work to earn our daily bread (or rice), the more we discover that we also have to add value to the networks and teams that supply us our knowledge and help us navigate it. The days of the knowledge Consumer who doesn't also collect, connect, create, communicate or criticize, is numbered. Knowledge-based organizations are increasingly coming to be made up of networks of relationships based on very loose forms of trust and barter. This isn't tit for tat trade, but more a matter of your cumulative reputation in the community, your record of contributions, and the recognition of your ability to add value. And the roles we have described are precisely how we add value. Passive consumption puts you on the fast track to falling out of the knowledge net. So if you're a dominant Consumer, it's probably worth looking at your next highest score and beefing up the behaviors (and skills) that add value to that particular role in the team.

What's Next?

What can you do with this insight into your preferred role, however simple it might be? First, it should give you a clearer idea of your dominant role, and the behaviors that can strengthen that role. The more you reinforce it, the more value you'll be in a knowledge-based team. Second, it should show you how to identify other people in your organization who can play valuable roles as one of the five good C's. Third, it should help you to identify gaps in your own abilities as well as your team's and some clue to what new behaviors and competencies will fill those gaps – in yourself or others.

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