

12.WWF Malaysia

Knowledge Management applications in a non-profit organization: A WWF-Malaysia Case Study

Brian Lee Meng Siong, Manager, Knowledge Management, WWF-Malaysia

The Background and Purpose of the KM Effort in the Case:

There are too many silos of information and knowledge within and without the organization and these were not easy to tap into quickly. As such, we are relatively slow in responding to hot-potato conservation and environmental issues.

This also caused us to take far longer than we would like when it comes to compiling information or collaborating with colleagues.

And finally, realizing the wealth of knowledge in the organization, we would like to start using it in ways that can add value to our work e.g in fundraising, educating the public and changing behaviours of our targeted stakeholders. In short, we would like to empower our staff, our partners and our stakeholders (including the public) with the knowledge of they can do to tackle environmental and nature conservation issues. This is the long term goal.

What We Did

We have a five year KM Initiative in place, starting early this year. As such, our KM implementation is still very new. Within this KM Initiative, we have formally set up a KM Unit. The Manager of this unit was also put in charge of supervising the ICT Unit, thus improving ICT support for the KM Initiative..

A formal Knowledge Management Team (committee) was set up to monitor and push for implementation of the KM Initiative. A Decision Making Body was also set up comprising all the heads of departments with the KM Manager as Secretary. This Body makes cross-departmental decisions when it comes to KM implementation.

Part of the KM Initiative is to revamp the two existing book libraries into Knowledge Centres that will focus on nature conservation knowledge propagation.

Lessons Learned

(1) Uncertainty among management and staff (about 150 people) on what KM is and how it will benefit them. We address this by having email updates on what is happening and what staff can gain out of these. There's also focal group discussions where we discuss KM activities that can help that particular group work faster and easier. We also rope in different groups of staff from all departments to pilot test systems such as the Library Management System and the Knowledge Portal.

(2) Difficult balance between setting up an intranet/collaboration portal versus utilizing the international WWF Intranet. We needed to draw clear lines (which are not existent) without seemingly ignoring the international WWF Intranet. We also had long discussions with members of the network to craft an agreeable arrangement.

(3) We had difficulty finding systems that are relatively affordable. We are working around this by subscribing to systems based on the Software As A Service model which cut development time substantially. We also ensured that the systems we select allow for migration to our internal servers if needed in the future. We also try to get discounts where possible e.g. we have good discount arrangements with Microsoft (Windows Sharepoint Server or even Microsoft Office Sharepoint).

Impact and Benefits

(1) We started a bi-monthly forum called Conservation Science Forum with the intention to get our colleagues to share their expertise and their work. We have had seven such sessions on a myriad of topics and the attendance is usually around 20 to 30 staff from various departments. This helps our colleagues understand each other's work better.

(2) Although it is still very early, by bringing in a librarian as a staff, we have already started providing library services to staff and also to external parties such as students, researchers and consultants. This helps them find the resources they need faster. We have also digitized all the Technical Reports generated by WWF-Malaysia in the last 36 years (around 600 reports). These will be made available online for staff to search and download. We are now collecting other institutionally important documents for archiving and sharing.

How did you evaluate or monitor the benefits? We have set preliminary KPIs based on the outcomes we would like to achieve. It is still too early to claim any success as we have just started the KM Initiative since early this year.

Insights and lessons learned from case study discussions

1. To reduce cost of implementing KM, use freely available web resources.
2. Would a KM starter Kit for NGO be useful?
3. Be specific in what you mean by knowledge sharing.
4. KPI is key for NGOs.
5. KM needs to be relevant to users.
6. To have people take part in sharing, we need to clearly tell them what to share.
7. One very good incentive to get people to share is to make sharing easy.
8. In encouraging knowledge sharing it is good to get people thinking, eg, via questions or use reflection journals.
9. There are strong individual differences in how willing people are to share knowledge.
10. Technology seems the more efficient way to cross geographical boundaries but things to keep in mind include political sensitivity and funding.
11. 'Knowledge sharing' as a term is of varying meaning to different people and subject to interpretation. Good to have a common understanding.
12. KM is only seen as a cost in a particular mindset. It is most definitely an asset if knowledge is core to organization function.
13. Avoiding using the term 'knowledge management' and other similar terms if possible as this may be misunderstood as extra work by staff.
14. In promoting sharing, it is important to first get joint agreement on the meaning of words we use.
15. KM ROI cannot be easily qualified so avoid going down this road if possible, ie quantifying KM ROI.
16. To improve KM implementation among national or satellite offices, find common task that can be leverage on KM and have weekly teleconferences (for example).
17. Have face to face meeting often.
18. Develop shared understanding and a common meaning = speak the same language..

19. Face to face meeting before virtual.
20. Not much discussion of KM initiatives, more questions by speaker than input on lessons learnt.
21. Appeal to people's social agendas.
22. Staff may not share if they fear backlash from superiors. Need to find a solution.

Contact: blee@wwf.org.my (Brian Lee)