Straits Knowledge
Redefining corporate knowledge

Knowledge Management Implementation Challenges: Case Studies from Singapore Organizations

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Introduction

This study contains six case studies describing KM implementation challenges in Singapore. While the cases are fictional, the study is solidly research-based, and addresses commonly-encountered KM implementation challenges in the Singapore context. We have deliberately displayed a range of management roles and organization types, to help readers identify the different ways in which KM challenges may emerge, and give some thought to how they might be addressed.

The purpose of this study is to help organizations and managers anticipate and address common, repeated, and damaging but often unacknowledged pitfalls in rolling out a KM project. This purpose drives the subject matter as well as the form in which the cases are presented.

Research Methodology

The background research for this study comes from two main sources: (1) a survey of public case studies on twenty two KM projects in Singapore from journals, magazines, academic case study projects and conference presentations; (2) input and insights from Straits Knowledge's survey-based reports on *Knowledge Management in Singapore Organizations* (July 2002), *Knowledge-based Leadership in Singapore Organizations* (October 2002), *Knowledge-based Strategy in Singapore Organizations* (January 2003).

This background research formed the basis of a deep understanding of the context in which KM is implemented in Singapore, and allowed us to identify typical implementation scenarios, as well as commonly perceived challenges and issues. In particular, we found that there was often an over-confidence in technology and process at the expense of a real appreciation of the cultural, leadership and strategy focus issues involved in any KM project. These latter themes come through very strongly in the case studies presented here.

The primary material from these case studies came from a series of fifteen confidential interviews with practising knowledge managers or managers who had been involved in some way with a KM project. The interviews covered public and private sector organizations, government linked corporations, multinationals, small and medium enterprises, and organizations in the educational sector. The

interviewees were assured of confidentiality in order to reduce their inhibitions about disclosing information about challenges encountered in their projects. We are profoundly grateful to these interviewees for their knowledge-sharing in support of finding better ways of anticipating and addressing the challenges they encountered.

To mitigate bias, the interview questions did not present or suggest any of the key challenges or barriers previously encountered in our research. The structure of the interviews was typically as follows: (1) we asked the interviewee to give a brief account of the background and rationale behind the KM project being described; (2) we explored the timeline of the project in greater depth, identifying key transition points, both positive and negative; (3) we explored those key transition points in detail, focusing on the challenges identified by the interviewee; (4) we asked the interviewees what they would have done differently, given their present hindsight and experience.

From the raw material of the interview transcripts, we identified six common themes: each of these is represented in as a dominant theme in at least one of the case studies:

- Technology management and project management issues, including integration with existing platforms and systems
- Knowledge continuity in environments of rapid change, and the need to maintain a very clear focus and set of objectives
- The resourcing of KM in terms of staffing, time allocation and management support
- The negative impact of unclear strategic direction and internal politics
- The impact of having too many stakeholders with divergent agendas in a KM initiative
- Issues that emerge when KM is superficially understood by organizational leadership, but is promoted as "politically correct".

Underlying all of these are the problems in KM projects that are caused by poor strategic focus, poor strategic alignment, and poor project planning and resourcing.

Once the themes were identified, they were abstracted from their original contexts, and new scenarios were constructed based on our background research. Our aim in constructing these fictional organizations was to create contexts that would be realistic and recognisably Singaporean, within which the themes we had identified might be expected to play out in the way that we describe them.

It is likely that curious individuals will attempt to "guess" which organizations and projects are being "represented" here. The case studies presented here are not in any way intended to represent or identify actual persons or organizations; any resemblance to existing organizations is purely for the purposes of simulating a realistic and recognizable environment. None of the projects described have

elements taken from a single organization, different elements from different interviews have been combined in ways that are entirely different from the KM projects we investigated, and for the most part, issues identified in one organization type, have been transferred to a different organization type, where we felt they might realistically belong.

The final stage, in line with our initial purpose, was to construct the cases in the form of learning activities, known as decision games. This form of presentation requires fuller explanation.

Decision Games

Decision games are a form of presentation pitched somewhere between a case study and a simulation. Like most problem-based case studies, they present you with a well-defined initial context, events which you cannot yourself modify, and a central dilemma to reflect on. Like simulations, they unfold sequentially and invite response and interpretations as you proceed through them. Unlike case studies, they more closely mirror the complex, uncertain and ambiguous unfolding of events in the real world. Unlike simulations, you don't get the chance to systematically explore different, well-defined option routes.

Originally developed as "Tactical Decision Games" by the US Marine Corps for training purposes, the decision game form has been most actively researched and developed for learning and experience exchange purposes by leading decision research company, Klein Associates. Gary Klein, founder of Klein Associates, describes them thus:

"Decision games are a centrepiece of a mental conditioning program, simple thought exercises… that capture the essence of a typical, difficult decision. A decision game presents some details leading up to a dilemma, typically charged with lots of uncertainty, and challenges those taking the exercise to come up with a plan of action." (Gary Klein, *Intuition at Work,* Currency Doubleday, 2003 p.35)

In our case, we have taken the decision game to represent not a single decision, but a complex scenario full of uncertainties and ambiguities and competing forces, together with the requirement to chart a clear course of action – characteristics very typical of KM projects in general.

In our case studies, we have presented the decision games in the form of numbered, sequential events. You are put into the position of the knowledge manager responsible for the project, and as you read the events, you are required to evaluate the significance (positive or negative) of the event for your KM project. Your ability to anticipate possible problems, and weak signals of emerging threat or opportunity, immeasurably improves your chances of being able to manage them proactively, rather than reactively. This capacity is what you will be exercising here.

Decision games are powerful problem-based learning exercises, for the following reasons: (1) the sequential presentation of events, many of them ambiguous, better represents the way in which the real world works, than the traditional "tidy" case study format; (2) the challenge to anticipate and "read" weak signals in these events better engages our existing experience, insight and intuition than does a more pre-digested or analytical format; (3) analytical insights and theoretical knowledge from "lessons learned" mean little in a project environment of rapid change, uncertainty, and unpredictable occurrences; (4) the format is particularly well-adapted to knowledge and experience sharing contexts where people with different levels of applied experience can negotiate their perceptions, intuitions and "readings" of the situation, and thereby get access to other people's experience by proxy.

Decision games therefore form a useful way of testing one's judgement, knowledge and experience while engaging with implementation challenges safely, and if "played" together with a group of peers, they provide a means of accessing other people's intuitions, judgements and experience by proxy.

How to Use These Case Studies

These case studies can certainly be read and reflected on by individuals in the traditional way that you'd read a normal case study. Analysis of key issues in the case studies given by experts in related fields, presented after the main case study, will help to focus such reflection.

However, the format can best be utilised by using the decision game features to reflect on each step as it occurs, and to make mental note of where you think weak or early signals of opportunities and threats are emerging. To identify such signals is not sufficient: you'll also need to think through alternative courses of action based on those signals. The evaluation table following this section will help you

map your perceptions of your possibilities as you progress through the case. Once you've reached the conclusion and thought through your answers to the focus questions, it will be worth retracing your steps, and re-evaluating what you might have done differently.

The most productive format in which to use these cases is in a workshop setting, where you have KM practitioners with diverse ranges and degrees of experience. At each step, use the evaluation table to negotiate a common interpretation of your current position (positive, negative or neutral). This negotiation itself will surface important insights based on your colleagues' experience and insights, and start to give you clues about alternative courses of action, and give you a richer knowledge base with which to tackle other KM projects.
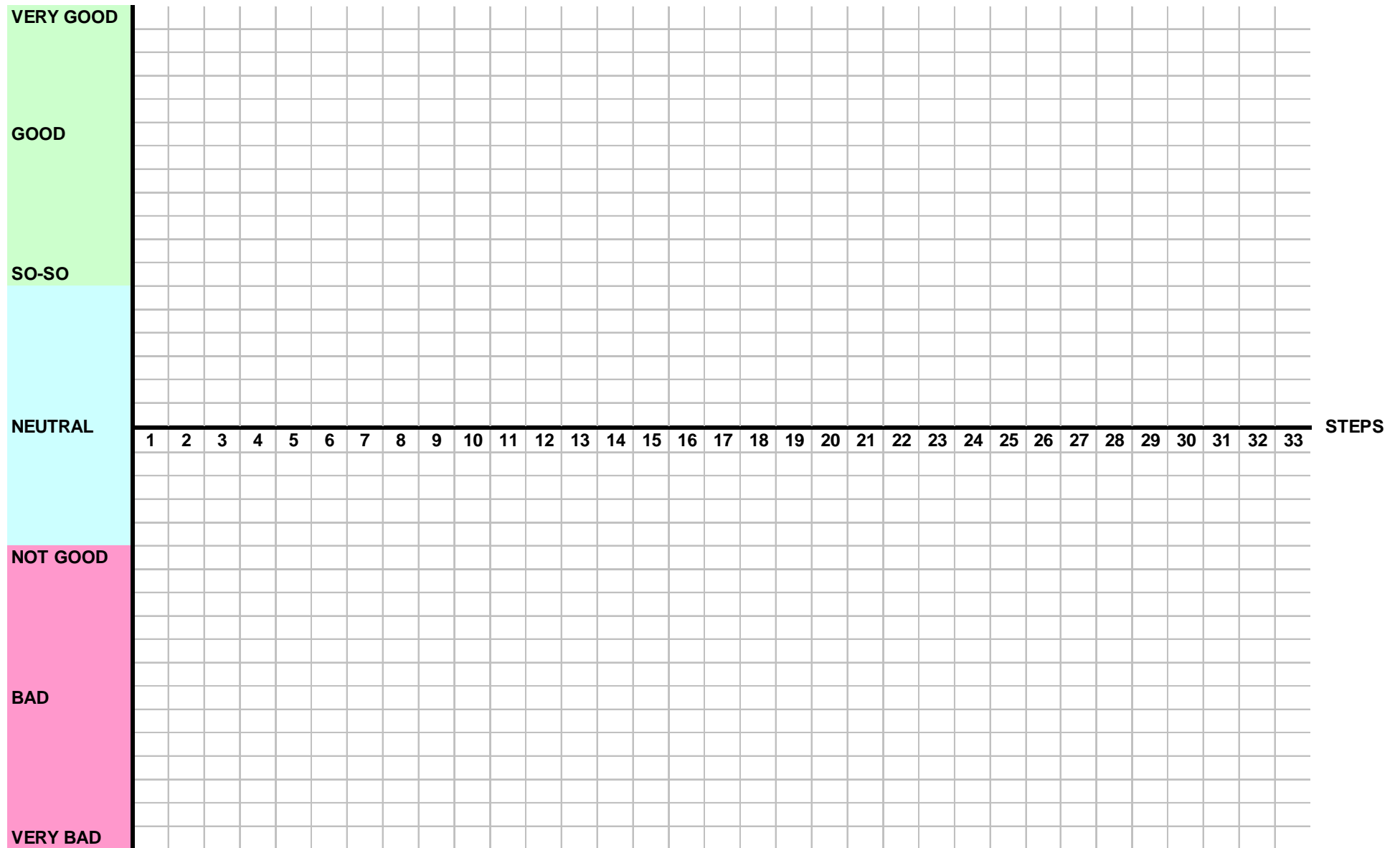
In short then, this final method of using the cases, is itself a tacit knowledge and experience sharing method, that will give knowledge managers a more sophisticated and more highly tuned sensitivity to the possibilities and the threats facing them in their own work.

We hope you find them useful.

Patrick Lambe
Edgar Tan

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NEUTRAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	STEPS
NOT GOOD																																		
BAD																																		
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Evaluate each step in your case study by indicating on the chart whether you think it is a positive, negative or neutral contributor to your desired outcomes.

Case 1. Bounded Intelligence: The Fargate Logistics Case

Who: Fargate Global Logistics Asia Pacific Pte Ltd
What: MNC – global logistics company
When: 1 year into a KM program
Where: Asia Pacific

Background:

Fargate is a US-based global logistics company operating in 130 countries. Historically it has organized by region, and operates mainly as a "global company providing regional logistics services". This is beginning to change, as its clients seek truly global services.

Its Asia Pacific office based in Singapore has decided to deploy an end-to-end customer oriented intelligence and KM system.

Asia Pacific is the only one of Fargate's five regions to have a significant and growing business in outsourced logistics services, widely seen as the next big thing for the company. The KM vision was for the customer to be able to see the status of their shipments at any point in the process, and for a CRM system to help manage customer relationships.

The motivation is two-fold – to maintain competitive capabilities against regional competitors who already deploy such technology, and to be able to create and sustain knowledge-based relationships with customers.

Initially envisaged as a pilot for a business intelligence and CRM system using data warehousing and reporting technology within the Asia Pacific outsourced logistics division, Fargate has now run into difficulties with its global IT department based at the global hub in Houston Texas.

"If we wait for them to get their act together, we'll go out of business" says Tham Kin Cheong, Asia Pacific VP for outsourced logistics services.

Themes: Systems, Infrastructure, Role of IT in KM, Standards, Security, Intelligence, CRM, Project Management

Case 1. Bounded Intelligence: The Fargate Logistics Case

You are Tham Kin Cheong, Asia Pacific VP for outsourced logistics services. Consider the following events, try to interpret what is unfolding, and anticipate what your options for action might be.

1. A meeting of regional managers gives strong endorsement to your KM project, which you have named "Intellitrack"

2. One of your major local competitors buys Siebel CRM system

3. You attend a global strategy meeting in Houston - the Asia Pacific region is held up as a pioneer in logistics outsourcing. "This is the next major direction for Fargate" declares your CEO.

4. Your quarterly figures turn out much better than expected - and Asia Pacific shows the biggest performance improvement worldwide. You are flavour of the month!

5. Your IT manager goes on maternity leave - however, she says she has fully briefed her deputy.

6. One of your largest regional outsourcing clients, Solger Corporation, invites you to bid for their global contract. Solger's Chairman tells you: "We think you're doing a marvellous job."

7. Your KM project team say there will be some delays in integrating the CRM System with the data warehouse and cite lack of internal expertise.

8. You authorise extra budget for using external consultants on your systems integration issues. The consultant tells you over lunch that your system can compete with the best -"It's both robust and scalable".

9. You hear that the #1 player in global outsourced logistics is making a pitch to Solger, who have just put out the RFQ. You decide to go for the global outsourcing bid.

10. Your deputy tells you that the KM team is having problems with the acting IT manager, Alex. "He's very difficult to work with".

11. An internal study cites concerns about increased piracy and terrorism activity in the region - it concludes "the outsourcing business brings us additional rewards, but it also transfers to us additional risk."

12. Your bid team for the global outsourcing contract say they can't get enough information on how the intelligent tracking and CRM system will work globally. "There's no documentation on how it will interface with the other regional systems" You ask them to tap into the IT managers' network through Alex.

13. You ask the KM project leader if the acting IT manager is up to the job. She says he just isn't very diplomatic. "He works very hard, and he knows the system inside out. We'd find it very difficult to complete the project without him."

14. Your pilot intelligence system is ready and is working well with two small regional clients. You decide to accelerate the rollout.

15. Houston announces its North American outsourcing strategy. You are disappointed that they do not seem to consider your "Intellitrack" system.

16. You win a large regional outsourcing contract. The "Intellitrack" system made the decisive difference, the client tells you.

17. Your bid team for the global contract asks for an urgent meeting. They say they can't make progress until they figure out cross-regional integration.

18. On a visit to the Vietnam office, you discover that there is a lot of unhappiness about the "Intellitrack" system because of bandwidth problems.

19. You have a global briefing meeting coming up in Rotterdam. You arrange to demonstrate "Intellitrack" at this meeting, and call for a side meeting involving the regional IT heads to solve the integration issues.

20. A massive worm infection brings down your systems for over 14 hours. Some data is lost, but fortunately your staff were still using the paper based system as a backup. Not too many customers complain.

21. You are asked to present the "Intellitrack" case study at a major regional KM conference. You accept.

22. In Rotterdam, the demo works beautifully - everybody is very enthusiastic. Your CEO asks the VP for North America to "seriously look at adopting it as a differentiating factor".

23. The IT Managers' side meeting goes less well. The Houston IT head is most negative. "Alex should have told you, because I certainly told him. We can't do any integration of this nature until we get our basic platforms in synch, and our global security policy in place. I'm still waiting for Asia Pacific's compliance report on data security - and we've been asking you for two years now not to implement new technology solutions without checking with us first. We can't even get everybody on the same operating system - how do you expect us to help you with this?"

24. You arrive back in your office to find an exciting proposal from your external consultant for extending Intellitrack access to mobile devices.

25. ASEAN announces a major initiative to review and harmonize data protection and data security legislation to cover cross border data transfers and "economic espionage".

26. Your bid team for the global outsourcing contract tells you they can "patch something together" for their RFQ from the documentation you brought back from

Rotterdam. However, the lack of integration will affect the costings.

27. Over golf, the Solger chairman tells you he's heard rumours that Intellitrack is not robust enough to support global logistics. "I've got two main criteria in this decision: we can't afford any screw ups, and we've got to go with the best price. If you can't deliver, it's better not to go for it."

Focus question: *What do you do next?*

Analysis

Fargate Asia Pacific has taken a lead in its organisation to develop integrated systems that provide customers with an intelligent tracking system. This allows the company to keep pace with its competitors, and perhaps even develop a real competitive advantage.

Feedback from potential customers supports this view, showing that Fargate's Asia Pacific VP was making the right moves and adding value to the sales proposition. Indeed the pilot systems were working well and system demonstrations to the whole organisation won support.

Fargate's Asia Pacific operations were even out-performing the other regional operations. Yet all was perhaps not going quite so well as this initial analysis suggests.

For projects that integrate across functions and regions and indeed hardware platforms, it's essential to take a multi-disciplinary approach and consider all the stakeholders' needs, capabilities and preferences.

During the initiation of the project, Fargate's Asia Pacific VP would have done well to clarify the problem that Intellitrack was intended to solve and consulted colleagues across the region and in Fargate's global HQ – such an approach may have highlighted the constraints earlier, allowing more time and effort to be spent finding solutions or alternatives.

In particular, problems such as legacy system integration may have stopped the project in the early stages, but better that, than investing in and developing a solution that cannot be implemented on the scale that it is designed for.

During the planning stage, the project would have been better served by paying more attention to building the core team, especially when it turns out that a key member (the IT manager) will not be available.

This activity would help clarify the specifications, feasibility, resources and capabilities required as well as budgeting to ensure that the additional value anticipated will not be eroded through additional and unanticipated costs.

Fargate is at a difficult juncture in the project. It may seem too late to stop the project now, but the major customer has suggested that the proposed system is not the key deciding factor to win the global contract.

This may allow the project team time to revert to the planning stage and find solutions to the technical problems encountered. Perhaps more importantly they should review whether the proposed system will provide a real and realizable competitive advantage in the global outsourcing business as imagined.

John Kenworthy

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Case 2. Building Knowledge: GLE Corporation Goes Regional

Who: GLE Corporation

What: SME – family owned design & build construction company

When: Company founded as a building contractor 47 years ago

Where: Singapore, expanding into Malaysia, China and Vietnam

Background:

GLE was founded as a small building contracting company in 1956 by Gan Lok Eng, the father of the present CEO.

Eric Gan, his son, was educated and worked in the USA, before gaining an MBA. He returned to take over the company in 1983, after his father began to suffer from poor health.

He steadily transformed the business, growing it rapidly throughout the 1980s and early 1990s as the construction sector boomed in Singapore. With the contraction in the private construction sector in the late 1990s, he shifted his focus to deepening the skills base of the company and moving into civil engineering and design and build work, while coping with workforce reduction and falling revenues.

The depression in the local construction market also forced him quite early to start seeking opportunities in the region, and GLE now runs large projects in Malaysia, Vietnam and China.

Several large projects in Brunei collapsed in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, and the company lost a lot of money.

The company is now at a crossroads: should it move out of Singapore almost completely, simply maintaining it as a regional HQ, or should it remain committed to its original home market?

Against this backdrop, the general manager, Jackson Loke, has decided that the company needs to introduce KM to manage some of the information flow problems it is encountering.

There have been so many different filing systems and personalities involved in the company's various phases of growth and contraction, that documents and knowledge from old projects are now difficult to trace when needed.

He also feels the deep experience of some of the older employees needs to be captured and transferred to the newer, greener managers. This issue is accelerated by the increasing difficulty of getting experienced site managers and project managers; they tend to get sucked up by large engineering companies and MNCs, who can offer better terms.

Jackson's ambition is to capture the knowledge of the more experienced employees and use it to train up the younger ones quickly.

He also wants to use KM to improve collaboration and coordination of resources with the overseas project teams in the region, and their various partners.

He delegates the KM project to his business development manager, Eunice Poh, who has recently come to GLE from a large regional engineering company. She believes the solution

is to implement an enterprise knowledge portal to manage document flow and collaboration. Is she on the right track?

Themes: People, Scalability of Information and Documentation Systems, Family Business Culture vs Professional Business Culture, Cross Border Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing, Maintaining Historical Knowledge and Experience, Difficulties of Acquiring and Holding Talent, Knowledge Portal

Case 2. Building Knowledge: GLE Corporation Goes Regional

You are Eunice Poh, Business Development Manager for GLE Corporation. Consider the following events, try to interpret what is unfolding, and anticipate what your options for action might be.

1. Your KM team, consisting of Bill the IT manager and Jesslyn your strategy planning manager, recommend Sharepoint Portal for your new KM System. "We are already on a MS platform and can leverage the .Net technology" says the IT manager.

2. You ask Jesslyn, your strategy planning manager, to conduct a knowledge survey. "Find out where people are having trouble in finding the information they need"

3. Looking at the company's financials, you are concerned by the high risk and bad debt figures and the very thin margins. The accounting manager tells you "In this business, you've got to get the big deals, and pray you can manage the costs. It takes a lot of experience to do it well."

4. You go to Laos with Jackson Loke to help put together a bid for a big road building project funded by the Asian Development Bank. He is worried about the lack of experienced site managers. "When can your KM system start helping out with this?"

5. A colleague tells you that Hong Seng Loong, one of GLE's archrivals, has just signed a huge property development deal in Shenyang. "The old man will be furious" your colleague says of your company's founder, "they have some bad history, a deal that went sour."

6. Jesslyn tells you that the KM survey has met with very poor response. When you press her, she says only two people have responded. Of the others, she says "They say they have no time".

7. You discover that GLE is a candidate for the Singapore Enterprise 50. Effective KM processes are among the

criteria for assessment. You are pleased to see that "effective document management" and "enterprise knowledge portal" get you extra points.

8. You speak to Jackson about moving more decisively into the property development market, citing the higher margins and Hong Seng Loong's recent success "We would be less dependent on the older managers as well" - Jackson is not enthusiastic. "This is a building company not a marketing company" You decide to sound out your CEO Eric Gan when he returns from China.

9. Three of your local sub-contractors suddenly go bankrupt when a project they are working on (not yours) comes to a halt. You hear Jackson has gone talent spotting to see if he can bring in some of their better project managers.

10. Jackson asks why there is no progress on the KM project. You tell him the portal is up, and you are integrating the document registry system. "We are following the Enterprise 50 guidelines", you tell him. "Never mind that", he says. "I have ten very seasoned managers nearing retirement age. I want their experience made available to the younger ones."

11. The Laos project is delayed, and one of your projects in Vietnam is suddenly cancelled. You ask Jesslyn to write a strategy paper on the property development business. When she asks you about the KM project you tell her that Bill, the IT manager, can take care of it for the time being.

12. A Building and Construction Authority study projects strong growth in regional Design and Build projects over the coming year. They ask GLE to join a consortium of companies that will bid for very large projects. Against your advice, Eric Gan declines. You suspect the presence of Hong Seng Loong in the consortium is a factor.

13. You send a note to the ten managers named by Jackson Loke, asking them to document their current and past projects into the knowledge portal. You copy your note to Jackson.

14. Through your contact in the Asian Development Bank, you discover that the Laos project is back on track, and that GLE is a favoured candidate. You bump into Eric Gan in the lobby and pass on the good news.

15. Jackson calls you in to see him. He tells you that his managers are very upset at your note. " You can't just ask them to write like that" he says. "You haven't even given them a framework, and they are already very busy. That's why I asked Jesslyn and Bill to help you. Please go and speak to them personally."

16. You decide to hold a KM training workshop for the ten older managers, using an external consultant, but starting with a briefing from you - "To soften them up".

17. Good news! Your company is awarded the Laos project thanks to some last minute work on the costings from your team. You discover one of your competitors was Hong Seng Loong. This project promises to bring you back into the black in a difficult year.

18. Your KM workshop is a disaster. Only one manager turns up, and he leaves after an hour. Three of the others send one of their juniors.

19. You notice a Dilbert cartoon in one of the project manager's cubicles. In it, the Catbert character says "Once we've downloaded your brain into this KM system we'll be able to do some more right-sizing." Somebody has drawn a large pair of spectacles on Catbert. They look suspiciously like the ones you wear.

20. At your company's dinner and dance, the managers from your offices in China, Vietnam and Malaysia take you aside and ask when they can have access to the Sharepoint Portal. "It would be really useful for us to have project team rooms to share knowledge across the different countries. We often feel very isolated'' You promise to look into it.

21. The founder of your company Gan Lok Eng suddenly collapses and is warded with a suspected heart attack.

22. Good news! You have made the Enterprise 50 and been given the award for "Best Knowledge Enterprise".

23. Bill, your IT manager, tells you he doesn't have the resources to extend the portal to other countries. "Besides, they just don't have the bandwidth, and in China they don't even use Microsoft Office".

24. You present Jesslyn's strategy paper on the property development business at a board meeting. Eric Gan asks Jackson for his views. Jackson says "It's a different skills set. I'm not sure we are ready to go into it." Eric says he will think about it.

25. Gan Lok Eng passes away in his sleep.

26. You hear that the overseas offices have set up a small internet-based team room for communication and document sharing, using an ASP service. You ask Bill to write to them warning them about security issues. They should wait until the company is ready to roll out Sharepoint.

27. Jackson summons you again. He is clearly furious about the KM project. "It has cost us so much money. There's absolutely nothing on there of any use. The only people using it are finance and HR. You've alienated my managers, and got us into a project in Laos at a price where we can't afford to bring in experienced project managers, and there's no KM system to support the managers we do have. And you undermine my position with the CEO. I think you should resign."

28. You bring your resignation letter to Jackson's office, but you find his PA in tears. She tells you to come back later.

29. Eric Gan calls a company meeting. He says he has decided to move the company HQ to Shenyang. All employees have the option to work there if they wish. Only a small office will remain in Singapore. Jackson Loke has decided to leave the company.

Focus question: *What role does KM have in the new GLE, and how well is the company prepared for it?*

Analysis

GLE have made some moves that make sense: organizing the the KM workshop was probably the right thing to do, but it came too late and was not prepared or contextualized correctly, it seems. This would account for the lack of interest and involvement from the target participants.

Including collaboration was a right move but I'm not sure it was emphasized enough and that enough was communicated about how this would be done and what it would mean for everyone. Again, it was done reactively, and might have been anticipated in advance.

Unfortunately, there were many more mis-steps than right steps in this case.

Before one sends out a survey or puts on a workshop one needs to communicate to everyone and make clear what it is all about, clarify the purpose, and help motivate and make people understand the context of what is being done.

If people don't understand why something is being done, and especially how they can or will benefit from the programmes being planned, one should not expect to get enthusiastic response and participation.

One can also help make clear what it is all about by giving specific examples of what other companies have done with their KM programs and what benefits have been achieved and how the programs being planned will help the company prosper.

Also, one must deal directly with the fear that many will have that some of the actions taken will make them redundant (and thus will benefit only the company and its bottom line but not the workers themselves). Many companies prefer to avoid this, but the lack of explicit mention of it, only serves to make it seem a more threatening possibility to the observers.

It seems that the KM team did not fully take into account and recognize the different (network) infrastructure situation in different countries that they were planning to operate in and thus explore how they would address the challenges this situation would bring. They seem to have recognized this issue too late.

One way they could have approached some of this would have been to first have had discussions with some of the most respected employees in the company to explain the situation and the programs being planned, and why this was being done.

Getting the buy-in and support of these respected employees could then help spread the word (by word of mouth or in a more formal way) to others.

I am not sure that transferring the responsibilities of the KM program to the IT guy was smart, as it might have given the impression that "this is a technology problem" and not a "people issue."

At least one would need to make sure the IT person would have the right background and broad enough understanding of KM so as not to just see it as "an IT problem."

GLE could have explored different options for how to document managers' current and past projects. For instance, although it would have added some expense, they could have had one trained person (with journalistic background for instance—which is what Sun Microsystems did in a case like this) to go and interview the managers and get the information and get it into a consistent format, etc.

This person could also help to explain why this was done and how it would be used and benefit everyone—including the managers.

Given all of the bad history and mistakes made it will likely be difficult to implement a new KM project in the "new GLE", assuming that many of the employees stay with the company.

On the other hand, the company has hopefully learned some good lessons from the experiences they have had, and can "start fresh" and build on what they have done.

The first thing they should do is to do a "post mortem" or workshop among those who will be involved in implementing a new KM program, and involving if at all possible, the original KM team. It is important that everyone hears what has been done before, why things went wrong, and that they share ideas on how a successful project can be launched with very different results from the first attempt.

Eilif Trondsen

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Case 3. Banking on Culture: Fa Cai Bank Integrates its Knowledge

Who: Fa Cai Bank
What: Major local bank
When: Founded 1962
Where: Singapore and region

Background:

Fa Cai Bank was originally a family owned commercial bank, which grew a significant consumer banking business in the 1980s.

Also in the 1980s, a large stake in the bank was taken by the government through a special banking sector development scheme.

In cash deposits, Fa Cai is now one of the largest banks in Singapore, thanks to the acquisition of three smaller players in Singapore, over a period of the past 18 months, together with a number of acquisitions in the SE Asia region.

Derrick Huang, formerly with Group HR for Shuangxi Bank, one of the newly-acquired banks, is now Assistant Manager

for Organizational Development for Fa Cai Bank, and he has been charged with implementing a KM program for the Bank.

"We'd like you to use KM to assist in the cultural alignment of our separate acquisitions, so that we can leverage our people resources. As a valued member of the Shuangxi team, we think you're ideal for this" says his boss, who is also from Shuangxi Bank.

Derrick soon finds himself in a minefield of competing interests, however. The Process and Services Division has been running an intelligence-based KM project for two years (with little success) as part of its quality improvement initiatives; Fa Cai HR is in the midst of a Peoplesoft project, so has no appetite for supporting a large KM project.

The IT/IS Division is still working with the external consultants on the integration of information systems, and are struggling to meet the demands of the Process and Services and HR initiatives.

Meanwhile customer services are demanding a CRM system to help them cope with the newly expanded customer base, as well as the increasing volume of complaints arising out of integration problems. Derrick finds himself excluded from all of these discussions and projects, and he has no independent budget. Where is he to start?

Themes: Culture, People, Strategy, Change Management, IT projects

Case 3. Banking on Culture: Fa Cai Bank Integrates its Knowledge

You are Derrick Huang, Assistant Manager for Organizational Development in Fa Cai Bank. Consider the following events, try to interpret what is unfolding, and anticipate what your options for action might be.

1. You have been evaluating KM vendors and consultants – most of them think you should focus on facilitating knowledge exchange across the different IT platforms currently being implemented. This idea is shot down by your boss. "IT are just too busy right now, and we really need some input or the human relations side. Get people communicating and sharing."

2. Whenever you use the shared printer you notice a lot of the Shuangxi employees are printing out their resumes.

3. You have lunch with a colleague, also formerly from Shuangxi. She complains bitterly about the Fa Cai culture. "Everybody knows they bought us for our innovative systems and spirit. Now they are trying to kill it. Have you noticed how they put us all under Fa Cai managers?" You point out that your boss also came from Shuangxi. "He won't last long" she says.

4. You present four KM options to your boss: a) online collaboration tool for the departments involved in process integration, HR, quality improvement, and CRM; b) informal "get to know you" monthly knowledge sharing sessions; c) doing a social network analysis of the combined organizations and using it to set up communities of practice; d) compiling an expertise directory and putting it onto the intranet as a yellow pages. He asks you to focus on a) and d).

5. You read in the newspaper that Fa Cai expects to retrench 500 employees. When you get to work, you discover the Fa Cai staff have known about this for a couple of weeks.

6. You send out your "expertise questionnaire". Your friend, who is an experienced knowledge manager from a different company, helped you to make it simple and easy to complete. It contains a list of topic keywords for

practical help areas – you derived this list by conducting a number of interviews across the bank. People can also nominate expert "knowers" using these keywords.

7. The Monetary Authority of Singapore issues a statement saying that the restructuring of the banking sector is not moving quickly enough.

8. You receive several emails, not just from Shuangxi colleagues, saying your expertise database is a great idea.

9. A rumour is going round that Shuangxi employees are likely to be the main targets of the expected retrenchments. Two of your colleagues from other departments say they have got other offers from outside, and have tendered their resignations.

10. You hold your first "knowledge lunch" session. You got one of the managers from credit risk to talk about how the risk guidelines are drawn up. Only a few people turn up, mainly from her department.

11. You have a regular lunch group of buddies from across the bank, mainly from Shuangxi. You ask them if they would like to formalise themselves as an "innovation" community of practice. They agree, enthusiastically.

12. Your boss has just been promoted to Deputy Director of HR as part of the post-merger restructuring.

13. Your responses to the expertise questionnaire have been disappointing, even from people who said they would respond. When you call them to follow up, they say "Oh we checked with HR if it was really necessary and they said the Peoplesoft System would do this automatically for us."

14. You hold your second knowledge lunch. This time you personally went to every department and asked for support. Attendance is better, but not many managers are there.

15. Your informal "innovation" community of practice is going well. You decide to ask for a homepage on the intranet to promote its work and ideas.

16. Fa Cai Bank is in the news again. Customers have been receiving the wrong statements, and accounts that they have consolidated are still being reported separately. The Bank's chairman refers to "teething problems with legacy systems from Shuangxi Bank". Your Shuangxi colleagues are furious. "Our systems are at least three years ahead of Fa Cai's, and they are forcing us to use the old ones just because they bought us. No wonder they have integration problems."

17. You manage to speak to the HR Director about your expertise database. He doesn't seem to know anything about it (even though he was on your mailing list). He suggests you go talk to the IT/IS department – "They are looking after the Peoplesoft implementation for us."

18. You float the idea of an innovation day to your boss, saying your innovation community of practice can organize it. Your boss gets very excited, especially when he learns that your COP now comprises both Fa Cai and Shuangxi members. He wants a briefing on how the community of practice works, for all the senior managers.

19. You attend a KM conference, and an SVP from a rival bank spends a long time in conversation with you. You have a very good chat about KM issues in the banking industry. You feel reassured that you are not alone in the issues you face, but you envy the rival bank's attitude. "I don't think any of our SVPs go to KM conferences".

20. The IT department claim no knowledge of your expertise database. "In any case you will need to apply for a project workplan if you want us to do it. Maybe we can look at it next year." When you talk to your boss about it, he says "Oh yes, a couple of my colleagues were a bit doubtful about revealing their personal information, and they didn't want just anybody to feel they could call up and ask questions. I told them the Peoplesoft system would be able to manage this information better and keep it secure. I forgot to tell you."

21. Your presentation on COPs and the innovation day to senior managers and divisional heads goes down very well. Your boss tells you to put in a budget proposal for the innovation day, and a plan for COP development.

22. The promised retrenchments have happened. It's hard to keep track of who's leaving, it happens so fast. However, it does seem like more Shuangxi posts are removed.

23. You discover that three of the key members of your Innovation COP are among those retrenched.

24. Your buddy forwards a "KM integration proposal" drawn up by the IT department. It suggests a collaboration portal to link users of all the different systems in the bank, as well as support communities of practice. You notice it's version 4.0 and you are not on the circulation list. "I thought you were looking after KM?" asks your friend.

25. The SVP you met at the KM conference drops you an email to ask if you would like to discuss a KM job possibility over lunch. "It's very similar to what you are doing now," he says. "We couldn't offer a big rise in salary, but you'd have your own team, a budget, and a clear mandate from the CEO".

26. Your boss tells you not to take the IT Department's KM report too seriously. "They are just trying to consolidate their position," he says. He doesn't explain why he didn't alert you to the report.

27. You have been too busy to arrange a knowledge lunch session this month, partly because it has been difficult to find someone willing to speak. You are surprised to receive several emails from people asking when the next session will be held.

28. Your wife thinks you should go for the rival bank's KM job. "They just don't appreciate you where you are now."

29. Fa Cai announces that it is acquiring a small consumer bank in Thailand.

Focus question: *What should Fa Cai do to build its KM capabilities? How should it proceed?*

Analysis

Knowledge and information sharing does become a critical issue in the wake of a merger. This does not simply mean the integration of information technology systems and data sharing. The informal and face-to-face knowledge sharing networks are essential for business continuity – it is people who know the context for differing processes, and can most rapidly align them. So on the face of it, Fa Cai is making a smart move in using KM as a culture alignment initiative.

Derrick Huang shows good insight into these issues: his four options span information systems integration, to knowledge sharing across departments and functions.

His job is made difficult, however, by his lack of influence and his very limited resources. It is also made difficult by the air of uncertainty and nervousness among the employees, particularly the former employees of Shuangxi.

He does not seem to have picked up on the possibility of using his KM initiative to alleviate the communication issues – Fa Cai employees seem to know much more about what's going on than the Shuangxi former employees.

Derrick puts a lot of energy into his knowledge lunch initiative. As a means of forging relationships across the merged banks, it's a good strategy. Even though he seems disappointed by the turnouts, and seems to lose his enthusiasm for it, his colleagues miss the lunches, when he fails to schedule them.

Derrick also demonstrates initiative by start up a community of practice (even though he has no official mandate to do so), and though it begins from his own circle, grows to encompass Fa Cai employees as well. Derrick displays an admirable commitment to his mission of forging links between the new culture, and if sustained in the long term, this commitment will probably help him move towards success.

The real question, however, is whether the bank can keep Derrick and employees like him. The KM initiative is disempowered by its lack of integration with other KM-related activities and departments. In particular, the political jostling of the IT department, first in rebuffing his advances, then in starting their own initiative. Derrick's boss also appears to give him ambivalent support – at best simply not communicating well with him, at worst, abandoning him to the corporate politics, while he secures his own place in the new structure.

Part of this is unavoidable: the bank is going through a difficult exercise, has multiple initiatives and many challenges to overcome. However, the bank has not fully committed itself to deploying KM as a tool for helping integration. It has been supported from too low down in the organization to have any impact.

Fa Cai could have approached this differently by looking much harder at Derrick's original proposal, and escalating it for serious consideration by the CEO and Fa Cai's senior executives, rather than keeping it contained as a small organizational development initiative. I would also recommend that internal corporate communications (to alleviate uncertainty and low morale) be added to Derrick's four recommended strategies.

Given that this has not happened, Fa Cai is in a vulnerable position. Derrick is clearly tempted to resign and move to the rival bank (though he seems to know very little about the true state of affairs there as well). If he does so, then it's likely that the cultural integration initiative will fail, and KM will become predominantly a platform integration initiative dominated by the IT Department. To some degree this will help, but it's likely to produce more talent-loss casualties along the way.

To rescue the situation, Fa Cai would need to take Derrick's initiative and empower it, giving him or his successor a clear and strong role in the bigger KM programme currently being proposed by IT. Since it seems that Fa Cai is relatively blind to its current predicament, it's unlikely this will happen.

Patrick Lambe

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Case 4: Strategic Knowledge: The Environmental Action Foundation Repositions Around its Knowledge

Who: Environmental Action Foundation
What: Non-profit
When: Founded 1988, 1 year into a KM project
Where: Singapore

Background:

EAF is a non-profit agency founded fifteen years ago to promote public and corporate environmental awareness, and standards of professionalism in the field. It now has quasi-official status, and comes under the supervision of the Ministry of the Environment.

EAF supports other environmental agencies, many of them voluntary, with advice, contacts and resources, and performs a coordinating role in connecting them to each other, or to experts in particular fields. It also conducts or organizes training for those agencies. These agencies are referred to as "members".

About 40% of EAF's budget comes from government grant, channeled annually through the Ministry. Fundraising and corporate sponsorship accounts for 25% while 35% comes from project management services for the government and other agencies. The Permanent Secretary sits on its Board, and the Ministry assesses EAF every year against the government's environmental agenda.

Over the years, EAF has become very thinly stretched, getting involved in too many activities, and its "backroom" approach also means that its profile has suffered. Clients find that EAF cannot deliver the in-depth environmental knowledge and expertise they need, so they have begun setting up their own resource centres.

Internally, EAF staff morale is low, and staff turnover very high. As one staff member put it, "The more idealistic they are when they come in, the faster they get burned out".

A new CEO, Elaine Francis, has been brought in to turn the organization around, and given two years by the Ministry to show results.

She believes that a strategy based on providing core knowledge services to the Foundation's stakeholders is the way to go.

The organization has been flattened (involving a number of "early retirements"), and EAF has moved into a brand new building. Staff have a new intranet and portal, with their own email accounts for the first time.

All documents now have to be registered and processed electronically through the document management system. A knowledge audit has been conducted, and a programme of content migration has started.

Staff are expected to contribute two pieces of new content on lessons learned or best practices per month, as well as fulfil a target quota of documents transferred from previous filing systems.

Instead of morale going up with all this investment, it has plunged. Many staff are uncomfortable with the new focus, because it takes them away from direct involvement in

environmental issues. They are acutely aware of the warning given by the Ministry to withdraw funding if performance targets are not met, and a number of staff fear further retrenchments as budgets are cut. Many also resent the money spent on new premises and IT systems, at the cost of people.

Elaine finds her managers increasingly fighting rearguard actions to protect their turf against her and against each other.

Employees claim that they cannot fulfil their normal duties as well as meet their knowledge contribution targets.

Collaboration and coordination between departments is also breaking down.

Themes: Culture, People, Systems, Change Management, IT projects, Strategy, Information Security

Case 4. Strategic Knowledge: The Environmental Action Foundation Repositions Around its Knowledge

You are Elaine Francis, CEO of the Environmental Action Foundation (EAF). Consider the following events, try to interpret what is unfolding, and anticipate what your options for action might be.

1. In your regular meeting with the KM consultant you find that the migration of documents to the new portal is going well. However the user logs show that very few people seem to be using the portal to retrieve documents. You ask the KM consultant to find out why.

2. In a member survey, only 14% of members list EAF as a major source of knowledge on environmental issues.

3. You win a $25,000 research grant to create an online information resource on the conservation issues surrounding Singapore's marine habitats.

4. Sulin is the veteran head of your Campaigns Division. She has been with EAF since its founding, and been running campaigns since 1994. You are worried that so little of past campaigns is documented. "Don't worry, you only need to ask me what you need to know" she says. When you ask her to beef up the Campaigns Division content in the portal, she says she will "get round" to it when she has a spare moment. Her Division is in the middle of a fundraising drive, and you know she is extremely under-staffed, and working long hours.

5. At a divisional meeting you ask why so few people use the portal, despite the large amount of content already posted there. Most people keep quiet. Rama, Head of Partnership Development, says that his people complain they can't find what they need when they do a search. "Perhaps they need more training'' you say. Rama is often negative. He was the internal candidate for your job, and likes to challenge you as an "outsider".

6. Alice, your Acting Head of HR, tells you she is worried about staff turnover. "Most departments are under-staffed by up to 20%, and we basically have two types of employee: the long term 'prisoner' who has nowhere else to go, and the short stay 'tourist' who barely learns the ropes and then moves on. If the economy wasn't so bad, we'd be in a far worse position."

7. The KM consultant tells you that people are not posting content onto the portal properly. "The trouble is they are getting volunteers and admin support to post the documents. These people don't know how to fill in the metadata properly. The taxonomy is fine, it's just the document profiles don't contain enough information for the search engine to use. And the people doing it are not choosing the correct subject keywords."

8. You receive an angry call from the Ministry. Apparently a confidential environmental impact report on land reclamation has found its way into the Malaysian media. They think one of your subscribers got it from your portal. "Don't you follow government records management guidelines on security?'' You promise to investigate.

9. A spot check on the portal shows that there are a number of classified documents freely available to all users. You decide to suspend external access until the problem is sorted out.

10. You have been trying to recruit a trusted former colleague as Head of Communications to help "shake up" EAF and give it a better internal and external image. You definitely need more talented internal allies. Good news - she has finally accepted your offer.

11. Your IT manager and KM consultant are both defensive about the security issues. Both argue that the rights management setup is correct. "It's the people who publish the documents".

12. A minor row has blown up between Campaigns and Partnerships. Each accuses the other of stealing their longstanding sponsors.

13. You call Alice in HR to seek her views on a morale-raising "Fun Day" for the staff - and discover she has been on medical leave for a week.

14. At your bi-monthly Board Meeting two of the members' representatives suggest that EAF "consolidate its resources" and just focus on information services and research. "Many of our members feel that you are competing with them on the public advocacy front. We think you should focus on getting the member services right. You don't have the resources to cover everything." To your dismay, the Permanent Secretary from the Ministry does not disagree. He asks you to prepare a new restructuring paper "to help us explore our options".

15. At your divisional heads meeting, you decide to get tough. You cite the lack of clear leadership support for the portal, the recent security breach, and interdepartmental conflict. "Our members are unhappy, our stakeholders are unhappy, and our staff are unhappy. Unless you can pull together as a leadership team and stand behind this KM initiative and our strategic direction, we run the risk of becoming completely marginal and losing our funding." There is an uncomfortable silence. You announce a leadership team-building retreat at the end of the month. "This is not optional".

16. The KM consultant reports that the security issues have been addressed and that user activity on the portal has increased significantly. "However, it's almost all internal users".

17. You are profiled in the prestigious TV series, "Singapore Visionaries", thanks to your new Head of Communications.

18. You hold a members' lunch to get wider informal feedback on how they see EAF's role. Several members don't know anything about your portal. One of them, who has used it, says, "It's just a document management system, Elaine. I'm sure it works fine for your own people, but for us, we have so many areas of specialization, that it's not useful at all. Even if it has some good stuff, we don't have the time to get our heads around the way you organize it. And what about the knowledge we create? Your system assumes all the content is provided by EAF.''

19. At the official opening of your new building, the Permanent Secretary asks you how the restructuring paper is going. "You can expect funds to be very tight

next year," he says, "especially after such a big investment in IT infrastructure and the new building."

20. When pressed, your KM consultant agrees that the members were not consulted on the organization of the content in the portal, nor on the priorities for content migration. "At the price you wanted to pay, we could only do an internal knowledge needs assessment."

21. Alice, your Acting Head of HR, resigns, citing health problems. You decide to postpone your leadership retreat.

22. At your request, a group of six member organizations, together with the National University of Singapore and the National Library Board, agree to form a working advisory task force to help EAF make its portal more relevant.

23. You discover that your Projects Division and your Partnership Development Division have just independently submitted two separate bids for the same World Bank project. Even worse, they vary widely in the amounts quoted. You give them both a severe reprimand and ask

them to withdraw from the bid. "Do you realize how bad this makes us look?"

24. Your secretary tells you that the EAF librarian is very upset about not being included on the membership services task force. "She's been putting together special resource packs for members for years."

25. Rama, your Head of Partnership Development, resigns. He gives an interview to the press, citing your "arrogant and bureaucratic behavior" and your lack of "true commitment" to environmental issues, as the main reasons. He also announces the formation of a new rival association of environmental activists, with financial backing from a prominent local businessman.

26. The resource website on Singapore's marine habitats that EAF set up as part of the $25,000 research grant, wins a National Geographic award, and receives record breaking numbers of hits. You discover it was designed by volunteer polytechnic students.

27. You finally get round to holding your staff "Fun Day". Everyone seems to have a good time, but you notice several of the older members of staff, and a couple of Division Heads are absent.

28. You are named in the National Day Honours list as a recipient of the Public Service Medal.

29. You present your new restructuring paper to the EAF Board. You recommend the removal of three Divisions (Campaigns, Partnerships and Projects) the enlargement of Communications Division for public advocacy services on behalf of the members, and a new Division called E-knowledge, providing public and membership-only content through a radically redesigned portal. "With this structure, we can deliver better services at half the cost."

Focus question: *What is the role of KM as a strategic part of EAF's future? What should the Board decide?*

Analysis

The EAF clearly needed to examine its strategy and "core business". The reorganization and reengineering activity that Elaine engaged in was exactly what she should have been doing, and she did eventually find a scope and focus that aligns with what members want and need. But this was done much too late, it seems.

Elaine also did well in getting help and participation from some very capable organizations — like the National University of Singapore — but this should also probably have been done earlier (and if it had, perhaps some of the problems that resulted could have been avoided).

The National Geographic Award also showed that some things could be done well. The processes that found the students to build an award winning website were clearly very effective, even if they seemed to operate under the radar of the management.

In fact this suggests that existing resources and capabilities resources may have been there that could have been accessed earlier to help strengthen the organization in its KM initiative.

There were also clear failures in this project. EAF does not seem to have done a thorough user survey as part of its knowledge audit to find out what documents people would find most useful and would most like to see on the portal. Simply cataloguing knowledge assets does not automatically indicate which are the most valuable.

This fact — and the poor search capability (due to poor meta-tagging resulting from inexperienced staff and lack of training) — has resulted in low usage of the portal and of the documents that are there.

Additionally, the organization did not understand what it was getting, and not getting, from its KM consultant. The fact that only a partial (internal) needs assessment was done, later came back to haunt them when members found the portal largely irrelevant.

Information policy and training issues had not been thoroughly thought through, and this became apparent when problems emerged where people could not find what they wanted and documents that should not have been posted on public site were available to anyone.

If the staff of EAF staff only consists of 'prisoners' and 'tourists' then the organization has a serious problem that needs to be addressed head on, even before it gets to KM processes and policies. For any knowledge-based exercise to work, it needs to provide conditions that will attract the kind of talent it needs, especially considering its new role.

It would seem that EAF either needed some organizational changes or at least better inter-divisional communication and collaboration to avoid the kind of things that happened with two independent bids for the World Bank project.

The organization also seems to have some fundamental stakeholder problems if members feel that the organization is "competing with them on the public advocacy front". This is a strong indicator of a need for reorganization, which of course, was finally done.

The fact that these fundamental problems were addressed relatively late, explains why the KM project ran into such stormy waters.

For future developments, it's important that EAF makes sure that the new organization aligns well with the membership and provides the kinds of services they need and expect, and that no perceived conflicts exist with members.

The shape of its KM system will be one of the key indicators of whether that need is met.

 EAF also needs to start a longer term planning process, to determine what new products and knowledge-based services may be appropriate to add in the future — and should make sure that members have a strong voice and participation in these deliberations.

Eilif Trondsen

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Case 5: Collaboration and Competition: The Knowledge Research Institute of Singapore Provides a Model KM System

Who: Knowledge Research Institute of Singapore (KRIS)

What: Education and research institute attached to a local university

When: Founded 2002

Where: Singapore

Background:

The Knowledge Research Institute of Singapore (KRIS) was founded in 2002 with funding from government, private sector technology companies, and its host university, the Nanhua University of Singapore.

Its purpose is to promote the adoption of KM in Singapore, and to promote Singapore as a regional knowledge services hub. It has a permanent staff of five people, including its new Director, Dr Hanifah bte Ismail, a KM expert from Republic University.

KRIS also has a mandate to coordinate the KM research and teaching work conducted in the various universities and polytechnics that fall under the Ministry of Education.

Its first task was to establish an online "Knowledge Exchange" portal for the KM community in these institutions.

The portal, and the technology behind it, is built into the funding package from the main private sector sponsor, OBM Technologies.

Dr Hanifah's intention is to create a showpiece knowledge management system that she can demonstrate to the local KM community, as well as visitors from overseas. However, she quickly starts running into problems. Academic KM staff, even in her own host university are reluctant to share insights and research, until it has been formally

published through normal academic journals and conferences.

A small debate among some academics at Nanhua about respecting intellectual property rights was quickly squashed by the university, which pointed to its formal IP policy. "It's part of your employment contract" pointed out the President; "it's for everybody's good that you share your knowledge."

However, since that debate, contributions have declined in quality.

Dr Hanifah is also discovering that the research conducted by the Institute is constrained by the major stakeholders.

Finally, Dr Hanifah's efforts to open up her Knowledge Exchange to the broader KM community in the region have met with some resistance.

OBM is also a relative newcomer to the KM technology space, its background being in data storage and datamining, and Dr Hanifah is discovering several user-unfriendly features and limitations in her portal. Is her chance-of-a-lifetime project all going disastrously wrong?

Themes: Culture, People, Systems, Portals, Intellectual
                Property, Partnerships, Stakeholders

Case 5. Collaboration and Competition: The Knowledge Research Institute of Singapore Provides a Model KM System

You are Dr Hanifah bte Ismail, Director of the Knowledge Research Institute of Singapore (KRIS). Consider the following events, try to interpret what is unfolding, and anticipate what your options for action might be.

1. Your searchable online directory of KM experts, practitioners and solution providers in Singapore is complete, and is now available on your public website. As a last minute touch you have indexed entries by keyword, so that people can search by specialization or KM topic. It looks good!

2. At a meeting with the University President, you are asked why KRIS is not conducting KM projects for the university as a whole. "Shouldn't we be practicing what we preach?" You explain that KRIS' role is to resource the KM community, not conduct KM projects.

3. Two of the people in your KM directory have emailed you to ask you to take them out of the list. "We are receiving a lot of emails from people asking basic questions about KM. This is just a way of getting free consulting."

4. You are starting a series of free half-day workshops on KM topics. The first workshop "Introduction to KM" attracts over 50 people.

5. You are concerned that the K-Link portal has so little content on KM from your academic members in Nanhua. Most of the contributions are from Republic University and Mercedes Polytechnic. You decide to hold a tea session with the Nanhua KM researchers.

6. After several more emails from the people on your KM directory, you agree to move it to the private, members-only portal. "It's making us targets for spam" says one.

7. Your first major research project is complete. It is a market study of Singapore's role as a regional knowledge services hub, commissioned by your main funding

agency, the Knowledge Infrastructure Board (KIB). The results are somewhat disappointing. The findings suggest that while regional market demand is high, most countries look to North America and Europe for expertise in knowledge based services.

8. While surfing, you discover a link to a new website set up in Singapore by the Learning Organization Community of Knowledge (LOCK). The look and feel is much better than yours, and so is the content! People seem to be engaged in active discussions, posting papers, and the interface is very simple. You ask your webmaster to take a look at it. "Why can't we do something like this?"

9. Your half day workshops continue to be popular. You now have over 100 people asking for follow-up courses.

10. At your monthly meeting, Professor Khoo the Chairman of your Executive Committee asks if you are focussed enough on supporting KM research in Singapore. "I don't see much shared resources and I'm sure your members are producing more than that."

11. The Association for KM Education (AKME), the local professional society for knowledge managers, proposes collaboration by becoming contributing members to your portal. "You should also invite the regional KM societies." You agree that this would give KRIS a much stronger presence.

12. KIB have come back to you on your market study report. "It's too negative" they say, "please go and collect more data." When you point out that the findings are solid, can stimulate a healthy debate and help clarify Singapore's knowledge services strategy, Clarice Tan, the Deputy Director of Knowledge Services says, "We already know what our strategy is. Your research is obviously incomplete."

13. Your webmaster has analyzed the LOCK learning organisation website. He says your K-Link system doesn't have the capability to replicate it. "Ours is a very high-end KM system. They are just using simple web-logging software, and they have no security to speak of. The content management functionality is also pretty thin." "But our collaboration tools are very poor" you say. He promises to talk to OBM about adding collaboration to the portal.

14. At your tea for Nanhua KM researchers, one of the associate professors takes you aside. "Basically the universities are in competition with each other" he says. "And they don't want to let other people know too much about their research areas in case their findings are used before being properly validated. They are much more comfortable with you using their work once it is published. Why don't you get the Library to help you track down all their past papers?"

15. You receive a letter from OBM Technologies objecting to your proposal to showcase a range of KM technologies from a range of KM vendors in an upcoming conference that you are organizing. "As KRIS's main technology partner we feel that it would be contrary to the spirit of our agreement to promote the products and services of our competitors."

16. Your Executive Committee rejects the proposal to open up K-Link to AKME and other regional professional societies. "It would not be appropriate at this stage" says Professor Khoo. "We don't have anything good enough to show the outside world. Let's get our own house in order first."

17. You receive an email from the Business Times requesting an interview. "We'd like to do a profile on KRIS". You agree to a telephone interview. It goes well.

18. The article in the Business Times comes out. It is a savage attack on your Institute, written by a consistent critic of government spending - not the journalist who interviewed you. "In a time of economic crisis, public money is spent on an institution that has no economic or professional relevance. Despite research showing a strong regional demand for KM-related services, and Singapore's clear lead in this area, KRIS remains an ivory tower refuge, isolated from real-world practice and the business issues of the KM industry here." You suspect the AKME president had a hand in this article. He had seemed disappointed by KRIS's brush-off.

19. Clarice Tan from KIB calls you. She asks you if you leaked details of the "unfinished" market study to the Business Times. You deny it, angrily. "Well they seem to know a lot of the information in that report. I will remind you that your work with us is confidential. You are not to talk to the media without our express permission."

20. You have been struggling with the issue of the market study. You decide that you cannot in good conscience massage the conclusions any other way. You ask for a meeting with Clarice and tell her so. "Well we will have to finish it ourselves" she says.

21. The Human Development Secretariat for ASEAN contacts you to ask if you can host a regional seminar on "Knowledge Society and the Development Agenda". You say you will think about it. It's a lot of work, and you feel it might be better handled by Republic University's School of Development Studies.

22. You ask the Nanhua university librarian if you can host links to the published papers of your academic members on your K-Link Portal. She says it is easier to point them to the full-text databases on the Library portal. "But first they need to be a member of the university, and they can only access them from inside the campus." You remind her that your members are scattered across several institutions, and you only need the KM articles. "I'm sorry, there is nothing I can do'' she says. "We are restricted by our license agreements with the publishers."

23. Professor Khoo invites you to lunch. He tells you there have been a number of complaints from the members and from KIB about your work. "They don't feel it is very relevant to what they need. For example, all these free workshops are upsetting the polytechnics and the commercial providers. Maybe you should think about getting more involved in real KM projects. There is plenty of opportunity to do something at Nanhua - my own School of Engineering is ready to try out KM. And you can channel consulting work to our academic members. We all need to make ourselves more relevant to industry." He tells you to take on the ASEAN knowledge society seminar. "It's good for the university."

24. Your webmaster tells you that OBM is still developing its collaboration module. "It should be ready early next year. They have promised to pilot it with us, so we will get a chance to give feedback and ask for additional features."

25. You have had a brainwave. You can re-brand your KM experts directory as 'K-Connect', linking them to potential projects and clients. You ask your webmaster to redesign the profile template and send out an email asking them to upgrade their profiles, explaining the purpose.

26. The Nanhua Legal officer calls you. She is concerned that the proposed K-Connect system might involve legal liabilities for the university. "These people are not our employees. We cannot be held responsible for what they say or do, nor can we suggest that we are endorsing them in any way." She insists that every search results page on K-Connect carries a full disclaimer.

27. You learn that LOCK and AKME have launched a Virtual Knowledge Institute in association with the World Federation of KM Associations. The press release states a combined membership of 350 members in Singapore "With over 700 virtual members from affiliated societies in the region."

Focus question: *Where did KRIS go wrong? How can it redefine its mission, and serve the KM community in Singapore?*

Analysis

The initiative that resulted in the foundation of KRIS is very well-intended, and on the face of it, promises to add value to the development of KM in Singapore (and perhaps in the region).

The harnessing of support from industry as well as from government and the academic sector was a strong move: these three domains do need to be integrated in order to fully understand the value of KM to an economy.

However, they seem to have missed out the practitioner networks at the start. When the professional societies AKME and LOCK emerge later on and offer collaboration, KRIS no longer appears hospitable to their aims or their needs.

In fact, the key mistake here is that KRIS has allowed itself to be too tightly constrained by its stakeholder interests: OBM is able to constrain KRIS's ability to work with alternative technology partners, and yet its own technology does not satisfy the Institute's own needs.

The university is able to influence the activities of the Institute against its better judgement, and yet it cannot harness the cooperation or the content of its academic staff. The KIB have a larger agenda for KRIS, and this does not seem to be well aligned with the emerging issues and challenges facing the Director.

Dr Hanifah generally seems unaware of the strategic issues, and the lack of alignment of stakeholder interests with her own vision. Her lack of experience in the corporate environment means that she very easily alienates the KM and Learning Organization societies, and the commercial providers of KM training, who are upset by her provision of free workshops.

A strategic visioning and planning exercise at the beginning of the KM project would have helped to identify some of these issues early on. The lack of involvement of the practitioner networks would also have emerged as a possible blindspot.

Even the knowledge-sharing issues had not been identified in advance. Collaboration elements on the portal should have been identified early on as a requirement, given the nature of the project. Similarly, the IP issues around the kind of content they wanted to host should have been clarified at the start.

In the present situation, Dr Hanifah has a swift recovery job to attempt. On its present course, her Institute risks being hijacked as a vehicle for academic enlargement of consulting activity in the Singapore market. This will likely alienate the principal funding stakeholder KIB even further, and set KRIS

in direct opposition to the practitioners' competing portal, which is more likely to succeed.

We suggest that Dr Hanifah's best course to save her vision for KRIS, would be to do what she should have done at the beginning: bring the stakeholders together with the representatives of LOCK and AKME, and negotiate a more open and flexible set of deliverables, based on open collaboration and a commitment to genuine knowledge sharing in support of the Singapore KM market.

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Case 6. Knowledge and Power: The Knowledge Infrastructure Board Tries to Practice What it Preaches

Who: Knowledge Infrastructure Board (KIB)
What: Government Statutory Board
When: Established in 1999, has supported over twenty
                 KM projects in the government sector
Where: Singapore

Background:

The Knowledge Infrastructure Board (KIB) was created as part of a Singapore government initiative to develop Singapore's capabilities as a knowledge services hub for the Asia Pacific region.

It has been the main funding arm for KM and information management projects in the government sector, as well as funding KM training and certification programmes.

A new Director for Policy and Planning, Mr Tan Kin Leong, has been appointed, and his first official act was to ask why KIB did not have its own KM project. "How can we have credibility if we don't practice it ourselves?"

He has set up a project team, and asked them to get a KM project under way as quickly as possible. "We have an intra-government conference on re-tooling Singapore for the KBE in three months time" he tells his staff. "I need something to show, or we'll be put in an embarrassing position."

With the economic climate so very uncertain, budget, however, is limited: "No fancy technology systems, and no big process reengineering work. Do something inexpensive like communities of practice, or a knowledge audit."

His team, all in their twenties, are newcomers to KM, so they start doing internal research. They discover that KM projects have been tried before in other divisions of KIB, some of them still in progress.

They also discover that it's going to be difficult to get cooperation outside their own division. "We have our hands full with what we're already doing" people say. "What's our pay-back for helping you?"

Their Director Mr Tan has got official support for their project from the CEO, but they suspect that does not extend to his fellow Divisional heads – because they just don't seem to be able to get any movement, though they always get friendly words. How should they proceed?

Themes: Culture, People, Competencies, Strategy, Leadership, Knowledge Audit, Communities of Practice

Case 6. Knowledge and Power: The Knowledge Infrastructure Board Tries to Practice What it Preaches

You are Henry, a planning executive in the Policy and Planning Division of the Knowledge Infrastructure Board (KIB). You have been tasked by your new Director Mr Tan, along with your colleagues Gary and Linda, to lead the KM project. Consider the following events, try to interpret what is unfolding, and anticipate what your options for action might be.

1. Your team (you and your colleagues Gary and Linda) meet a KM consultant to find out if he can help you do a knowledge audit or set up communities of practice. He is not very helpful - he insists you should figure out your KM objectives first. He says he can help you do this, in a workshop for KIB's senior executives. You say you will get back to him.

2. The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) announces new funding for KM projects in the civil service. Grants will be managed by a different department from yours.

3. Your team attends a workshop on "Successful Communities of Practice" given by the Government Training Institute. It gives a clear methodology and the instructor says he is willing to advise you. You are encouraged!

4. At your meeting with Mr Tan Kin Leong, your Director, you report on your meeting with the KM consultant and his offer to conduct a strategy workshop for Directors and Deputy Directors. "They are all very busy people" he says. "It's your job to get the project planned out, then put it up for approval." He suggests that you talk to another consultant, who is already doing an ERP project for KIB. "He will have a better picture of our needs."

5. Gary, your colleague, has been doing a lot of research on Communities of Practice (CoP). He believes your team can handle a CoP Project internally. You all agree that you will still need outside help to conduct a knowledge audit.

6. You have been given additional responsibility for managing the Balanced Scorecard project for KIB. Your boss tells you it will synergise well with the KM effort.

7. You meet your colleagues from HR to see if they can help in your CoP project. They are friendly, but cautious. "We are trying to implement learning organization this year, and this ERP implementation is also taking a lot of our time." However, they promise to introduce you to their consultant, who also does KM projects.

8. Gary tells you that he spoke to a Chief Information Officer from an MNC at a workshop on taxonomy building. "He said if we want to do a knowledge audit, we need to know why we are doing it. That will help us define the scope of the audit." You think he is probably right, but neither of you can figure out how to scope it.

9. You submit your draft proposal for the CoP project to Mr Tan. As it includes purchasing collaboration software for the whole of KIB, you suggest a bid to the MAS KM funding programme.

10. You need to take some time off - you are getting married next month and there are a lot of things to take care of!

11. Gary and Linda saw the ERP consultant while you were away. Linda is especially impatient. "It's so frustrating - he said the same as the others. Why can't we just go ahead and do the audit ourselves? I've got a KM workbook with all the worksheets here."

12. Mr Tan asks you to do a proof of concept on your CoP proposal. He's not convinced about the need for software. "This is about people to people knowledge sharing, right? Technology will only get in the way." Linda is sceptical. "I heard he doesn't really get on with the other Directors. He wants to take all the credit for this KM thing himself. He doesn't want to ask them for additional budget.''

13. Mr Tan has arranged for Linda to visit all the Department Heads to seek their support for setting up CoPs. "It's better if you explain it to them personally."

14. You have a crisis! Your hotel function room for the wedding dinner has been double booked! Your fiancee is in tears, and accuses you of not doing your fair share. You take urgent leave to sort out the hotel and do some other chores.

15. The consultant recommended by Mr. Tan has sent a proposal for a "Knowledge audit scoping workshop". Mr Tan forwards it to you saying "Approved. But don't disturb the other managers. Attendees can come from within the division…"

16. Linda is not having much impact in her meetings with the departmental managers from other divisions. As usual she's quite cynical. "They are just giving me the brush-off without actually saying so. Clarice Tan actually asked me why we are doing a new KM project when there are already so many KM initiatives in KIB. I think they don't want our Director to look good." She asks if Gary can go round and talk to the frontline staff in the other departments, instead. "You know how to talk to them, you seem to get on well with everybody."

17. Your consultant for your Balanced Scorecard workshops can't make the dates you originally agreed. This is a major headache, it's virtually impossible to get everybody's diaries coordinated for new dates - and the workshops have to be completed before the budget planning cycle starts.

18. The knowledge audit workshop is inconclusive. You only covered knowledge assets from the Strategy and Planning Division, and people were clearly bored - "How is this relevant to what we do?" asked one. "Why do we have to do this? Isn't this what we engage the consultant for?" However, Linda is happier. "I have a much clear idea of how to do it ourselves - we can do it as an online survey form. I'll get the IT people to do a mock up." She promises to write up her proposal for presentation to Mr Tan.

19. Mr Tan has just been nominated Chief Knowledge Officer for KIB in addition to his current role. Linda is astonished. "He certainly knows how to butter up the CEO." You are a little bit surprised, until a colleague tells you that the position will rotate annually among the Divisional Directors. "Being new, he was an easy target, and it suits him to be seen as a KM champion."

20. Gary reports good progress with what he calls his "arm twisting exercise." He seems to have generated a lot of interest in the communities of practice idea, across the organization. He has managed to set up three CoPs, one on innovation, one on Balanced Scorecard, and one on using the Staff Recreational Club to improve knowledge sharing. He has even set up an account on Yahoo Groups

to service the CoPs. You make a note to ensure that Gary's efforts are acknowledged in his performance review. He has a lot of energy, but you have noticed he's been looking tired lately.

21. The Prime Minister dropped in! You were out, running a quick errand for your fiancee, but Linda saw all the action. "He was here to give a press conference on our new 'Knowledge Singapore' report and Mr Tan showed him round wearing his CKO hat. The PM even asked me about our knowledge mapping project!"

22. Mr Tan sends back the presentation you've prepared for his government conference speech on your KM project. He asks you to take out the CoP stuff, and focus on the knowledge mapping project. "The community stuff is too airy fairy and there's nothing I can show on that. Get me lots of statistics on our knowledge assets and some ROI calculations on efficiency and productivity." You press Linda for the project plan, and for the additional data. Her mock-up survey form is prepared, but she is still sitting on the detailed plan.

23. Your wedding! As you are taking ten days off for your honeymoon, you ask Gary to help with the Balanced Scorecard rescheduling problem while you're away.

24. Back from your honeymoon, and still no plan from Linda. You're getting desperate. Mr. Tan's conference is in three weeks! Thankfully, the Balanced Scorecard project is back on track.

25. The innovation community of practice has just had an idea accepted for review by The Enterprise Challenge (TEC)! If they pass the review process, they will get funding to make it work.

26. Finally, Linda's proposal for the knowledge mapping project! But it's full of holes, and none of the data Mr Tan requested has been collected. When you challenge her, Linda is defensive. "There's no point doing too much work on it, he'll just drop it once the conference is over just like the communities of practice." You wonder whether you should try to sell Mr Tan the story on The Enterprise Challenge CoP for his conference speech.

27. Gary tells you he has submitted his resignation. "It's nothing personal, I just can't stand working in this type of environment - the internal politics are killing me." He has taken a marketing job in the private sector.

28. Phew! Mr Tan thinks the CoP angle is a good one. However, Gary is the leading person in the TEC project proposal. You ask him to document it thoroughly before he leaves.

Focus question: *How sustainable are the KM projects at KIB? How could KIB have approached their KM differently?*

Analysis

The KIB's KM project has one of the key recommended success factors for a KM implementation: senior management support with CEO approval. In fact, their sponsor is nominated Chief Knowledge Officer, which gives much more visibility to the project. There also appears to be a fairly dedicated team to drive it, although one of the team members gets side-tracked early on with a related, Balanced Scorecard project.

However, the team are young and inexperienced, and this project seems at times to have been over-delegated, with little follow through on the senior management support. Their attempt to involve senior management in a KM strategy workshop meets with a rebuff.

The project is also subject to the internal politics of the organization. The long term commitment of the sponsor to the project outcomes are suspect, and his fellow Directors seem willing to stand back and let the project slide, without either opposing or supporting it.

In consequence, the team find it hard to gain support across the organization, not least because they are probably too junior to sway middle and senior managers. They show admirable energy in lobbying frontline staff for involvement, and demonstrate the importance of being able to operate at multiple levels in an organization to succeed in knowledge sharing initiatives.

Their inability to get a coherent KM strategy is a serious flaw, and affects the credibility of their project. They end up working very hard to achieve the form of a KM project with no real substance. Their one success, the project that gets the attention of The Enterprise Challenge, happens more out of energy and good will, than out of design or any intrinsic merits of the KM system they are attempting to establish.

Given Gary's commitment and energy on the CoP project, it's not surprising that he eventually decides to resign. Although he has had some success at the operational level, his Director's casual attitude towards this work, and the play of internal politics that determines the flavour of the week, are both understandably demotivating.

This project also falls victim to a clearly fragmented organization. The team several times encounter references to other KM projects in KIB, which they seem not to have explored in any depth. This was also a weakness, because they amplified the sense of competition among departments and divisions, thereby undermining the knowledge sharing philosophy being espoused.

Key steps that should have been undertaken at the start should have included an audit of KM projects previously undertaken in KIB. Their successes and failures should have

been examined, with particular focus on the reasons for success or failure.

The project should not have proceeded without a clear strategy that the whole organization could buy into. This message came through consistently from the experts whom KIB consulted and thereafter ignored.

Given the clear role of internal politics, I do not believe any further resources should be devoted to this project as an official KM project. The knowledge mapping exercise certainly makes no sense given the lack of clear focus.

The work with communities of practice would be useful to continue as a kind of proto-KM activity, but they are unlikely to deliver any tangible results except by accident or by the unlikely event the organization can inspire Gary-like energy in future. The most useful role they can play (if they survive) would be as seed work for a future, more focused KM implementation.

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