GURTEEN KNOWLEDGE: 10 YEARS IN KM

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Happy Anniversary

When I first joined *Inside Knowledge* magazine as a bright-eyed and bushy tailed editorial assistant in 2004, I had never heard the term 'knowledge management'. Of course, I understood the value of collaboration and knowledge sharing within successful, innovative businesses (although maybe not using that particular terminology) but I had much to learn.

Throughout my baptism of fire over the subsequent months certain names and organisations – KM trailblazers or gurus, if you like – popped up on a regular basis. One of these was David Gurteen and his work with the Gurteen Knowledge Community and his knowledge cafés.

A regular fixture in the magazine with his monthly 'Gurteen perspective' column, David has established himself as one of our most valued and supportive contributors, as well being a thoroughly nice chap and a pleasure to work with. He has also been a regular speaker and chair at many of Ark's conferences over the years.

With that in mind we thought that it would be appropriate to celebrate the Gurteen Knowledge Community's tenth anniversary with a special supplement, featuring a retrospective look at some of David's most thought-provoking columns, as well as coverage of the past 10 years in KM.

It would be impossible to distill every single development in the KM space into one supplement. There has been so much change over the past decade, not only in attitudes towards knowledge work, but also in the technologies that support the process and people aspects. KM has also proved itself to its doubters (although this may still be up for debate) by adapting to the changing requirements of organisations and, more importantly their people. The popularity of Web 2.0 tools is testament to this – and I'm sure this is still much more to come… InsideKnowledge

In the meantime, I hope that you enjoy this commemorative compilation as much as we have enjoyed bringing it together.

Kate Clifton
Managing editor

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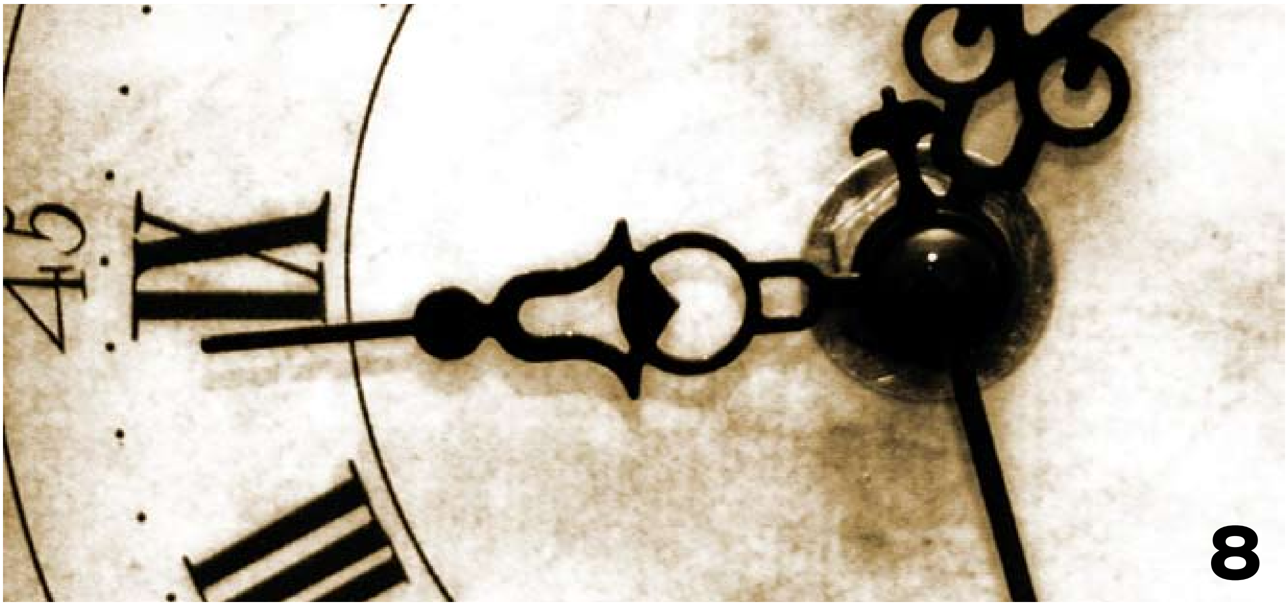

The Gurteen Perspectives

The knowledge: David Gurteen

The architect of one of the world's most friendly knowledge website; host to online discussion forums; and author of a monthly newsletter, now in its tenth year, with a subscription list of 17,000 people in 168 countries. He is one of the world's most respected knowledge experts. Yet he is unassuming, not 'authoritative' and always open to other points of view.

Before David Gurteen became all that, he logged 40 years in high technology industries as a professional software development manager. In the late 1980s he worked for Lotus Development as 'international czar,' responsible for ensuring that Lotus products were designed for the global marketplace.

"This was one of the most rewarding and fun times of my career, as my job was really all about knowledge sharing and working with people," he says. "It was also a KM role although, of course, the term was not used in those days."

David Gurteen

In 1993, he left Lotus Development and founded Gurteen Knowledge, working as a Lotus Notes consultant. Lotus Notes was one of the first collaborative application development platforms that enabled users to communicate, coordinate and collaborate on a global scale. What he learnt developing such applications was that the real barriers to knowledge sharing and collaboration had little to do with the technology but more to do with the attitudes and behaviours of the people.

In the mid-to-late 1990s, with the birth of the commercial web and knowledge management (KM), he found a more natural home in KM and this led to the creation of his website, the publication of his knowledge letter and the formation of the Gurteen Knowledge Community – with the purpose of accelerating people's understanding of the need for new ways of seeing the word and working. This has been his focus ever since.

Knowledge community

The Gurteen Knowledge Community is for people who are committed to making a difference; people who wish to share and learn from each other and who strive to see the world differently, think differently and act differently.

Gurteen says the members are inclined to action, see themselves as thought leaders and change activists, recognise the importance of understanding through dialogue and conversation, have a passion for learning, are open minded and non-judgmental by nature, and value diversity and cultural differences.

People join the community to come together to take action, to explore new ways of working, to improve their understanding of the world, to meet like-minded people (and not so like minded), to share knowledge and to learn, to gain new and different perspectives and to give or gain support and motivation from other members.

Membership is free and the only 'obligation' is to receive the free monthly newsletter. Members of the community are entitled to attend Gurteen Knowledge Cafés, meetings which are held regularly in London, along with the regional communities in Liverpool, Bristol, New York City, Zurich and Adelaide.

Open cafés are held in various cities throughout the world – wherever he happens to be on business. The past 18 months alone has seen open cafés in Belgium, Norway, Dubai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Phoenix, New Zealand and Australia, among others. "This is a huge part of who I am and what I'm about," Gurteen says. "Whenever I visit a country on business, I mail my community and ask who would like to host an open Gurteen Knowledge Café."

There are also knowledge cafés at conferences, and internally for organisations, plus knowledge café workshops where he teaches others how to run them.

Knowledge letter

Gurteen had a clear vision of his audience from the very first issue of his knowledge letter: "Many of you have a technical orientation; others a people one; some of you are business managers and others are individual contributors. So my challenge is to strike a balance between the 'business' domain and the 'human' domain."

First published in June, 2000, the newsletter went out to his personal list of 300 acquaintances. He promised it would contain roughly 10 items on subjects such as KM, learning, creativity and the effective use of internet technology. The items would be short and succinct but would point readers to richer resources on the web.

He called the format a smorgasbord with "lots of tasty little bites to eat – some you may enjoy, some you may not and some may be an acquired taste. So nibble at the morsels you like and push the others aside. What you find food for thought may not be liked by others; and what others like you may find tasteless."

Knowledge cafés

Sometimes people attend the cafés just to learn how to conduct one themself. He doesn't pretend to be the originator or last word on cafés and refers people to The World Café. But if they want to learn how Gurteen does it, he readily shares his method.

The purpose of his knowledge cafés is to bring a group of people together to have an open, creative conversation on a topic of mutual interest to surface their collective knowledge, to share ideas and insights and to gain a deeper understanding of the subject and the issues involved. Although this may seem like a 'talking shop' it is not, as improvement in understanding ultimately leads to action in the form of better decision making and innovation and thus, tangible business outcomes.

"Knowledge cafés can be run in many ways," he says. "There is no definitive format but some ways are more effective than others." For many reasons, he runs his cafés to a quite different format to the one outlined in the World Café website (*see* www.theworldcafe.com).

Friendly website

If simplicity is the key to Gurteen's knowledge cafés, personalisation and organisation are the keys to his content-rich website.

Everything on this site is open and you do not need to be a member to access any part of it or subscribe to any of the services provided."

Gurteen eschews 'marketing hype' websites and those that harvest e-mail addresses before opening the door to content. His website provides a wealth of information and knowledge including book reviews, articles, people profiles, an event calendar, inspirational quotations, an integral knowledge log (blog) and more on subjects that include KM, learning, creativity, innovation and personal mastery.

Knowledge Log

The Gurteen Knowledge Log is a casual blog in which David talks about items of interest that he's found on the Web, experiences or insights he thinks his readers might find useful. The content is mainly, but not strictly, limited to the area of KM and learning.

"Like the rest of my site, it's an eclectic mix," says Gurteen. And it isn't always about the standard Gurteen themes. In his blog message of April 22, 2008, a quote from a fellow blogger set him off:

"I am a documentary junkie – the UK History Channel and other documentary and news channels are pretty much all I watch. But time and time again I get angry when I see the programme makers turn the problems facing the world into entertainment.

"What I have long wanted media companies to do is to start taking the problems seriously and move from saying 'isn't it tragic', isn't it crazy to 'here is what you can do to help solve them. And this is what we are setting up to help support you.'"

But Gurteen looks instead to a participatory web. "In 50 years time I think we will look back at old news clips and documentaries of today in a similar way we look back at the propaganda news reels of World War II and wonder why so many people at the time did not see things for what they were."

Articles, publications and more

Gurteen has been a fixture in *Inside Knowledge* magazine since August 2006 and he also writes occasional articles for other professional publications in the UK, US and Australia.

He also holds two-day workshops on building a knowledge-sharing culture, geared toward inspiring attendees to put into motion ideas that will make a difference in their organisations. Additionally, there are keynote speeches, presentations, talks and chairing of conferences. As Gurteen says, "I love to meet people and to network and am always looking for opportunities to do so."

Gurteen also makes extensive use of social tools to help grow and support his community. Along with his blog, he puts together e-mail and RSS feeds, including his popular 'Knowledge Quote of the Day'. He also makes effective use of tools such as Flickr, YouTube, Dopplr, Twitter and others. In summary, it could be said that Gurteen is the benchmark for knowledge sharing and that his contributions to the knowledge fields are equal or greater than those of entire organisations. InsideKnowledge

To learn more about the Gurteen Knowledge Community go to http://www.gurteen.com.

This article is adapted from 'The Knowledge', originally published in *Inside Knowledge*, Volume 11 Issue 9.

Q&A: David Gurteen

David Gurteen takes the hot seat and discusses KM challenges and those people who have inspired him over the years, with Kate Clifton.

What have been the highlights of your career so far?

Stephen Fry interviewed Steve Jobs a few weeks back and he asked him about his career. Jobs said something along the lines of 'I don't think of my life as a career. I respond to things, which isn't a career, it's a life'. That resonates with me. I don't think of my life as a career at all – certainly not now, but perhaps when I was younger.

There are two highlights though. One was in my last corporate job – at Lotus Development, as international czar in the early 1990s.

Since then it's been the knowledge cafes, which have come from nowhere. I started them out of sheer frustration for 'chalk and talk' presentations and they've just taken on a life of their own, which has been more powerful than I ever envisaged when I first started.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?

In the KM field, it's Dave Snowden by far. His thinking and ideas around KM and complexity are just way ahead of anyone else and I've learnt a huge amount from him.

More broadly, the one person who's inspired me more than anyone else is the American author and naturalist, Henry David Thoreau. In his essay *Civil Disobedience*, he almost suggested that if people were being ruled by an unjust government, they had the moral right to be disobedient. His writing influenced Ghandi and Martin Luther King amongst others and he had a huge impact on the world long after his death.

Which aspects of KM do you enjoy the most, and the least?

Increasingly the aspect that I enjoy is KM when it's applied for social good rather than just financial profit or gain. We face so many problems in the world, whether it's terrorism, poverty, AIDS or exploitation of women – I could go on. We must apply our knowledge to solving those problems.

The area that drives me insane is the conversation about whether or not KM is dead, or if we should we give it another label. Whether we call it something different or not, the issues or problems that KM is trying to address are never going to go away. The tools, techniques and ideas will evolve, but KM is never going to disappear

What do you think are the biggest challenges currently faced by KM practitioners?

First, to be successful, they need to focus on the business. The reason KM has failed in the past is that there has been a lack of focus on business outcomes and results. Second: they need to obtain sustained buy-in – not just initial support, which loses momentum and results in resource cuts further down the line. Third: you have to engage the people who KM will affect throughout the business.

What do you think will be the key developments in over KM over the next 12 months?

On the technology side, it's the application of social tools such as blogs and wikis for knowledge sharing. Within that, I think that smart phones and the iPad are going to be huge. The fact that people will have the ability to access each other and knowledge at any time is really exciting.

The growing recognition of the importance of conversation is another key area, as so many KM approaches are technology based. Whenever I talk about the cafés, one of the first questions I get asked is 'how do we do this online'? People want to put a computer between that face-to-face interaction, which defeats the object.

In summary, I think KM processes are moving towards being much less formal and more casual.

Outside of work, what are you most likely to be found doing?

Sleeping! It comes back to my reference to Steve Jobs earlier – I don't differentiate. I don't have any hobbies, such as golfing or gardening. I travel a great deal and I always try to build in some extra time to meet people and have conversations. I enjoy having dinner or a drink and chatting – that's my form of relaxation.

If you could describe yourself in three words, what would they be?

I'm a typical Libran. I Googled Libra to find three words and came up with loads. The ones that I thought described me the best were 'social', 'sharing' and 'balanced'.

10 years in KM...

Kate Clifton takes a retrospective glance at the past decade in KM

In a 2009 blog post[1] Nancy Dixon discussed the different ways in which people conceptualise 'knowledge' and the subsequent impact on how knowledge professionals approach their work, including the premise of the strategies that they design and implement. Within this overview of conceptualisation, she touched upon examples such as 'who in the organisation has useful knowledge?', 'how stable is knowledge over time?', and 'how can we tell if the knowledge is valid or trustworthy?'.

Dixon concluded that if the goal of KM was to leverage the collective knowledge of an organisation, then we have been 'doing KM' since the 1990s. "It has been a steep learning curve and we still have a steep curve head of us, but we are learning as evidenced by how our thinking about our strategies for dealing with organisational knowledge has changed and evolved," she wrote.

The evolving KM landscape, Dixon explained, could be separated into three categories:

- Leveraging explicit content (1990 onwards) – capturing documented knowledge and analytical content and creating repositories of information. The primary focus being to connect people to content;
- Leveraging experiential knowledge (2000 onwards) – using communities of practice (CoP), building expertise locators and experimenting with 'learning before, during and after' processes. The primary focus being to connect people to people; and,
- Leveraging collective knowledge (2005 onwards) – examining conversation in both its face-to-face and virtual guises and assessing who is involved in that conversation and what it is about. The primary focus being to connect employees and decision makers.

While this article will focus predominantly on the second and third 'phases' of KM, exploring developments in attitudes, processes and the use of technology over the past ten years, it would be remiss not to first look at the state of KM at the end of the 1990s.

Knowledge as a business asset

During the 1990s, experimental forays into 'KM' were driven largely by the view that an organisation's collective knowledge was a critical business asset and could increase competitive advantage. Therefore, there was a push (by those organisations 'in the know') to collect that explicit knowledge, preferably from subject matter experts, in documents and make it available in a repository or data warehouse. Many business leaders also made the assumption that such 'best practice' knowledge was fairly stable and could be stored without losing value. And that if the knowledge was available, then employees would actively seek it out and use it.

However, as Dixon explains: "What knowledge management professionals began to discover was that technology alone was not enough to manage knowledge. 'People to content' was a necessary step but fell far short of being sufficient to leverage an organisation's knowledge."

While relying on technology to build know-how databases and repositories was fine, business leaders did not acknowledge that there was a great deal of tacit knowledge held in the heads of individuals. In addition, the knowledge that had been captured may not necessarily remain stable and was therefore at risk of becoming out of date. For that reason, companies that had invested heavily in document management systems or intranets (the list could go on) rapidly became disillusioned with the concept of KM as a purely technological endeavour.

In 1999, Ron Young[2] referred to a growing acceptance that 'ordinary KM' wasn't enough and had been undertaken with limited success and by a limited number of organisations.

"Generally, the major shift in thinking that was essential to truly understanding the fundamentally new knowledge management capabilities, together with the understanding and implementation of radically and fundamentally new knowledge-based business processes, tools and technologies, had only taken place for a relative minority of people and organisations in the world," he wrote. "What we saw, instead, was an increasing number of organisations embarking on what I would refer to as 'ordinary knowledge management initiatives' that were doomed to failure, at worst, or mediocre improved organisational performance and improvement at best."

This opened the door for what has often been termed as the 'second wave' of KM, around 2000. Here, the focus was on connecting people, to encourage collaboration and a more personal involvement in KM activities – albeit still with a technological angle.

Growing acceptance?

In 1998, KPMG Consulting released its *Knowledge Management Research Report*, within which it concluded that the term 'KM' was just beginning to enter into the business language.

In 2000, when it published the next edition of the report[3], KM was firmly at the top of the business agenda, with the survey findings demonstrating that the importance of effective KM had been grasped.

Of the 423 organisations surveyed, 81 per cent said they had or were considering a KM programme. Thirty-eight per cent had a programme in place and 30 per cent were in the process of setting one up.

Respondents stated that they were looking for KM to play an 'extremely significant' or 'significant' role in: improving competitive advantage (79 per cent); improving marketing (75 per cent); improving customer focus (72 per cent); employee development (57 per cent); product innovation (64 per cent); and, revenue growth and profit (63 per cent).

However, even with the adoption of KM processes and strategy, respondents were still concerned that organisations were failing to tackle the associated challenges, perhaps because they didn't fully understand the implications of implementing such a programme. Of the 36 per cent of respondents who said that KM had failed to meet expectations:

- Twenty per cent said there was a lack of user uptake owing to insufficient communication;
- Nineteen per cent said there was a failure to integrate KM into everyday working practices;
- Eighteen per cent cited a lack of time to learn how to use the system, or a sense that the system was too complicated;
- Fifteen per cent felt there was a lack of training; and,
- Thirteen per cent believed there was little personal benefit for the user.

Organisations were still failing to address the real KM challenges and respondents also raised concerns about such problems as: a lack of time to share knowledge (62 per cent); failure to use knowledge effectively (57 per cent); and, difficulty in capturing tacit knowledge (50 per cent).

In addition, organisations remained unaware of the cultural implications of KM implementation – and were still focusing on technology, such as intranets and extranets, data mining and warehousing tools, document management systems, decision support and groupware.

Despite the increase in person-to-person collaboration during the same period, thanks to the popularity of e-mail and business process re-engineering, respondents to the study still displayed frustration at the processes involved in gathering and accessing the knowledge they required to perform their jobs to a high standard. Only one-third of respondents had knowledge policies stipulating which elements to store, update or delete and even fewer rewarded knowledge working. Further, only 18 per cent had a knowledge map or guide showing employees what information was available to them.

All of these factors were contributing to the wider issue of information overload, with organisations relying on huge siloes of information, which were not necessarily easy to navigate. They also failed to account for perhaps the most valuable knowledge asset of all – the intangible elements, such as collective experiences passed down through generations or apprenticeships, innovation and personal relationships.

So, if these survey findings formed an accurate benchmark at the time, while many organisations had recognised that KM was no longer a 'nice to have', they were failing to introduce the appropriate knowledge-sharing culture and relying heavily on technology – while at the same time not using it to its full capability. Even though e-mail, intranets and extranets where becoming more common, and certain trailblazing organisations were making leaps and bounds with their KM programmes, there was still much work to be done.

Not surprisingly then, in an article written in 2002, Dave Snowden (then working as director of IBM's Institute for Knowledge) predicted the end of the 'second generation of KM' – suggesting that it had failed to deliver on its promised benefits.

Knowledge is paradoxical

In 'Complex Acts of Knowing: Paradox and Descriptive Self-Awareness'[4], Snowden wrote about the paradoxical nature of knowledge, which was challenging some of the basic, underpinning concepts of KM.

Knowledge and intellectual capital were not systems or 'things' that could measured, and therefore they could not be managed – as the old management adage suggests.

Instead, he asserted that:

- "Knowledge can only be volunteered; it cannot be conscripted";
- "We can always know more than we can tell, and we will always tell more than we can write down"; and,
- We only know what we know when we need to know it."

He argued that 'content and context' were key to understanding the true nature of knowledge transfer and with his theories on abstraction, sense-making, and the Cynefin framework, reminded knowledge managers that all human interactions were heavily influenced by their experiences – whether personal or collective.

> "
> **'Enterprise 2.0' has broken down the more traditional and hierarchical model of command and control KM.**

Snowden concluded that the previous focus on tacit-explicit knowledge conversion that had dominated KM since its inception in the 1990s had provided a limited, albeit useful, set of tools, stating that:

"In the new 'complexity informed' but not 'complexity constrained' third generation, content, narrative and context management provide a radical synthesis of the concepts and practices of both first and second generation. By enabling descriptive self-awareness within an organisation, rather than imposing a pseudo-analytic model of best practice, it provides a new model of simplicity, without being simplistic, enabling the emergence of new meaning through the interaction of the informal and formal in a complex ecology of knowledge."

It's good to talk

By combining formal tools, such as e-learning programmes, enterprise search engines and workflow technology, with more informal processes, including CoPs and other communities where the sharing of knowledge and experience could be performed with relative ease – and at the user's discretion – organisations finally began to realise the business benefits of KM.

More recently, the introduction of social networks and the impact of Web 2.0 technology has enabled people to gain more control over how they interact not only in professional, formal environments, but also at home and within their informal communities. By empowering the user, 'Enterprise 2.0' has broken down the more traditional and hierarchical model of command and control KM. As David Gurteen has previously stated in *Inside Knowledge*:

"Enterprise 2.0 is a flatter, more fluid, networked organisation built around social tools.

Now it wasn't KM people who drove this development. It wasn't the traditional KM technology vendors and it wasn't the knowledge managers and workers within organisations. It was a bunch of enthusiastic renegades on the web as well as a few corporate renegades who could see where things were heading."

Interestingly enough, the transition to leveraging collective knowledge has been enabled by people using social media tools and websites to their own advantage, without the constraints of more formal systems and procedures – resulting in a more relaxed and ongoing transfer of knowledge and insight. And as people replicate such practices in the workplace it seems that the true value of knowledge – in its tacit and intangible forms – is finally being exploited.

Although challenges still remain – for example in persuading certain

'Thinking about KM's growth as a concept'

- "Knowledge was thought of as an occasional and almost-permanent *thing* – thus were born repositories;
- Knowledge was thought of as something only in *people's minds* – thus were born expertise locators;
- Knowledge was thought of as a constant *stream of thought* – thus were born blogs;
- Knowledge was thought of as a *collective entity* (rather than individualistic) – thus were born communities;
- Knowledge was thought of as a *constant and collective flow and evolution of* thought – thus were born wikis;
- Knowledge was thought of as *contextual and specific to relationships between people* – thus were born social networks;
- Knowledge was thought of as that which *people value* – thus were born social bookmarking and RSS;
- Knowledge was thought of as something that can be extracted, in the form of trends and patterns, from oceans of data and information through smart/intelligent tools – thus was born business intelligence and data mining;
- Knowledge was thought of as something that emerges and suggests itself rather than something exists in a ready-to-use form – thus were born the practices of brainstorming and after action reviews."

Source: Taken from a blog post by Nirmala Palaniappan at http://nirmala-km.blogspot.com/2008/08/thinking-about-kms-growth-as-concept.html, 1 August 2009.

generational groups to update a wiki (as was the case with uploading documents to a database in the 1990s) or the associated risk that comes with social networking (such as data leaks or information loss) – the future certainly does seem to be more positive.

And surely the early techno-centric approach to KM has now come full circle. It is still an enabler and the introduction of a search system or the inclusion of a blog on a company's website does not guarantee success, if the appropriate cultural guidance is not in place. However the advent of technologies that enable people to connect faster, better and at any time means that knowledge can be disseminated 24 hours a day and across geographical boundaries, more effectively than ever before. Certainly the ordinary has become the extraordinary and it will be interesting to see what effect the semantic web (or Web 3.0) will have, in terms of generating automated and more 'meaningful' web content over the coming years.

What next for KM?

Many have argued as to whether or not 'KM is dead'. Jerry Ash, in a debate with Dave Snowden in *Inside Knowledge* magazine[5] commented:

"No. KM is not finished. It hasn't even made a good start. How can KM fold up its tent and wander off in multiple new directions to sink further into mystery? What sense is there in further fragmenting a strategy that can only work as a whole, not as disconnected parts? But maybe Snowden is right. Maybe KM has outlived its usefulness if it is not ready to extend itself beyond limited theory and practice."

The salient point here being that people are rapidly bridging the divide between theory and practice and bringing together new networks and innovative ways of working on an almost continuous basis.

Perhaps the key message to remember is that while the very definition of KM has continuously evolved, as have the working practices associated with it, the issues that KM is trying to address will always be present. Businesses will always want to be more productive and differentiated from their competitors. They will always want to come to market with the most innovative product. And junior members of staff will always need to learn from departing experts. KM may be an unpopular label, but its ethos is here to stay.

To be continued in ten years' time... InsideKnowledge

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What I learnt about KM as czar

From 1989 to 1992 I worked for Lotus Development in its then headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts as 'international czar'. Yes that was my title. I still have some business cards to prove it. Funny thing was, though, even with such a grand title I had no authoritative power, yet I did get to build a small team.

My mission was to ensure that all Lotus products were designed for the global market. This meant they needed to be coded in such a way that they could be cost effectively localised for other languages and cultures. Not just European languages, such as French and German, but Japanese, Chinese and Arabic – somewhat harder propositions given their multi-byte character sets.

I started, thinking this was simply a means of understanding the requirements, documenting them and making that 'knowledge' available to the development and marketing teams. I could not have been more wrong!

Having created an international handbook that explained how to design software products for global markets and distributed it, run training courses and built international requirements into the formal software development process – development teams still did not take the time to build international products.

One of the main reasons was that they were not measured or rewarded on it and they were under huge pressure to ship the US product. This meant that international concerns always came second. Another reason was that they did not really understand why we were asking for all the things we did.

But I was not to be beaten. I developed a strategy that turned out to be very successful. Basically, we built and nurtured close personal relationships with the people that mattered. We worked and collaborated with them to get the work done. We took the time to understand their problems and avoided confrontational situations with them. We would sit down and discuss how we could help each other and meet both our objectives.

Often senior managers were under such pressure that they would not even give us the time of day. So, we would move down the organisation until we found someone who would. That was one of the things I loved about the Lotus culture – that I could do that without too much fear of recrimination from a senior manager – although at times we did need to be careful.

> Often senior managers were under such pressure that they would not even give us the time of day. So we would move down the organisation until we found someone who would.

At times we would move to the lowest level – the programmer cutting the code. By building a relationship with them and explaining what we were trying to do and why it was important, we could often persuade them to design and write the code the way we required and frequently it required no additional effort. It often meant doing deals. 'If you do this for us – we will help you by doing this for you'. Basically, we would do whatever it took – as long as it was ethical, of course.

In my last year there, every single new product was sufficiently well designed for the global marketplace. And I had learnt a lesson that profoundly changed the way I saw the world and the way I behaved.

'Sharing knowledge' is not just about documenting that knowledge and formal process. It's about building relationships with people and working together with them to get things done. InsideKnowledge

Personally speaking

A while back, a friend told me that she had forwarded my monthly knowledge letter to a number of colleagues and that several had commented that it was strange that I used the word 'I' a lot.

I found this amusing as I quite deliberately use the word. I strive to avoid the passive voice. Both my website and my newsletter are personal endeavours and so it makes sense to write in the first person, but it took me a while to learn that.

In the early days it was feedback from a friend who said, "Hey David, I love your newsletter but it is so much more interesting and authentic when you are 'yourself' and speak in 'your own voice' about something you feel passionate about". That helped convince me to write in the first person.

It was also at that time I first read the book *The Cluetrain Manifesto* and the thoughts of David Weinberger on voice: "We have been trained throughout our business careers to suppress our individual voice and to sound like a 'professional', that is, to sound like everyone else. This professional voice is distinctive. And weird. Taken out of context, it is as mannered as the ritualistic dialogue of the 17th-century French court."

But it goes deeper. I was educated as a scientist. I was instructed to write in the passive voice. That's what scientists do. I never really questioned it. Well at least not until I came across an article in *New Scientist* magazine by Rupert Sheldrake, the biologist and author. Here is how he started his article:

"'The test tube was carefully smelt.' I was astonished to read this sentence on my 11-year-old son's science notebook. At primary school his science reports had been lively and vivid. But when he moved to secondary school they become stilted and passive. This was no accident. His teachers told him to write this way."

Writing in the passive voice is meant to make science objective, impersonal and professional. Maybe it does, but at great cost: it is less truthful. And this style has spilt over into our business world.

To my mind one of the best examples of the distortion caused by the passive voice are the biographies of conference speakers. Everyone knows they are not written by an independent person, but by the speakers themselves. So when they read, "Dr John Smith is an internationally acclaimed educator, speaker and trainer... he is a world renowned thought leader, author and practitioner," you know you are reading hype. Here is someone with a huge ego telling you just how great he is.

"Writing in the passive voice is meant to make science objective, impersonal and professional. Maybe it does, but at great cost: it is less truthful

Writing like this is misleading. It is alienating. But if you write your bio in the first person then it becomes harder to write such rubbish. You are making it personal.

The active voice is more truthful. It gives us ownership of our work. It makes it harder to distort things. It involves us with the subject more. It liberates us to be ourselves. Bloggers and storytellers have already discovered this. By writing personally they free themselves to be more creative.

So, I love to use the word 'I'. I hope you are inspired to write more personally too. InsideKnowledge

David – get a life!

I discovered weblogs back in 2002, when a colleague suggested I take a look at them. At first I stumbled across the mass of personal weblogs that held little interest for me but then I found a one that changed my life.

It was unusual for a weblog in that it was co-authored by three people: Dan Bricklin, Bob Frankston and Dave Reed. And I knew all three of these gentlemen from my days with Lotus Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dan Bricklin was the inventor of the spreadsheet VisiCalc back in 1982; Bob Frankston was his co-developer; and Dave Reed was the chief architect for 1-2-3 in the late 80s.

Here were three exceptionally bright, talented people blogging about the development of the internet – they were sharing their thoughts, musings and ideas out loud. Instantly I saw the value of weblogs as knowledge-sharing tools and by the end of the evening I had developed and integrated a weblog into my own website.

Back then I used to tell people about weblogs and their potential whenever I had the opportunity but few took the time to listen or understand. After one talk I gave on weblogs at a conference, a member of the audience was overheard to say, 'We have been blogged and klogged to death by David Gurteen'. To which his friend replied, 'Yes he really ought to get a life'. I still chuckle about this today.

However, in the intervening four years more and more people have come to see the power of weblogs as powerful social tools – tools that enable people to share, learn and collaborate. But I am still shocked at people's head-in-the-sand mentality at times. Recently when I mentioned weblogs to a senior manager he replied, 'Oh you mean the ramblings of the ill-informed'. When I explained their power I was greeted with the response, 'But how do people find the time to read them; never mind write them? They need to get a life!'

But it's not about lack of time – we are already overloaded. It's about a lack of understanding of their benefits and prioritising our time accordingly. I subscribe to 30 or so RSS [really simple syndication] feeds – news channels that get pushed to my own personal 'newspaper' each day. Some of these feeds are from well-known sources, such as the BBC and other mainstream media, but many of them come from weblogs and websites.

My RSS reader keeps me informed of all the things that are important to my professional development. The information obtained in them I could find nowhere else –

“But it's not about lack of time – we are already overloaded. It's about a lack of understanding of their benefits and prioritising our time accordingly.

not in books, magazines, newspapers or on the TV. I keep abreast of new products, new technologies and new ideas. I simply could not do my job without them.

So I still find it surprising when I come across such resistance to weblogs and RSS. Too many people, to my mind, are prejudiced against them without ever taking the time to really understand what they are really about and their benefits.

You don't have to write a weblog to benefit. Find an RSS reader, such as Bloglines, and start to subscribe to just a few of the millions of news channels on the web. Very soon you will wonder how you ever survived without it. InsideKnowledge

Life is political

You can't avoid politics. One of the best KM discussion forums on the web is ActKM. Some time back there was a fascinating debate triggered by Nirmala Palaniappan. Let me paraphrase her posting slightly:

"I've been thinking about something that perhaps shows KM in 'bad' light. What if a person who has been innovative has worked hard and created his or her own things and then has shared the knowledge with others in the same domain? He or she has then been taken for a ride by one of those who has benefited.

The person who benefited has tweaked some of the concepts, admittedly added, perhaps, some value to them and then projected himself as having been innovative. This idea stealer has the people skills to project himself as having done a great job and doesn't give credit to our knowledge sharer. The knowledge sharer has got a raw deal and is left high and dry wringing his or her hands. To add insult to the injury, the idea-stealer has been sweet-talking our knowledge sharer into sharing information on a one-to-one basis and no one knows about the 'mentoring'."

Maybe this situation helps the organisation as a whole, but there is one person who has got an unfair deal and there is another who is walking away with someone else's work without so much as a struggle and what's more, is taking the credit for it too.

What would you do in such a situation? What would your advice be to others in such a situation? There was lots of good advice from the forum: use of weblogs, creative commons, keeping logs of conversations and more. But at one stage Nirmala replies to another posting thus:

"Yes. I agree. It is, partly, the giver's fault. But, I feel a little irritated to think that one cannot be left with the joy of having been creative. One also has to be politically smart to be able to project, protect and safeguard one's own creations from predators and that means spending some really valuable time in non-creative pursuits to say the least – that's a tough task for the apolitical."

I used to feel like Nirmala until I came across an article written by Tom Peters entitled 'Politics the path to achievement'. Here is an excerpt:

"Every relationship, with friend, spouse, or business associate, is political, rests on lots of give, some take, and the sharing of assumptions. To be sure, divorces occur regularly and business partnerships split up all the time. The fact is, such failures are political – i.e., the failure to invest

"One also has to be politically smart to be able to project, protect and safeguard one's own creations from predators and that means spending some really valuable time in non-creative pursuits to say the least – that's a tough task for the apolitical."

sufficiently in a relationship. The meaning of 'invest' is clear: paying the price of frequent compromise and, above all, spending time.

Often as not, the time spent feels unproductive, but it's usually not. In truth, the wise devote most of their waking hours 'checking out' where the other person is 'coming from'; trying to understand what sorts of things went on for him or her yesterday that led to today's unexpected blow up over a trivial remark[1]."

Those natural knowledge sharers among us need to learn to not 'blindly share' but as Nirmala says to "take the time to protect and safeguard our creations from predators". It's not wasted time – it's well invested. Life is political – there is no getting away from it! Inside Knowledge

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1. Peters, Tom., 'Politics the path to achievement'., *The Independent,* 19 March, 1995.

Learning to share

I gave a talk recently on knowledge sharing entitled the rather tongue-in-cheek, 'How do you make people share their knowledge?' as clearly you cannot make people share their knowledge.

At the end of the talk a woman from the audience approached me and said "David, I loved your talk but I am still unsure why people won't share their knowledge and how you make them".

Now I suspect she asked this because I had not made things clear enough (or she was not listening!) so here is an answer to her question.

First, there are a wide variety of reasons why people do not share their knowledge. I have identified 50 or more different reasons in my knowledge cafés. Some reasons are reasonable, such as language barriers, other reasons are not so reasonable such as the belief that knowledge is power and therefore sharing it makes no sense.

The reasons why people do not share vary for each individual (there is no single answer) but by and large people will only share when they see the personal benefits to themselves. And here lies the root of the answer to the question 'How you make them share?'

If you try to explain the benefits to people, and if you show them how many of their perceived barriers are myths, then they are most likely to feel you are trying to manipulate them. You cannot make people share their knowledge, reward them or otherwise manipulate them. They have to see the reasons and the benefits for themselves.

So how do you do this? Well here is my suggested solution. You need to bring them together to have conversations about the issue in order that they might start to engage with the subject; think about it for themselves; and realise the need for personal change.

I do this through my knowledge cafés. I start by giving a short talk about knowledge sharing and the barriers and the benefits but typically for only ten minutes or so. I then pose the question to the group 'What are the barriers to knowledge sharing in your organisation and how do you overcome them.' I then go into my knowledge café format where people get to have conversations with each other. From this, hopefully, people start to see the problems and the benefits for themselves and the need to change their attitudes, mindsets and behaviours around knowledge sharing.

I say hopefully, as of course there is no guarantee that they will do this. Some people will see it immediately, others will never ever get it and the majority will take a while to come around to a 'sharing is power' viewpoint and start to change.

"Some people will see it immediately, others will never ever get it and the majority will take a while to come around to a 'sharing is power' viewpoint and start to change.

Over time you can go on and run other knowledge café style events where people come together to discuss the actual problems facing the organisation due to lack of knowledge sharing, such as mistakes being repeated; work being repeated; lack of knowledge regarding what is going on in other parts of the organisation and so on. They can then take personal responsibility for the problems and work together to solve them. Of course, this takes time and there is no guarantee of success but this approach is far more likely to work then wagging your finger and telling people to share or trying to reward them with goodies! InsideKnowledge

Get found!

It seems to me that one of the key attributes of a successful knowledge worker is the ability to easily connect with people. People whom you can learn from, share knowledge with, collaborate with and get things done together.

Some time ago I received an e-mail *via* the Friends Reunited website from an old school friend whom I had not seen in 40 years. In it he told me all about his life and how successful he had been – he had started several companies, travelled the world and even been an advisor to the Labour government and visited 10 Downing Street.

Now, not wanting to pay to join Friends Reunited just so I could reply to him, I thought that if he was that successful I would just Google him. He has an unusual name so it should have been a dead cert to find him. But it turned out he had no web presence whatsoever – strange. I have still not got back to him.

At the time, as an experiment, I tried to find a few other old business colleagues but it was impossible to find most of them *via* Google. I did a little better searching the professional social networking site, Linkedin.

Have you tried finding yourself on the web? If like me, you have an unusual name, then it may not be too difficult, but if your name is John Smith then it could be a bit trickier. But probably not so difficult if you combine your name say with the company you work for or some other attribute that makes you unique. I make it easy for people: try Googling 'contact David Gurteen' – the top hit is the contact page on my website.

But even for people you know it is not always easy to contact them. I cannot understand, given how easy it is to automatically append your contact details to your e-mail, why so few people do it. I have lost count of the number of times I have wanted to pick up the phone to reply to someone either because it was urgent or I preferred to have a conversation with them.

I have recently made it much easier for people to contact me. On each page of my website is a panel that includes my photo, who I am, a link to my contact details, my schedule, a nano-blog from Twitter that tells you what I am doing, my location and a Skype presence indicator.

For close friends and business contacts I also have two online calendars – one that provides details of where I am – right down to air flight number or hotel name. And another that is limited to dates and times when I will be in London to make it easy to arrange meetings. I even include a list of possible meeting places to make it even easier.

> “The bottom line is that I want people to be able to find me easily; connect with me easily and meet with me face-to-face wherever I am in the world – any place, any time.

The bottom line is that I want people to be able to find me easily; connect with me easily and meet with me face-to-face wherever I am in the world – any place, any time. You might like to think to what extent this important to you and what you might do to make it easier for people to find and connect with you both within your organisation and without.

So don't get lost – get found! InsideKnowledge

Avoiding jargon

> If you are a technology user then open your mind a little and try not to be intimidated, confused, misled or put off by the jargon that often accompanies it.

At a conference recently, I noticed a participant had written on her feedback form that one of the speaker's sessions was 'nerdy', but then as an afterthought she had written in brackets that the speaker wasn't.

I found this rather amusing, as the speaker had done his best to tone down the techie aspects of his talk for the audience.

He was talking about social networking and at times had used words and phrases such as weblogs, blogging, 'blogrolls' and RSS [really-simple syndication] news feeds. So there certainly were some nerdy words in his presentation.

I often speak on the same topics and find that many in my audience are 'switched off' by the jargon. So I try to minimise it when I talk or write, but unfortunately weblogs are called weblogs and news feeds are commonly referred to as RSS feeds. It is better to use the right jargon than to call something by a simpler name because using a term not in common use can be downright confusing.

But the problem is worse. Continuing with the same example, if you wish to subscribe to a news feed – you often need to click a little orange button labeled 'XML' though at other times it may be labeled 'RSS'. And more recently, another little orange icon has been introduced with no label at all! But why XML you might ask? Well because an RSS feed is encoded in a language called XML. Make sense? Not really, but that's the way it is.

It is often impossible to avoid nerdy words – the best you can do is minimise them and make light of the jargon – poke a little light-hearted fun at it and say 'hey don't let it get in the way.' But it can still be a problem.

If you are a technology user then open your mind a little and try not to be intimidated, confused, misled or put off by the jargon that often accompanies it. Just accept the jargon as the 'labels' in use. You will soon get used to it. At first I used to hate the word "blogging" but I have got used to it and can say it most of the time without flinching.

But for the techies and marketers who produce all this stuff and all the others who regurgitate it without thought – please, stop and think what you are doing before terms become too well established and try to make it easier for the technophobes.

And of course we mustn't forget about knowledge management (KM). This is a subject in which jargon abounds: tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge, after-action reviews, codification, communities of practice, intellectual capital, human capital, externalisation, internalisation, intangible assets, peer assists, taxonomies – the list just goes on.

To my mind, this jargon is one of the major barriers to the adoption of KM – it is a sure fire way of antagonising both senior management and the people in the organisation who you wish to buy-in to KM. It's okay to use the jargon among ourselves, but when talking to others who know little about KM we should do our best to avoid it. We should explain concepts in simple language and always provide an example ties the concept in to a real business problem or challenge within the organisation.

Café culture

I was recently in Jakarta, Indonesia, where I ran a two-day knowledge-sharing workshop for a client, which included a knowledge café. And, as I often do when abroad, I ran an open Gurteen knowledge café on one of the evenings.

I have a little experience of Asian culture, having run knowledge cafés in Singapore and Hong Kong, so understand people's reluctance at times to talk or ask questions. Therefore, I was expecting some learning on my part.

We ran the open knowledge café in a beautiful building that was part of the Dutch Embassy and about 60 people participated. The problem with this many people is that you need microphones and this can be intimidating.

Only one person in the room seemed prepared to talk in the whole group conversation until someone else was encouraged to stand up. Having got up, though, he said nothing about what was discussed at his table. But in an entertaining way he told us about his life and his work. I considered intervening, but looking around the room I could see that everyone was enjoying his talk – there was lots of laughter and people were starting to relax. I let him continue.

I then asked for another person to speak. Silence once again. So I talked for a while about just 'being yourself' like the last participant. People seemed to warm to the idea and then someone else spoke up and then another and another. The conversation gathered pace and really worked quite well.

In my workshop, the following day, people had no problem talking in small groups as in the previous evening. But if I asked questions of the whole group – more often than not I would not get an answer – even to simple 'yes or no' questions.

So when I came to run my knowledge café, the small group discussions were fine, but as they came to change tables, two of the tables asked if they could merge to create a group of about ten. I don't normally do this because in a large group some people get cut out of the conversation, but I wanted to keep them at ease and was also interested to see how it would work, so I agreed. It worked fine – everyone actively engaged in the conversation.

But how was I to run the whole group conversation? I knew that as soon as I took part, as had occurred the previous night, they would clam up. And then I had an idea. I would ask them all to sit at one large table. Invite them to hold a whole-group conversation, but crucially not join in myself as I normally do. This way they could also speak in their own language. The problem, of course, is that I would have no idea what they were talking about and although my facilitator style is 'light touch', I would have no way of intervening. So I asked one of the organisers to sit in, listen and communicate with me as to how it was going using eye-contact. It worked a treat!

"So what did I learn as a facilitator? Well to take my time, to go with the flow and to be prepared to experiment. And to do all that I can to make it easy and painless for people to engage in conversation.

So what did I learn as a facilitator? Well to take my time, to go with the flow and to be prepared to experiment. And to do all that I can to make it easy and painless for people to engage in conversation. Everyone enjoys conversation. It's at the very heart of being human. You just need to get some of the barriers out of the way! InsideKnowledge

Open and transparent?

When considering knowledge sharing or creating a more collaborative culture, we often talk about the need for people to be open and for more transparency. These two concepts are usually used interchangeably and often without too much thought as to what they really mean.

For a long time, in my mind, I have made a clear distinction between the two. Recently though, I was interviewed about knowledge sharing and the interviewer asked me what the difference was, as she though they meant the same thing. I gave her what I felt was a simple answer at the time, but thought I'd try to articulate a more detailed view of the differences as I see them here.

To my mind, to be effective as a knowledge worker you need to network – to share more; to work more collaboratively; and, to work in a way that facilitates continuous informal learning. Two of the major complementary behaviours that underpin this are the need to be 'open' and 'transparent'.

Openness

If you are open-minded, not closed, you are open to new ideas, to new thoughts, to new people and to new ways of working. When you come across new things you are curious and eager to explore them. You are non-judgmental and you look to engage other people in conversation – not so much in debate, but more in dialogue.

You deliberately go out of your way to discover new things. You are an explorer!

You ask for criticism from people – not praise. You are not afraid when people challenge your ideas – in fact you welcome it. This is how you learn. You are willing to 'let things in'. People can 'come in'. Hence the word 'open'.

Transparency

If you are transparent, you work in a way which naturally enables people to see what you are doing. You publish your activity and your 'work in progress' as a by-product of the way that you work. You deliberately go out of your way to try to be honest and open about who you are. There is no façade, no pretense – with you, people get what they see.

You speak in your own voice. You are authentic. Others can see clearly who you are, what you are doing and why you are doing it.

> "Being open and transparent are not the only traits of an effective knowledge worker, but I do believe they are two of the core behaviours.

You do not try to hide things out of fear of being seen to make a mistake. You actually want your mistakes to be seen. And you want others to point them out to you – that way you get to learn and to get even better at what you do. You make it easy for people to find you and to connect with you. You 'let things out'. People can 'see in'. Hence the word 'transparent'.

Behaviours

Being open and transparent is a state of mind and more about general behaviour than the use of any specific tools. But, if you are open and transparent, you are more likely to blog; to twitter; use wikis and other social-networking tools; give talks; publish papers, articles or newsletters; keep your calendar online; have an online presence indicator; and, write regular status reports on your activity and much more besides.

Being open and transparent are not the only traits of an effective knowledge worker, but I do believe they are two of the core behaviours. So do you think openness and transparency are important? If so, just how open and transparent are you and what might you do to improve? InsideKnowledge

Get specific

Time and time again people ask me questions like 'how do you make people share?', or 'how do we get buy-in from senior management?', or even 'how do we share all our knowledge more widely?'.

To me, these are meaningless, unanswerable questions. KM is extremely context dependent; the answer to any question depends on so many factors. Which people? What knowledge? What is the business purpose? What is the culture like? What are the barriers? Have you had a history of management adopting one fad and then another? All of these questions and more need to be answered before you can reply to what seems like a simple question.

I was recently talking to a group of middle managers about knowledge cafés and I was asked 'how do we get senior management to buy-in to knowledge cafés'. I started to answer before I spotted I was falling for the trap!

First, you do not try to get buy-in for a knowledge café or any other tool – you get buy-in to address a specific business purpose. So the question should be 'what business problems do we have that a knowledge café can help solve?'.

So you have found your problem and you believe a particular KM initiative is the solution. How do you get senior management's buy-in? Again you need to get specific. Which managers do you need buy-in from? Is this a problem that they recognise and is it important to them to solve it? Just what are their specific goals and aspirations and what keeps them awake at night? You need to identify the specific manager or managers or stakeholders in order to do this.

You need to get specific!

Another example: I was asked recently how would I get people in an organisation, who were part of existing communities of practice – centralised, controlled, ones I might add – to be more motivated to engage with them. So I asked, who are the people, what is the business purpose, and why are they not engaging? None of these specifics was clear.

We started to talk about motivation and incentives. We talked about possible lack of time – everyone was extremely busy. I pointed out that lack of time was never the issue – there is never enough time to do everything in any organisation; people needed to see the value of the initiatives. If the initiative helped save them time or get their job done more effectively, then they were more likely to make the time.

“First, you do not try to get buy-in for a knowledge café or any other tool – you get buy-in to address a specific business purpose.

But we were speculating as to why they were not engaged. These CoPs were being 'forced' on people. They had not been involved in their conception. I was asked 'so how do we know the reasons they are not engaged?'. My reply was 'Well, you talk to them'. 'But who do we talk to?' was the response. Well, everyone – sure start with the opinion leaders and even the trouble makers but talk to as many as you can face-to-face and even bring them together to discuss the issues as a group.

Again, it's all about getting specific. Not second guessing. It could be that each CoP or individual has different reasons for not being engaged. One solution does not fit all!

Ask specific questions; target specific business problems; get the buy-in of specific people. Don't assume you know the answers. It's simple really.

Get it? *Get specific!* InsideKnowledge

Coffee and conversation

Kate Clifton provides insight into a recent David Gurteen masterclass on implementing a knowledge café, including what to do on the day and why conversation is a business imperative

As organisations have responded to the tough times imposed by the global recession it would not be unrealistic to suggest that conversation has been firmly at the bottom of the business agenda. Times of financial instability, where management seek to streamline operating processes and tighten purse strings, do not create the optimal atmosphere for a quick chin wag at the water cooler, or some relaxed yet insightful discussion at a colleague's desk. The onus is very much on getting things done as efficiently as possible and now, more than ever, is not the time for 'fluffy bunny' approaches to knowledge sharing and collaboration. Furthermore, the wealth of technology at our fingertips – not least tools synonymous with the advent of Web 2.0 – might make a simple conversation seem positively outdated. With platforms such as Twitter enabling us to communicate with hundreds or thousands of people with a few key strokes, we have the potential to unlock a wealth of information and expertise and for many of us, it is easier to fire off a quick e-mail or post to a blog to solicit responses to our queries or make our own opinions known. But at what cost?

Some might say that the ability to instantaneously share a viewpoint, or solve a problem, actually inhibits the ability to look at an issue from an entirely different perspective – which in itself fosters innovation and new, improved ways of working. When we type out an e-mail, we rarely come up with a message that is open to interpretation and dialogue. Rather, the focus is on obtaining a straightforward response, or communicating a development – as quickly as possible. And this is where the problem lies. In the words of Oxford historian Theodore Zelvin, taken from his book *Conversation*: "When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought." He adds: "Conversation doesn't just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards."

It was this type of thinking that David Gurteen drew comparisons with, at a recent masterclass on implementing a knowledge café in London. Before presenting the practical aspects of running these informal, workshop-style events, Gurteen spent some time encouraging participants to think about what knowledge management (KM) and conversation meant to them. The role of the knowledge worker, he suggested, was having interesting conversations. He presented the idea that we currently have access to unprecedented amounts of information, but that does not necessarily equate to increased efficiency. He added that throughout its history, the human race has used conversation to pass down experience and learning through generation after generation. True knowledge – the kind that really makes a difference in our personal and professional lives – is generated by understanding and sense-making, not just 'knowing more'. In-depth, unrestricted dialogue, therefore, is essential – and the knowledge café can become a powerful business tool by enabling and nurturing that level of communication.

Implementing a knowledge café

The beauty of the knowledge café, according to Gurteen, is its simplicity and flexibility. There are many different approaches that can be taken – for example, you might choose to have certain 'props' on hand for participants, such as notepads and pens. Some people may also choose to run cafés in the evening, over a glass of wine – rather than during core working hours.

Most important is that the location of the café creates the right ambience: one that is unthreatening and hospitable and, therefore, relaxes participants and encourages them to engage with one another.

Gurteen advocates using a decent-sized room with groups of approximately five people sat around tables that are not too large, so that everyone can be involved equally in the conversation. In groups much larger than this, there is a risk that more dominant personalities can take over the discussion. Similarly, if the total number of people in the café exceeds 40, it can be difficult to maintain the correct balance of participation without the use of microphones or a larger setting. Gurteen recommends inviting between 25 to 35 attendees.

The café process itself is split into several stages. First, the facilitator welcomes everyone to the event and takes a few minutes to make a short presentation to introduce the theme of the knowledge café – this stage should last no more than 15 minutes. It is also vital that the facilitator doesn't impose their own agenda on the proceedings. A short but effective speed networking session encourages to participants to find out more about each other and relax a little, before the café itself commences.

The facilitator will then pose an open-ended question for the groups to discuss. Any subject can be addressed as long as questions that really matter to the participants are explored.

At this point, the groups break off for 30 to 60 minutes to have their conversations. During this time participants have the option of moving to another table at certain points – the facilitator will pause discussions periodically (two or three times) to enable them to do so. The key here, says Gurteen, is not forcing people to move if they do not want to. For example, during the café that we took part in during the London masterclass, two people in the group that I started in remained at the same table for the entire discussion process. What was surprising to many delegates was the fact that conversation flowed freely even following the group changes. After five minutes or so, participants were incredibly relaxed within their 'teams' and engaging in in-depth and involved conversations – almost to the point that when we asked to pause and move around, we all wanted to stay exactly where we were. Once groups had moved around there was a slight lull, as people reacquainted themselves, but then everyone got back into the swing of things. This was actually discussed within our group and we came to the conclusion that the quality of the dialogue following the brief, slightly uncomfortable silence more than made up for it.

Throughout the group discussions, the facilitator will walk around the tables and listen in. Here, his or her role is not to lead or influence the discussion in any way, although if they do become aware of any problems, they are encouraged to remind people of the nature of dialogue – that it is "a frank exchange of ideas or views on a specific issue in an effort to attain mutual understanding" (Gurteen Knowledge), rather than an unproductive, defensive exchange of opinions.

Equally, within the groups, there should be no leader or 'reporter' appointed as this will only serve to stifle conversation – and everyone should be equal and fully engaged. Similarly, people are empowered to participate as little or as much as they would like – they share their perspectives with the group only if they wish to.

The role of the individual at a café is of huge relevance to its outcomes. Gurteen cited another Theodore Zeldin quote at the masterclass, saying that people should "… be prepared to emerge a slightly different person."

The cafés are designed to encourage participants to:

- See people with different views not as adversaries, but as resources from which we can learn;
- Enter into open conversation;
- Enter into more conversation;
- Listen, more than speak;
- Welcome differences;
- Withhold judgement;
- Avoid position taking; and,
- Avoid being too politically correct.

The knowledge circle

Once the tables have changed around for the last time, the entire group reassembles for an exchange of ideas arising from the smaller team discussions. Gurteen recommends that individuals bear in mind that their comments are intended for the whole group and not just the facilitator – who, at this point, should play a very limited role in proceedings. The way that Gurteen approaches this is simply to say 'who would like to start?' once the group is assembled, then let the participants take control. His advice here is that while the silence as someone 'plucks up the courage' to speak may seem like an eternity, it is actually never more than around 15 seconds – and the wait is usually worth it. And, following a brief 'wrap up' from the facilitator, that is it.

Why run a knowledge café?

For most knowledge workers, who are on board with the notion that dialogue outside of rigid meeting structures and official internal communications is more effective, the idea of the café makes perfect sense. People are likely to be more forthcoming if they feel that they are contributing ideas on their own terms, in a more informal setting. They will take the time to get to know one another's character traits and build a rapport – thereby becoming more honest in the views that the put to the group.

Indeed, during our own discussions, many barriers to this type of knowledge exchange were mentioned – not least the silo mentality within many organisations, a lack of time and encouragement for collaborative activities and in more extreme cases, a sense that organisations even saw conversation as time-wasting. With that in mind, everyone agreed, it could be rather difficult to get management to buy into the idea of running knowledge cafes, when their benefits were so intangible. One attendee summed up the group's feelings remarkably well at the end of the day, saying that he felt that he could now 'put his fluffy bunny inside a trojan horse', having explored the café process in more detail. Running a café may not be the silver bullet for all of your problems, but it will help in several areas that, by extension, improve the way in which the business works. These might include:

- Surfacing hidden problems and opportunities;
- Encouraging knowledge sharing and informal learning;
- Sparking action;
- Improving decision making and innovation;
- Addressing disengagement and lack of voice;
- Helping people make sense of the world;
- Helping people feel a sense of ownership;
- Retaining talent – may people feel disengaged when working in siloes; and,
- Reducing dependence on external facilitators.

The cafés can also serve to document or replace processes where many people or departments have a input, such as:

- Being included as part of a presentation;
- Gleaning feedback on policy documents;
- Replacing a series of interviews;
- Being used within a collaborative writing effort; and,
- Being implemented as part of a meeting to present future plans or strategy.

Masterclass participants also suggested using cafes as part of an organisational merger – to encourage staff from the different businesses to interact with one another, or during rebrands – for example, to brainstorm brand values or company marketing messages. InsideKnowledge

The knowledge café

Selling to senior management

- Start with the business problem, not the café;
- Focus on important business issues;
- Don't assume managers will not buy-in if there is no hard business outcome;
- Find a good reason to run a knowledge café for the managers.

Recording outcomes

- Café is about the transfer of tacit knowledge – not making tacit knowledge explicit;
- Recording can stifle the conversation;
- Cafes are often best as part of a larger process;
- Avoid disrupting the conversation;
- Participants should not record group notes

Ideas for recording outcomes

- Appoint an external person to take notes;
- Capture one item from each person and collate;
- Encourage people to blog the session;
- Audio capture and transcription;
- Visual capture.

Source: Gurteen Knowledge

Ducks in a row

I recently read a blog post on the web where someone proposed selling blogging to senior management by explaining how weblogs improved conversations. I wasn't at all convinced this had much chance of success.

What do you do when you want something? I need £1,500 to attend this course. I need a scanner for my PC. Or, I would like the company to start using weblogs. Well, you normally just ask – don't you?

And what happens when you are refused? You start to explain your reasons – why you want to go on the course, why you need the piece of equipment, and what's a weblog. But it is often too late. The other person is unlikely to change their mind. You have blown it.

So what's the way forward? I think the answer is to focus on business outcomes and not on solutions.

Let's take an example. You want your boss to sign off on your attending a course. You don't say, 'I need £1,500 to attend a course'. You first need to establish and agree on your objective or the problem you wish to solve.

So maybe you ask: 'how important is it that I bring my project in on time?'. Your boss is not going to say, 'don't worry about it'. They will agree it is important.

Then continue by saying something like 'well, as you know I do not have much project management experience. Could we discuss how I might improve my skills?'. Again, they are unlikely to say no.

You can then discuss your lack of skills and talk about outcomes – for example, the importance of the project deadlines and the specific skills you need to help meet them. And at some point you might say something like: 'I was talking to John and he recently attended a project management course that helped him better manage his project. Would it be worth me exploring attending the same course?'.

Now the answer is likely to be yes or maybe your boss might make alternative suggestions.

Then you can go back a few days later with information about the course and some costs. You have hugely improved the odds of approval.

So don't proffer the solution until you have the other party talking about and agreeing to the problem and the desired outcomes. Then you can discuss solutions.

What's this to do with KM? Well, we tend to try to sell KM on activity. We don't take the time to identify and agree on the problems we are trying to solve or the outcomes we are trying to achieve.

“So don't proffer the solution until you have the other party talking about and agreeing to the problem and the desired outcomes. Then you can discuss solutions.

We talk about improving knowledge sharing, setting up communities of practice or best practice databases or on improving conversations using weblogs. We need to focus on business outcomes, not activities or solutions.

So identify the problems or challenges and get buy-in to the desired outcomes. Start with a question where the answer cannot possibly be no! Focus on a known problem area. How would you like to reduce our customer support costs? How would you like our business partners to bring complementary products to market more quickly? How would you like to improve our product quality? The use of weblogs could be part of the answer to all of these questions.

In short: agree the 'what' and then the 'how'. InsideKnowledge

World 2.0

Most of us understand what Web 2.0 is all about as we move from a read-only web to a read-write or participatory web. And we are coming to grips with Enterprise 2.0 where the technologies and social tools of Web 2.0 are moving from the open web into organisations.

It is still early days and there are many issues to be grappled with as we try to balance the structure and stability of the old world with the more fluid and complex nature of the new. But the '2.0 meme' is affecting everything. In a talk in Kuala Lumpur I was asked how you implement Enterprise 2.0 and I was replying when someone spoke up and said "We will never have Enterprise 2.0 until we have Managers 2.0!" In other words, it was managers and their out-dated mindsets that presented a major barrier to change.

And a few days later while giving another talk at the National Library in Singapore, I found us talking about Libraries 2.0 and Learning 2.0. It then hit me that '2.0' thinking is permeating everything. People were also talking about Business 2.0 and Education 2.0.

So what does this mean in its broadest sense? Well, we are no longer consumers of goods, services or education – we are all 'prosumers', that is, we all have the opportunity to create and consume. For the first time we are participants in everything and not the 'victims'. Fundamentally, it is about our new freedom.

We are moving from a world where we were told to do things and where things are structured or planned for us to one where we get to decide what works best for us. We are moving from a mono-culture to a highly diverse ecology.

We are moving from a simple world to a rich, complex and diverse one. One where power is less centralised and more distributed. We are moving from a command and control world to one where people can do as they please within the boundaries of responsibility.

Another talk I gave in South East Asia was to SAFTI [the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute] and there I realised that the 2.0 concept could be applied to the military too. In the past, warfare was a relatively simple affair; there were rules of engagement and such things as the Geneva Convention. It was a male-dominated world but now with terrorism, men, women and children are actively involved in the fighting – there are few rules of engagement. It's complex – everyone participates.

The SAFTI talk was the last of 20 talks and knowledge cafés over a one-month period and they helped crystallise my thinking. It's not just about Web 2.0 and Enterprise 2.0, about tools and technology. It's far more than that. It's about World 2.0. The '2.0 meme' touches everything.

More than anything we need Mindset 2.0 or Thinking 2.0 – new ways of looking at and thinking about the world and seeing the opportunities to work in new, innovative ways that these new technologies enable.

Here is a brief comparison of the two worlds. This thinking can be applied in business, in education and learning, to adults and to children and to government and to society. It's not just about technology!

World 1.0	World 2.0
Knowledge sharing and learning is imposed upon people as additional work	Knowledge sharing and social learning is a welcome, natural part of people's everyday work
Work takes places behind closed doors	Work takes place transparently where everyone can see it
IT tools are imposed on people	People select the tools that work best for them
People are controlled out of fear they will do wrong	People are given freedom in return for accepting responsibility
Information is centralised, protected and controlled	Information is distributed freely and uncontrolled
Publishing is centrally controlled	Anyone can publish what they want
Context is stripped from information	Context is retained in the form of stories
People think quietly alone	People think out loud together
People tend to write in the third person, in a professional voice	People write in the first person, in their own voice
People, especially those in authority, are closed to new ideas and new ways of working	Everyone is open to new ideas
Information is pushed to people whether they have asked for it or not	People decide the information they need and subscribe to it
The world is seen through a Newtonian cause and effect model	The world is recognised as complex, with the need for different approaches

KM (2.0) goes social

With the advent of social tools, KM is poised to undergo a transformation. I'd like to take a brief look at what is going on.

In the early days, KM was primarily about capturing all the messy unstructured information in an organisation; making it searchable and easily accessible to employees. It's still what most companies mean when they talk about KM – so much so, that many IT managers think this is all there is to KM.

KM in this techno-centric form grew up with the development of the internet, organisational intranets and portals and the widespread use of electronic mail, Microsoft Office, corporate search engines and the like. It is fundamentally technology driven; usually by the IT department. It is centrally controlled and top-down in nature.

Techno-centric KM is necessary and useful but is not without its problems. Many early KM systems were designed to capture corporate information by requiring people to enter stuff into databases or to create personal profiles to help people find expertise. But too often employees did not see the value in this and such systems failed.

Meanwhile, other organisations were starting to practice a form of KM that relied not on technology but on soft tools that enabled people to share information face-to-face – tools such as communities of practice, after action reviews and peer assists.

This people-centric form of KM evolved in parallel with the techno-centric variety and is more about informal learning, collaboration and inter-personal knowledge sharing. The aim is to lead to improved decision making, greater creativity and innovation. Techno-centric KM is more about efficiency – being able to quickly find the right information when you need it.

But quite separately, while all of this was taking place, social tools were starting to evolve on the web: blogs, wikis, social tagging and the like. These tools are very different from traditional corporate knowledge-sharing tools. They were originally not developed by the large software developers such as Microsoft or IBM, though that is changing. They are often open source and free, or low cost..

Social tools put knowledge-sharing power in the hands of the users themselves and it's this to a great degree that has accounted for their rapid evolution, uptake and success.

As these new tools took hold – people started to talk about Web 2.0. A new web – dominated by social tools and the philosophy they embedded – turning the web of Web 1.0 from a publishing medium to a two-way communication and knowledge sharing medium – the so called 'participatory web'.

And now as these tools migrate into organisations, people are talking about Enterprise 1.0 and Enterprise 2.0. Enterprise 1.0 is seen as a traditional top-down command and control, hierarchical organisation built around traditional centralised IT systems. Enterprise 2.0 is a flatter, more fluid, networked organisation built around social tools.

Now it wasn't KM people who drove this development. It wasn't the traditional KM technology vendors and it wasn't the knowledge managers and workers within organisations. It was a bunch of enthusiastic renegades on the web as well as a few corporate renegades who could see where things were heading.

"So if the central question asked by managers in the KM 1.0 world was 'how do we make people share?', the question of the KM 2.0 era is 'how do we better share, learn and work together?'

But KM managers and others are starting to see the power of social tools within organisations as personal KM tools. And a new view is emerging of KM 2.0 that maps many of the principals of Web 2.0 and Enterprise 2.0 onto KM.

Clearly though '2.0' stuff does not replace '1.0' stuff as the suffix might imply: traditional '1.0' thinking and tools run hand-in-hand with '2.0' stuff'. Organisations need both and they are co-evolving.

But the key word in all of this is the word 'social'. Another label for KM 2.0 might be 'Social KM'. It is an emerging social model of KM that clearly places responsibility for knowledge sharing and making knowledge productive in the hands of the individual.

And so in the world of KM 2.0 we have two categories of social tool – soft-tools, such as after action reviews and knowledge cafés and techno-tools such as wikis and blogs – an incredibly powerful combination.

So if the central question asked by managers in the KM 1.0 world was 'how do we make people share?,' the question of the KM 2.0 era is 'how do we better share, learn and work together?' That question is asked by everyone!

KM is becoming social. InsideKnowledge

Mixing business with pleasure

People often ask me how I earn a living as I do much for free and it is not obvious how I market my services and earn money.

My goal is not to build a business but to do what I love; to make a difference in the world and earn a living whilst doing it.

What do I do for free? I maintain my website, I publish my monthly knowledge letter, and I run open knowledge cafés, write articles and more besides. What do I do for money? I give keynote talks, facilitate workshops, consult and run knowledge cafés. But how do I find my work? Let me explain by way of a story.

In November 2006, I ran a workshop for Ark Group at its annual KM Asia conference in Singapore. It did not pay me but they did cover my expenses. And then shortly after in the December, I ran a knowledge café at KMAP 2006 in Hong Kong where, again, only my expenses were paid.

But as a result of the Singapore workshop, I was invited by a small KM consultancy in April 2007 to run a workshop in Jakarta. This was paid work and enabled me to spend some time in Singapore at my own expense. It also enabled me to run an open knowledge café in Jakarta and recruit more members to my community.

Here the story tales an interesting turn. While in Jakarta, I received an e-mail from one of my community members in Bangkok, saying that since I was in the region, could I pop into see him. Well I couldn't, but it did result in my visiting Bangkok in August 2007 to run a fee-earning workshop for him.

At dinner, my host said 'you do remember me don't you David?'. I had to admit that I did not. It turned out that I had met him at a KM Conference in Oxford in September 2003 and he had been receiving my knowledge letter all those years and so felt he knew me well and this had helped to gain me the work.

To complete the story, while I was at the conference in Hong Kong I met a French woman who spent part of her year teaching KM at a University in Oslo and the rest of the year in Bangkok. We got to know each well as we both post photos of our travels on Flickr and realised that our paths often crossed.

While in Bangkok, she introduced me to people at the University which in turn led to my giving a keynote talk and running a knowledge café in Bangkok in January 2008 while I was there doing work for IBM – work that had been cemented during a meeting I had when popping into Singapore during my earlier trip to Jakarta.

> "My goal is not to build a business but to do what I love; to make a difference in the world and earn a living whilst doing it... You might like to think about how networking could work for you.

My French friend was also instrumental to my giving a keynote talk in Oslo in 2008 and my Jakarta host not only invited me back to run another workshop in 2008 but also took me to Bali for a treat where I met my son who was back-packing around SE Asia. Amazing!

Do you get the idea? I don't do any marketing or selling in the traditional sense, all my work is gained through networking and building relationships with people. My website, knowledge letter, and use of social tools play a major part. And my Knowledge Cafes, both the ones I run at conferences and the open ones that I organise for my community when visiting any large city are all part of my networking.

I love meeting and working with people. It's my strength and I play to it. What better way to travel the world; meet interesting people and earn a living?

You might like to think about how networking could work for you. InsideKnowledge

Twittering

Do you have a problem understanding what all the fuss is about Twitter? Do you think it is about telling strangers what you had for breakfast or that the cat has been sick? Do you still wonder why anyone would want to know these sorts of things and why you would waste your time telling them?

Well, Twitter is actually a powerful business tool. Let me explain.

You may work, or have done, in an open-plan office; if not, imagine working in one. Living in such an environment has its disadvantages in terms of disruption and noise but it has many benefits.

First, you get to overhear other people's conversations. Often, they are of no interest, and you tune them out but then a 'trigger' word penetrates your barrier and your ears pick up. This could be something interesting, something important: an insight; an item of news or a piece of gossip, something directly relevant to your work. Or it may tell you something about the people having the conversation, an insight into their personalities that helps deepen your relationship with them or conversely erodes it.

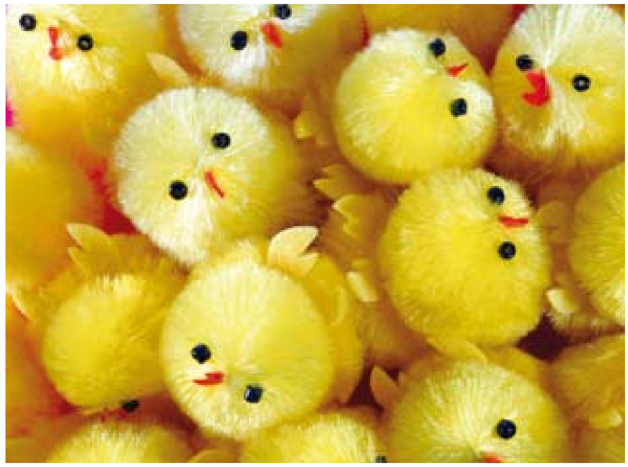
Second, there are the occasional questions that people ask you. Questions that don't take time, questions that need a one word 'yes or no' answer. Or 'go and see Mike, I think he can answer that'.

Then, there are people making telephone calls. These conversations are often intriguing as you do not know to whom they are talking and you can only hear one side of the conversation but you learn from them nevertheless.

In an open-plan office, you live in this ocean of 'twitter', an ambiance of chit-chat, questions and answers that you tune in and you tune out as your mood or the pressure of work takes you.

This process is a highly social and fragmented form of knowledge sharing and informal learning. It's essential learning even when you have been with your company for many years as it enables you to keep your finger on the pulse of the organisation and indeed your profession or industry; for a newcomer it is invaluable. It is how you get to know people; 'of people'; new products; plans; directions; competitors; markets – and much more. It's how you get up to speed.

Now imagine working in your own personal office or working from home or 'on the road'. You are cut off from all of this chatter and potential learning. And imagine



working, like myself, as an independent consultant – with no organisation to learn from.

What you need is a micro-blogging tool like Twitter. Twitter provides that background noise of chatter that you can learn from. It's not quite the same as working in an open-plan office but it has one huge advantage – you can switch it off at any time and you can participate in the chatter as little or as much as your personality or work load dictates.

> Twitter provides that background noise of chatter that you can learn from.

I use a complementary product called TwitterDeck. It runs in the background and lets me know when someone I am following (someone in my virtual office) has tweeted (said something). I can choose to ignore it or read it. If the tweet is a general comment, then that's it. If it's a question for me or a comment directed at me, I can chose to reply or not. One of the great things about Twitter etiquette is that it is okay just to 'listen in' and not tweet or respond to people. You can use it as much or as little as you wish.

Do you get the idea now? Like most social tools, the only way you ever stand a chance of understanding Twitter or similar micro-blogging products like Yammer is to start to use them. Go play with Twitter. It may take a while as it did with me but it will slowly start to make sense and it's far more useful than I have described. InsideKnowledge

Enabling conversation

One of the reasons I started to run my knowledge cafés was in reaction to 'death by PowerPoint' presentations, 'chalk and talk' or 'sit and git' style talks!

These sorts of presentations are endemic in conferences. The speaker has a fixed-time allocation to present, plus a short time for Q&A. He or she presents; they run over and eat into the Q&A; a few questions are asked and answered and everyone goes home. Often only one or two questions are taken as in answering a question the speaker will give a monologue for several minutes, effectively destroying the Q&A time and ensuring no further questions are asked.

But it's so easily avoidable. Let's say a speaker has 40 minutes. He or she speaks for 20 minutes, 10 minutes is given over for conversation amongst the audience and then 10 minutes for Q&A. This is the format I work to when I chair conferences.

It works exceptionally well when people are sitting at round tables but even when the participants are seated lecture style it is still easy to do. People can just turn to each other in twos and threes and have a conversation.

At a conference some time ago, everyone was enjoying this innovation and I mentioned to a female participant that it was a shame the seating was lecture style – to which she replied 'oh no that's an advantage as you can turn to different people each time and have different conversations'.

If you chair a conference, this is easy to do but even if you are a speaker you can do it yourself: just explain to the chairperson beforehand what you plan to do. Keep your talk short and then give 10 minutes for Q&A and 10 minutes for conversation. Try it – it works a treat.

One of the great advantages of this style is that everyone gets the opportunity to engage and to express their opinions, even people who may be too shy to ask a question of the speaker. Also someone might ask the group if they grasped, say, a key aspect of the speaker's talk and when they realise that none of them understood it encourages one of them to ask the speaker to clarify the point.

You may be also sitting there totally agreeing with the speaker only to find that other people in your group see things quite differently. Or maybe you disagree with the speaker but others agree. So much learning can surface from such a short conversation.

But better still, think about how you can use this technique in your everyday business meetings. Again, too often, a senior manager will give a pitch and then ask for questions. There is no actual conversation or discussion.

“ But think how much more powerful that session would have been if people had been asked to have conversations at their tables before asking questions and offering suggestions.

A while back, a university department invited me to come and listen to proposals for two new Msc courses it was thinking of running. Each person spoke in turn and then the group of which I was part asked questions about the courses and proffered suggestions. A traditional approach! But think how much more powerful that session would have been if people had been asked to have conversations at their tables before asking questions and offering suggestions. I am sure so many more good ideas would have been generated.

So, think about it. How could you build more conversation into your everyday business meetings and not only make them more enjoyable but more creative and productive too? InsideKnowledge

Think for yourself

It surprises me that so many knowledge management (KM) projects are undertaken by people with no training or education in KM and little or no project management or change management experience.

If you plan to undertake a KM project then it makes sense to understand KM thoroughly, especially as most KM projects fail.

One of the reasons for this is that we are dealing with complex human systems. In addition to understanding KM, you need to understand organisational complexity. For example, you should study the work of Dave Snowden and his Cynefin Framework.

You should also ensure that you understand the emerging 'social KM' based on social networking tools and take the time to understand intellectual capital and other related disciplines.

Some key points to keep in mind:

- KM projects are tough – the toughest projects to undertake in any organisation! If you are not a seasoned project manager with a fair degree of experience in change management then you are likely to fail;
- KM means different things to different people and industries – HR, IT and librarians all see KM through a different lens. It will have a different meaning to your organisation; and,
- KM is about surfacing unknown problems – not just about responding to known ones or supporting business objectives.

Some things to be cautious of:

- Beware of prescriptions – KM is context dependent and there is no substitute to thinking things through in your context;
- Beware of KM certification – there is nothing wrong in receiving certificates for attending a course or for being certified or accredited to practice specific KM techniques. (Cognitive Edge, for example, accredits practitioners who have attended its workshops.) What you do need to avoid is the non-sensical practice of certifying KM and awarding pretentious titles to participants such as 'certified knowledge manager'. The field of KM is too broad, too deep and too rich for this to have any meaning whatsoever. It's a cheap marketing technique;

"Beware of charlatans – there are far too many people teaching KM, who have no idea what they are talking about or are promoting old, failed methods.

- Beware of case studies – people often ask me for case studies but I studiously avoid giving them as too often they paint a rosy picture and distort the truth. More often than not they are thinly disguised marketing material for a vendor or their so-called 'KM system'. They are also dangerous in that people tend to treat them as 'prescriptions' (if it worked there it will work here). They inadvertently help avoid the need for thinking in context;
- Beware of academics and of theory – there is nothing inherently wrong with academics and theory, such as two by two matrices and conceptualisation, but it can cause you to take your eye of the ball. Focus on specifics and real-world practical examples. And beware of prescriptive approaches and so called 'best practices'. Get real; and,
- Beware of charlatans – there are far too many people teaching KM, who have no idea what they are talking about or are promoting old, failed methods. There is also a lot of poor material on the web. Be cautious.

The bottom line? There is no substitute for thinking for yourself in your specific context. InsideKnowledge

(Not) in it for the money

Some time ago I was chatting to a knowledge manager inside a large organisation and he told me that his organisation had a community of practice (CoP) programme that was not running well.

He asked how the organisation might incentivise the people who formed the communities as they were not engaged and were not turning up to meetings.

I asked why he thought that people needed motivating in this way. Indeed, it seemed that management was already trying to incentivise people by setting them up to compete with each other – in a situation where the 'winning' team would receive a big trip abroad – but it was not working.

My reply was that it did not necessarily mean that incentives were the answer (even if the organisation was assuming that incentives actually work, which I don't think they do).

I told him that he needed to understand exactly why people were not engaging and he asked how he could do that.

I suggested that he asked them but that did not seem to impress him. So I asked him to answer a few questions for me, which I've listed below:

- **Are they busy?** Oh yes, exceptionally busy – it's a very difficult, demanding organisation;
- **So they don't have much spare time?** That's right;
- **Was setting up the CoPs their idea?** Oh no, it was a senior management initiative. All the COPs were determined by the managers and people were told which ones they belonged to;
- **What's the purpose of the CoPs?** I'm not sure what you mean;
- **What were the expected business outcomes?** Well, more sharing and engagement of course;
- **But those aren't business outcomes – and what did you tell the participants was in it for them?**

He wasn't very clear at all on the answers to any of those questions! So I moved on.

'Okay,' I said. 'So, you say that this was a senior management idea. How often do they start initiatives like this and how long do they last?'.

The response was that management started such programmes all the time, but after a while they lost momentum and faded out.

In summary, staff had no say in how the CoPs were set up; the business value (or the personal value) was not explained to them individually; they were all ultra-busy; and, past initiatives such as this had usually faded away. I suggested that the knowledge manager actually had all the answers to his questions, without without even having to ask them! Clearly, incentives would never be the answer as there was no logical way in which to apply them.

'So, what's the solution?', he said. 'Well quite simply, you need to stop trying to do things to them and start to work with them', I replied.

I explained that the organisation still needed to talk openly with its staff, rather than simply making assumptions, no matter how well-founded it thought they might be. If the staff were really that busy, a dialogue was required to find out what their problems were and how the organisation could work with them to help. It's not rocket science. It's very easy really.

This situation occurred a couple of years ago now, but every so often I am reminded of it by very similar conversations I have.

I think there are two messages here. First, never assume things about people's motivation, and second, don't jump to the conclusion that issues are the result of a lack of motivation. It is too easy to think the worst of people – that they are lazy.

If you ever think you need to incentivise or attempt to motivate people then something is very wrong, as demonstrated in the story above. InsideKnowledge

What's the problem?

Clearly identifying and articulating the business issue or problem that you wish to respond to is the first and most fundamental step in any project but strangely it is one that is often skipped. People jump far too readily to the solution they already have in mind.

'Doing' KM, social networking, Enterprise 2.0 or undertaking a project to 'improve knowledge sharing', 'create a learning organisation' or 'create a knowledge-driven organisation' as a starting point is not only meaningless, but dumb! You need to identify the business issue first.

One of the problems of a solution-led approach is that it is often obvious to people that you have fallen in love (so to speak) with the technological solution or concept and this is often seen to cloud your judgment – which of course may or may not be true.

If you are not faced with an obvious problem – for example, you have been asked to 'do KM' – then you have two main options:

1. Talk to the CEO and other senior managers in the organisation and ask them what keeps them awake at night. The really serious business problems and challenges are usually well known by the business managers; or,
2. Conduct a series of knowledge cafés to surface hidden problems and opportunities within the organisation. Be cautious of knowledge audits as if you are not careful they cause you take your eye off the business and to focus too much on the information and knowledge issues and not the business problems themselves.

As you identify issues keep asking why they are problems. You need to get to the root of the issues in business terms. For example, 'people won't share their knowledge' is not a business problem but 'slowness in bringing new products to market' is.

Ask whether the business is addressing the real issue or the symptoms of the real issue? For example, is the problem 'a loss of critical business knowledge' or 'the loss of the actual people themselves'? Understanding the real problem means you are much better equipped to come up with an appropriate response – in this case, 'not to capture knowledge in a database' but 'to reduce the attrition rate'. And be specific. Find out which people are the critical ones that are leaving and what critical business knowledge is

being lost as a result – along with the resulting cost to the business. Don't generalise; be specific.

When you have identified the issue (or issues) you plan to tackle, write the problems, opportunities or risks down as clearly and as concisely as you can. And then relentlessly refine the document.

If people cannot agree on the issues or if no one cares about them, especially senior management, then forget about it, as you will be wasting your time.

The great thing about getting so clear about the problem, obtaining people's buy-in and not focusing too intently on the solution at this first stage, is that it makes it so much easier to make the business case for the eventual solution and to justify the cost involved later.

Einstein is quoted as having said that if he had one hour to save the world he would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and only five minutes finding the solution. To my mind, far too many people in organisations run around spending 60 minutes finding solutions to problems that don't actually matter, or for which there is no mandate to fix. InsideKnowledge

Peer pressure

One of my frequent messages is that we need to stop 'doing things' to people and start to work together'. Let me explain.

People often ask me 'how do we *make* people share?' or 'how so we *make* people adopt social tools?' or, more generally, 'How do we *make* people more engaged?'.

That little word 'make' comes up time and again. It's really obvious when it does and I wince every time I hear it.

Yet even when I point it out and people apologise and say 'oh I didn't mean that; it was just a turn of phrase', I am still not convinced. Deep down we all feel the need to 'make people be different'. Oh, wouldn't it be so good if everyone was just like me? (I laugh out loud).

Recently I have started to realise that there is a more subtle approach: the other things I often get asked are 'How do we incentivise people?' or 'How do we motivate them?'.

Think about it. Once again, we are trying to do things to people – incentivise or motivate them; however we look at it, we are trying to change them!

And then, I will hear people say (or catch myself saying) 'How do we help people to see things differently?' or 'How do we support them in this change?'.

But notice, in all these statements, the assumption is that we know best – that we have the right answers and others do not, and that we need to intervene and correct them. Even if we do wrap it all up in cotton wool and say 'help' rather than 'make'.

The really deep issue is that we are thinking about the world as 'us and them', when we need to be thinking in terms of 'we'.

Rather than 'I am here to help you', which implies you are in need of help and I am your saviour, we need to approach people with 'how can we work better together?'. And we need to mean that. It is not some ploy to enact our predetermined agenda.

It's about approaching them without an agenda other than to genuinely work with them better.

I have also noticed another strange phenomena: people will often tell me that the biggest excuse that their staff use for not changing, doing things differently or sharing their knowledge is that they have no time. But then the conversation moves on and when, sometime later, I ask them whether they blog, tweet, write articles or give presentations (in other words, do they walk the talk?) guess

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what they say? 'Oh no, David. If only I had the time!'. They are using exactly the same excuse.

Each year in its December issue, *Time* magazine announces its person of the year. In the December 2006 issue, in reaction to Web 2.0, it announced that person as 'you' and added "Yes, You. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world."

Personally, if I had been the editor, I would have phrased it somewhat differently: 'We, yes, we. We control the Information Age. Welcome to our world'.

So, some thoughts for this new world:

1. Stop doing things to people;
2. Become the change we wish to see; and,
3. Start to work together.

We are moving to a participatory 'WE' world. So whenever you initiate anything ask yourself the question: 'Am I trying to do things to people or am I approaching them with a genuine view to work together better?'. InsideKnowledge