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Enriching Knowledge Management Coordination

Abstract

{Excerpt} To manage knowledge—in the sense of making explicit and systematic efforts to enable vital individual and collective knowledge resources to be identified, created, stored, shared, and used for benefit—learning organizations build adaptive and generative institutions, systems and processes, and functions across leadership, organization, technology, and learning dimensions. Only by doing so can they, irrespective of configuration, hope to enjoy the capacity to act effectively to achieve shared vision.

Concern for sound management of stocks and, increasingly, flows of knowledge is not a fad. To accomplish their missions, organizations must continually refresh their stocks of knowledge by being part of relevant flows of new knowledge. To this intent, communities (and networks) of practice have, since the mid-1990s, become an accepted part of organizational development. (In a mobile workforce, people are more likely to be aligned to their professional identity than to their organizational affiliation.) They are groups of like-minded, interacting people who filter, amplify, invest and provide, convene, build, and learn and facilitate to ensure more effective creation and sharing of knowledge in their domain. It is also recognized that a coordinating medium, or knowledge manager, is a key factor for managing knowledge in organizations, be that with reference to well-structured, ill-structured, or wicked problem solving. With decreasing bureaucracy and decentralization of operations, it makes sense to distribute leadership for organizational problem solving: the span of knowledge coordination should be as close as possible to relevant knowledge domains.

Keywords

Asian Development Bank, ADB, poverty, economic growth, sustainability, development

Comments

Suggested Citation

Serrat, O. (2010). *Enriching knowledge management coordination*. Washington, DC: Asian Development Bank.

Required Publisher's Statement

This article was first published by the Asian Development Bank (www.adb.org)

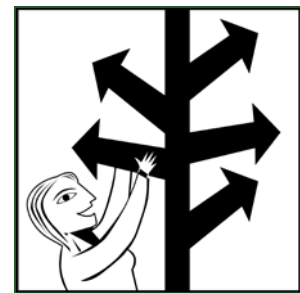
Enriching Knowledge Management Coordination

By Olivier Serrat

Distributing Knowledge Coordination for Organizational Problem Solving

With decreasing bureaucracy and decentralization of operations, the span of knowledge coordination should be as close as possible to relevant knowledge domains. Coordinating mediums, or knowledge managers, have key roles to play.

To manage knowledge—in the sense of making explicit and systematic efforts to enable vital individual and collective knowledge resources to be identified, created, stored, shared, and used for benefit—learning organizations build adaptive and generative institutions, systems and processes, and functions across leadership, organization, technology, and learning dimensions. Only by doing so can they, irrespective of configuration, hope to enjoy the capacity to act effectively to achieve shared vision.



Concern for sound management of stocks and, increasingly, flows of knowledge is not a fad.¹ To accomplish their missions, organizations must continually refresh their stocks of knowledge by being part of relevant flows of new knowledge. To this intent, communities (and networks) of practice have, since the mid-1990s, become an accepted part of organizational development. (In a mobile workforce, people are more likely to be aligned to their professional identity than to their organizational affiliation.) They are groups of like-minded, interacting people who filter, amplify, invest and provide, convene, build, and learn and facilitate to ensure more effective creation and sharing of knowledge in their domain. It is also recognized that a coordinating medium, or knowledge manager,² is a key factor for managing knowledge in organizations, be that with reference to well-structured, ill-structured, or wicked problem solving.³ With decreasing bureaucracy and decentralization of operations, it makes sense to distribute leadership for organizational problem solving: the span of knowledge coordination should be as close as possible to relevant knowledge domains.

¹ Put simply, a stock of knowledge is the level of knowledge, skills, and competencies of a person or organization. A flow of knowledge is the amount of such human capital that is transferred between people; in an organization, it is the use of knowledge in organizing activities to create intellectual (or structural and relational) capital.

² A knowledge manager has operational and developmental responsibility for knowledge management principles and practices. He or she often acts as central owner of taxonomies and content standards and knowledge processes. He or she also works to promote access to information, intelligence support, expertise, and good practices.

³ For well-structured problems, knowledge managers would focus on the division of labor across the various units within their organizational boundaries. For ill-structured problems, they would endeavor to leverage networks of influence outside these. For wicked problems, they would ask webs of experts across the latter to act as a conduit to influential managers and decision makers on their behalf.

Knowledge Coordination under ADB's Knowledge Management Framework

In 2004, ADB formulated a framework to guide its work on managing knowledge.⁴ The framework pursues two mutually supportive outcomes: (i) increased assimilation of and dissemination by ADB of relevant and high-quality knowledge to developing member countries and other stakeholders, and (ii) enhanced learning in ADB. Its outputs are intended to be an improved organizational culture for knowledge sharing; better management system; more efficient business processes and information technology solutions for knowledge capture, enrichment, storage, and retrieval; well-functioning communities of practice; and expanded knowledge sharing, learning, and dissemination through external relations and networking. Since 2004, the Knowledge Management Center in the Regional and Sustainable Development Department is responsible for coordinating and monitoring knowledge initiatives in ADB, and the action plans of the knowledge management framework. It plays a critical role in introducing new knowledge management approaches and reporting to ADB Management.

*When we seek to discover the best in others,
we somehow bring out the best in ourselves.*

—William Arthur Ward

In each office and department, a knowledge management coordinator is tasked with helping mainstream knowledge management in ADB.

In 2009, ADB approved *Enhancing Knowledge Management under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action for 2009–2011*⁵ to advance the knowledge management agenda under *Strategy 2020: The Long-Term Strategic Framework of the Asian Development Bank (2008–2020)*.⁶ Four pillars support the plan of action: (i) sharpening the knowledge focus in ADB's operations, (ii) empowering the communities of practice, (iii) strengthening external knowledge partnerships, and (iv) further enhancing staff learning and skills development.

In 2010, the Knowledge Management Center reexamined the roles and functions of ADB's knowledge management coordinators—who currently number 45 staff members—and discussed opportunities to enrich these with them.⁷ It then recommended a rationalized framework to align their roles and functions with *Enhancing Knowledge Management under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action, 2009–2011* and the corresponding *Knowledge Management Results Framework, 2009–2011*.⁸ The new roles and functions for the knowledge management coordinators would

- Gather the functions of point persons for knowledge management, information technology, web development, and publishing, most of which are related and frequently overlap.
- Validate the need for full-time work on knowledge management and learning.
- Enhance the visibility of knowledge management functions in ADB.
- Provide a common language enabling structured activities, inputs, outputs, and outcomes; interdepartmental complementarity and partnerships; cross-referencing of ADB-wide initiatives; mutual learning; critical mass; and wider outreach and impact.
- Inspire other staff to engage in knowledge management and learning.
- Drive *Enhancing Knowledge Management under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action, 2009–2011* and the corresponding *Knowledge Management Results Framework, 2009–2011*.

These *Knowledge Solutions* showcase the new terms of reference for knowledge management coordinators in ADB.

⁴ ADB. 2004. *Knowledge Management in ADB*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/knowledge-management/knowledge-framework.asp

⁵ ADB. 2009. *Enhancing Knowledge Management Under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action for 2009–2011*. Manila. The plan of action is reproduced in ADB. 2009. *Enhancing Knowledge Management Strategies*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/enhancing-knowledge-management-strategies.pdf

⁶ ADB. 2008. *Strategy 2020: The Long-Term Strategic Framework of the Asian Development Bank, 2008–2020*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/policies/strategy2020/strategy2020.pdf

⁷ Some offices and departments have nominated stand-alone point persons for information technology, web development, and publishing. Under the current arrangements are unclear divisions of labor and potential gaps in coordination among the point persons.

⁸ ADB. 2010. *Enhancing Knowledge Management under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action for 2009–2011—Knowledge Management Results Framework*. Manila. The results framework is reproduced in ADB. 2010. *Crafting a Knowledge Management Results Framework*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/crafting-a-knowledge-management-results-framework.pdf

Box: Roles and Functions for Knowledge Management Coordination

In July 2009, ADB approved *Enhancing Knowledge Management Under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action for 2009–2011*^a to advance *Knowledge Management in ADB*.^b In March 2010, it finalized *Enhancing Knowledge Management under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action for 2009–2011—Knowledge Management Results Framework*^c to specify the expected outcomes, useful results indicators, specific activity indicators, targets, and sources of verification that will operationalize ADB’s plan of action.

Notwithstanding the distinct mandates, systems, and resources of ADB’s offices and departments^d and the job descriptions of their staff, the knowledge management coordinators can advance ADB’s knowledge management agenda by selectively and progressively facilitating the following range of roles and functions. Their focus, approach, and involvement will depend on the primary responsibility of their respective office or department.^e

Sharpening the Knowledge Focus in ADB’s Operations

The knowledge management coordinators would

- Develop a knowledge management work plan for the office or department, aligned with ADB’s plan of action for 2009–2011, and advise its head of progress.
- Recognize good practice approaches, methods, and tools to enhance the identification, creation, storage, sharing, and use of knowledge from the operations cycle in ways consistent with the needs and systems of the office or department and developing member countries directly supported.
- Promote the use of knowledge management principles in preparing country partnership studies, reports and recommendations of the President, and technical assistance reports.
- Distinguish opportunities for the generation and sharing of knowledge from both lending and nonlending products and services throughout the project cycle and encourage related actions.
- Help boost research and analytical work relevant to the role of the office or department in priority areas of Strategy 2020 and the needs of unit clients, with attention to aligning with stages of the project cycle.

Empowering the Communities of Practice

The knowledge management coordinators would

- Enhance interactions between the office or department and communities of practice to identify, create, store, share, and use knowledge and extend related products and services.
- Promote awareness, understanding, and use of sector and thematic work and research between communities of practice and the office or department.
- Facilitate feedback to communities of practice on the perceived relevance and effectiveness of their activities in the office or department’s sector divisions and resident and regional missions.
- Identify opportunities for knowledge generation and sharing at community of practice events.

Strengthening External Knowledge Partnerships

The knowledge management coordinators would

- Identify and share good practices from lending and nonlending products and services (including those sourced from outside ADB) to promote uptake.
- Explore opportunities to generate and share knowledge solutions with decision makers in developing member countries before, during, and after interventions.
- Integrate knowledge components in external partnerships.

Further Enhancing Staff Learning and Skills Development

The knowledge management coordinators would

- Raise awareness of learning and development opportunities in knowledge management and learning in the office or department and provide feedback to learning program providers on their effectiveness.
- Help capture the tacit knowledge of departing staff to drive organizational performance improvement.

Promoting Knowledge Management and Learning. The knowledge management coordinators would

- Take part in, or keep aware of, the development and implementation of information technology solutions that facilitate knowledge generation and sharing in the office and department and developing member countries directly supported.

- Link with the Information Resources and Services Unit to optimize use of the Library's information resources and the library and records resources in the office or department and facilitate access in resident and regional missions and representative offices.
- Launch knowledge transfer initiatives through web development, storytelling, e-marketing, media promotion, and multilingual outreach.

^a ADB. 2009. *Enhancing Knowledge Management Under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action for 2009–2011*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/knowledge-management/action-plan.asp. The paper articulates four pillars to (i) sharpen the knowledge focus in ADB's operations, (ii) empower the communities of practice, (iii) strengthen external knowledge partnerships, and (iv) further enhance staff learning and skills development.

^b ADB. 2004. *Knowledge Management in ADB*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/knowledge-management/knowledge-framework.asp

^c ADB. 2010. *Enhancing Knowledge Management under Strategy 2020: Plan of Action for 2009–2011—Knowledge Management Results Framework*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/knowledge-management/results-framework.asp

^d Where feasible, deploying a single coordinator for knowledge management, publishing, and the web is likely more efficient and effective than having separate liaisons for these roles and functions. Nonetheless, a knowledge coordination approach can also be taken that mainstreams these through wider office or department systems and resources.

^e The *Knowledge Management Results Framework* lists opportunities for action across the four pillars.

^f This would enable the Information Resources and Services Unit to optimize the complementarity of its three functions, namely, information research and coordination, Library, and records and archive management for the benefit of ADB as a whole.

Source: Author.

Further Reading

ADB. 2008. *Building Communities of Practice*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org/documents/information/knowledge-solutions/building-communities-practice.pdf

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For further information

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Asian Development Bank

ADB's vision is an Asia and Pacific region free of poverty. Its mission is to help its developing member countries reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people. Despite the region's many successes, it remains home to two thirds of the world's poor: 1.8 billion people who live on less than \$2 a day, with 903 million struggling on less than \$1.25 a day. ADB is committed to reducing poverty through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration.

Based in Manila, ADB is owned by 67 members, including 48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

Knowledge Solutions are handy, quick reference guides to tools, methods, and approaches that propel development forward and enhance its effects. They are offered as resources to ADB staff. They may also appeal to the development community and people having interest in knowledge and learning.

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