

Knowledge Management Assessment Conducted Using Knowledge
Management Principles
Common Knowledge Associates
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The goal of a Knowledge Management Assessment is to:

1. Assess where the organization is in terms of leveraging explicit and tacit knowledge, collaboration, and the development of new knowledge for innovation
2. Assist the organization in developing a vision of where they need to be, taking into account 1) the strategy of the organization, and 2) the best practice within their industry
3. Work with the organization to develop a road map of strategies to get from where they are to their vision

The critical difference that Common Knowledge Associates brings to a KM assessment is the involvement of an internal team as joint researchers, rather than bringing in an external team to conduct the assessment. The internal team is composed of those whose work and behavior is expected to change – that often means those on the frontline.

Conducting the assessment through an internal team begins the important process of leveraging the organization's collective knowledge. The benefits to the organization in conducting the knowledge management assessment with an internal team are:

- The knowledge does not leave when the researcher leaves - in-depth understanding continues to reside in the organization
- The internal team conducts 70% of the interview/observations, significantly reducing the cost of assessment for the client
- A greater number of organizational members can be interviewed/observed
- Members of the internal team gain an understanding of the reasoning behind the change effort and are therefore able to influence change from the bottom up
- Suggested changes are more useful and realistic because they are developed by those who do the work

Assessing The "As Is"

The internal team, acting in their role as joint researchers, is involved in data collection, analysis, and the development of findings. This team has wide representation from across the organization, touching all units and levels that are anticipated to be involved in the changes. Dr. Dixon acts as principal researcher, using skills and knowledge developed through her many years as Professor of Administrative Science at the George Washington University. Depending upon the nature of the work, the "as is" assessment may involve interviews,

observation, surveys, review of documents and review of intranet sites including content management sites, communities, and social media. In her role as principal researcher, Dr. Dixon designs the assessment so that validity and reliability are preserved. Among these design tasks are:

- Selecting the methodology(s)
- Designing the interview/survey questions and then testing them for ambiguity and clarity
- Constructing an interview/observation protocol to ensure consistency across multiple interviewers
- Training the interviewers/observers in semi-structured interviewing techniques
- Selecting a representative sample of the population
- Conducting a minimum of 30% of the interviews/observations
- Employing qualitative analysis software to analyze the data
- Facilitating joint analysis sessions with the internal team, and
- Developing a report of findings

Because of the involvement of the internal team, by the time the assessment is completed, change has already started to happen. There is a buzz in the organization about the issues and people are trying out changes. For a detailed example of how this works see:

<http://www.nancydixonblog.com/2010/02/organizational-studies-that-dont-just-sit-on-the-shelf-participatory-action-research.html>

Constructing the “To Be” - Visioning

Common Knowledge Associates understands that real change, rather than compliance, occurs when employees, whose practices will have to change, are themselves involved in thinking through those changes. Therefore constructing the “to be” picture is again a joint effort that consists of uncovering what knowledge efforts would support the organization’s strategy, but also what is leading edge. Those whose work and behavior will necessarily change participate in exploring “best practices” of other organizations. Common Knowledge Associates selects from a set of collaborative strategies (Peer Assist, Field Trips, Kaizen Blitz, Future Search) to use in developing the “To Be” vision. See an example of Peer Assist at <http://commonknowledge.org/page.asp?id=30> and an example of Kaizen Blitz at <http://www.nancydixonblog.com/2009/09/if-the-army-can-put-its-doctrine-up-on-a-wiki-youve-got-no-excuse.html>

Moving from “As Is” to “To Be” - Roadmap

Once the organization’s knowledge gaps are identified the task is to build a road map from here to there. Identifying the practices, strategies and process that can be put into place to achieve the vision. Many of these will have been identified in the process of developing the “To Be.”

In the experience of Common Knowledge Associates the “To Be” already resides in the organization in bits and pieces – at the fringe, in the cracks, and parasitic on old practices. Using appreciative processes it is possible to locate where the future is already happening within the organization and to build upon those “found pilots.” They offer a great advantage for early successes and quick wins.

The internal team that has collected and analyzed the data now turns their focus to bringing about change in their own units/departments. By this point in the study several people from each of the units/departments have been involved in one or more of the activities of the study and they form an internal group to advocate for change and to be the first implementers of that change. The internal team becomes a valuable source of influence within the organization.

The internal team working with senior management prioritizes the identified strategies for the road map in terms of 1) greatest need, 2) cost, and 3) ease of implementation.

Summary

All three steps of the knowledge management assessment described above make use of the collective knowledge of the organization. Each step involves organizational members, not as subjects to be studied, but as joint researchers and innovators. A basic assumption of knowledge management is that much of the organization’s knowledge resides in the minds of those who are currently engaged in the work. That assumption is evident in the knowledge management assessment process designed by Common Knowledge Associates -it’s a matter of “walking the talk.”

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