

University of Wollongong

**Research Online**

---

Australian Health Services Research Institute

Faculty of Business and Law

---

1-1-2015

## **What practitioners (should) want and expect: a personal perspective**

Helen M. Hasan

*University of Wollongong*, [hasan@uow.edu.au](mailto:hasan@uow.edu.au)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/ahsri>

---

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

## What practitioners (should) want and expect: a personal perspective

### Abstract

Knowledge Management (KM) practice can be of great benefit to organisations whose current, and anticipated future, environments are complex and uncertain. Among KM researchers and practitioners there are differing views of what KM is, and what KMers do, however, all agree that KM is rarely easy, dealing with change, risk and complex issues in diverse contexts. This chapter attempts to speculate on what practitioners expect and want with respect to KM for the future. This speculation is based on the author's understanding of what KM has been and how it is currently practiced. Since a thorough understanding of the past and present of KM is beyond the scope of this chapter, a summary is presented from the author's interpretation of her substantial personal experience of KM. This experience comes from KM as practiced in the field of Information Systems and from the author's participation for over 5 years in the development of the Australian KM Standard. In order to speculate on the future of KM, the opinions of experienced and respected KM practitioners have been canvassed. It is clear that in the future, as in the past and present, KM practice will need to reconcile the various diversities and dichotomies of programs that leverage organisational knowledge for a productive and sustainable future.

### Keywords

should, practitioners, want, perspective, expect, personal

### Publication Details

H. Hasan, "What practitioners (should) want and expect: a personal perspective", in *Advances in Knowledge Management: Celebrating Twenty Years of Research and Practice* (eds E. Bolisani & M. Handzic), (Springer, Switzerland, 2015) 183-196.

## **PART III : Predicting the Future**

### **What practitioners (should) want and expect: a personal perspective**

#### **Abstract**

Knowledge Management (KM) practice can be of great benefit to organisations whose current, and anticipated future, environments are complex and uncertain. Among KM researchers and practitioners there are differing views of what KM is, and what KMers do, however, all agree that KM is rarely easy, dealing with change, risk and complex issues in diverse contexts. This chapter attempts to speculate on what practitioners expect and want with respect to KM for the future. This speculation is based on the author's understanding of what KM has been and how it is currently practiced. Since a thorough understanding of the past and present of KM is beyond the scope of this chapter, a summary is presented from the author's interpretation of her substantial personal experience of KM. This experience comes from KM as practiced in the field of Information Systems and from the author's participation for over five years in the development of the Australian KM Standard. In order to speculate on the future of KM, the opinions of experienced and respected KM practitioners have been canvassed. It is clear that in the future, as in the past and present, KM practice will need to reconcile the various diversities and dichotomies of programs that leverage organisational knowledge for a productive and sustainable future.

**Keywords:** Practitioner communities, networking, knowledge sharing, cooperative collaboration, KM Standard

#### **Introduction**

There is no doubt that the practice of Knowledge Management (KM) can be of great benefit to organisations. However, in facing the complexities of the changing global environment, KM is rarely easy or straight forward. It has been, and will no doubt continue to be, a challenge to do KM well even by seasoned practitioners. This is where research comes in. The KM body of knowledge will only grow if there is mutual respect and cross-fertilisation between research and practice.

This chapter attempts to speculate on what practitioners expect and want with respect to KM now and into the future. This challenge cannot be met in the same way that one would study the present or the past, as one of the basic tenets of complexity theory (Mitleton-Kelly 2005) is the virtual unknowability of the future. I will therefore approach the challenge from my interpretation of the complexities of KM in the past and present together with some insights expressed by some of my practitioner colleagues. I assert that all aspects of KM must be understood within their context. I therefore embed my interpretation of KM past, present and future in the context of my own substantial experiences.

I should make it clear from the start that I have only limited experience as a KM practitioner. So I am not writing this as a representative of the KM practitioner community but rather as a KM

researcher who has observed, and occasionally indulged in, KM practice for many years. I have conducted a few paid KM consulting jobs, which I will refer to later. It was however when I spent five years on the committee which developed the Australian KM Standard that I came into contact with a great many KM practitioners from whom I have learnt, and continue to learn, much. I am very grateful that they have been happy to share their ideas and experiences with me. I enjoy following their online comments on Twitter and the ActKM list and occasionally meeting them at KM conferences and events. Many people who work professionally as KM practitioners also work as part-time lecturers and tutors. Some have also undertaken post-graduate study in KM.

KM is clearly an area where there is a porous and blurred boundary between academia and practice. As in every profession there are occasions where practitioners accuse academics of being out of touch while academics claim that practitioners ignore well-researched findings. My experience is that in the field of KM there is a good deal of respect between the two communities. Academic research looks for basic principles, with long-term stable characteristics and relationships, while practitioners want specific solutions in order to solve immediate problems and meet current organisational objectives within budget and with allocated resources.

In research and practice KM is rarely easy, dealing with change, risk and complex issues in diverse contexts. In most cases it is difficult to attribute organisational outcomes directly to KM initiatives. It is therefore essential that academics and practitioners cooperate in advancing the field into the future. In this chapter I present a picture of the past present and future of KM from what I see as the practitioner perspective.

## **Background**

Before attempting to look towards the future, I think it only proper to see where the KM practitioner community has come from and where it now finds itself. Although there has been much debate over exactly what KM is, one thing is certain, that KM practice is always context dependent. What works in one context may not work, or works differently, in another. Therefore I begin by setting the context for this essay on what KM practitioners want and expect from the future.

For many of us, the first exposure to the ideas of KM was through the published work of Nonaka and others in the mid to late 1990s (Nonaka 1994). In my case, I was undertaking a PhD at that time on the effect of Executive Information Systems (EIS) on the process of strategic decision-making in organizations. EIS were quite new at the time and were in many ways quite revolutionary. They relied on data-warehouses that pulled data from properly normalized organizational databases, cleaned it, and then restructured it into aggregated data in denormalised, multi-dimensional databases with interfaces that actually made sense to senior managers. IT and database professionals had been taught that a good database was normalised according to entity-relationship models that reflected the way business was transacted. A different structure was required for strategic decision making and this challenged the firmly held principles of good database design. As a result EIS were often viewed by the IT technical support staff as not legitimately part of their responsibility.

On the other hand, executives immediately recognised the potential of such tools. They had previously viewed computers as glorified typewriters that did not belong on an executive's desk. Now they had an application that they could use directly to know how the business was

performing. They could set up and track key performance indicators and have a more authoritative source of information on which to base and justify decisions.

Distinguishing these EIS from the transactional organizational information systems coincided with a trend to emphasise *knowledge* rather than *information* as the most critical organisational resource. Both managers and researchers in management science started talking about the knowledge-based view (KBV) of the firm as a special case of the resource-based view (RBV). In popular parlance the *Knowledge Age* superseded the *Information Age* and new terms such as the 'knowledge economy' became part of the public discourse.

My PhD research investigated the implication of this new focus on knowledge rather than information as the basis of strategic decision-making. I found that in this context the activity of sense-making was central to the relationship between information, knowledge and decision-making (Hasan & Gould 2001). My basic premise was that executive information systems were a new tool for presenting organisational information to senior managers that would improve their knowledge about what was happening. The way they made sense of the information presented through graphical direct-manipulation interfaces would impact on their decision-making leading to action.

## **Lessons on KM Practice from the Creation of the Australian KM Standard**

Just as I graduated with a PhD in 2000, Standards Australia became interested in KM. They commissioned a study of what was happening locally in terms of KM both in practice and in academia. An original KM Framework (Figure 1) was produced and explained in a Handbook published by Standards Australia (HB275-2001). The Handbook was well received by practitioners and its popularity led Standards to set up a committee to develop a full KM Standard.

Among members of the KM Standard committee were people, mostly practitioners, from Records Management, Human Resources, Project Management and other corporate services. I was surprised to be the only IT person, and most of the time, the only academic. In academia the concept of KM is used in the fields of Computer Science and Information Systems. It is not my view of KM, but I know people in Computer Science who use the phrase managing knowledge to refer to methods and software tools in areas of semantic models, ontologies, data mining, big data and business analytics. While my main field of research is Information Systems (IS) I officially represented the Human Computer-Interaction (HCI) community on the KM Standard committee. HCI and IS are closely related. Both are concerned with the human use and impact of ICT. I don't believe it is a co-incidence that KM emerged in the mid-1990s just as the Internet was taking off. As an IS person, and one who relies on Complexity Theory to deal with complex systems, I see the Internet, or more correctly the World-Wide Web that sits on the Internet, as the world's biggest "information system". I describe it as a global complex adaptive system that connects everyone 24/7 and is continually evolving, providing exciting possibilities for sharing and co-creating knowledge that we still don't really understand or manage very well.

The Australian Interim KM Standard, produced and released in 2003 (AS5037(Int-2003)) was in many ways similar to the Handbook in that it was based on a rather prescriptive mechanistic framework (Figure 2) showing that application of elements of KM lead to beneficial strategic organisational outcomes. It was widely circulated for evaluation by the practitioner and academic communities. While a great deal of positive feedback was received, there were three

major challenges identified, namely (1) establishing an acceptable scope and content of KM, (2) establishing the link between KM initiatives and beneficial organisational outcomes and (3) building the case for the value of KM even when its benefits are not directly measurable or directly linked to outcomes but rather creating a culture for innovation that will benefit the organisation down the track.

To help address item (1) an accompanying KM vocabulary was created (HB189-2004). In an attempt to address item (2) the Final Standard released in 2005 (AS5037-2005) contained a KM maturity model (Figure 3) that allowed organisations to identify where they currently were, and where they might apply KM initiatives in order to improve performance in respect of the four elements of People, Process, Technology and Content.

The Final Standard (AS5037-2005) was far less prescriptive than the Interim Standard and does not dictate what any particular organisation should do. It attempts to present a view of KM that was appropriate for the increasing complex environment of modern organisations. It recognised that KM initiatives are usually complicated by the need to manage collections of people, processes, technologies and content from many different organisational units. As shown in Figure 4, the Standard replaced the mechanistic view of KM presented in Handbook and Interim Standard with a much more organic one, which portrayed KM as operating as a knowledge ecosystem. The Standard provides a three-phase cyclic framework (Mapping, Building and Operationalising –Figure 5) for planning and implementing in a non-linear cyclic set of three phases as follows:

- *mapping*: an audit of the current organisational KM state in the local context and culture and identifying suitable KM goals
- *building: experiences and linkages*: this is the vital phase of prototyping, trialling projects, building trust, generating champions.
- *operationalising: initiatives and capabilities*: including determination of effectiveness, measurements and performance evaluations.

The building phase in particular recommends appropriate knowledge interventions allowing participants to explore and take ownership of emergent solutions. A range of possible enablers are described that could support the explorations and interventions according to the demands and needs of a particular organisational circumstance.

The Australian Government Information Management Office was a strong supporter of the final standard and used it to develop a checklist (AGIMO 2004) that was widely used in the Australian public service. The description of KM in this document remains relevant for public sector organisations today.

*Knowledge management (KM) builds on earlier approaches of data management and information management and adds a higher level of complexity with the inclusion of meaning, networking, collaboration and business process improvement. KM has also emerged as an inter-disciplinary framework to assist organisations to engage in the wider information/knowledge economy. Technology is only one element in this engagement; content, process and people aspects also need to be considered. The information economy has a strong focus on networks, which requires organisations to focus on knowledge creation, values, ethics and cultural drivers to optimise the use of their knowledge resources. Public sector agencies throughout the world are at the forefront of implementing KM. Closer citizen engagement, cross-agency collaboration and efficiency*

*dividends are driving agencies to adopt initiatives that focus on making the best use of knowledge within them. While many organisations may not use the term 'knowledge management' to describe their activities in this area, many relevant activities are undertaken to enhance organisational learning, improve service delivery, and build capabilities and flexibility. (AGIMOS 2004 p 3)*

Since its release, the Standard has, apart from the AGIMO report, received a rather cool reception from most practitioners. It does not contain an easy to follow recipe for KM or dictate how the success of KM can be measured so takes some effort to implement in any particular context. On the other hand, many of those who know that there is no simple recipe for KM have not realised that the final version of the Final Standard, unlike the Handbook and Interim Standard, does not take such an approach. It came as quite a surprise when I read that Burford and Ferguson (2011) viewed the knowledge ecosystem of Figure 4 as being “too neat” when I know that it was created in order to depict its messy organic nature.

Getting the final document approved by the standard's authority was such a battle that members of the committee who developed it went on to do other things once it was approved. There continues to be debate on whether a KM standard is appropriate, meaningful, or even possible. However, despite all these things I believe that the process of developing the Australian KM Standard and the resulting Standard itself have been of value to the KM community. Over time, it was picked up by some people who found it interesting and useful. As Burford and Ferguson (2011) observed many Knowledge Managers have used the authority that comes with a Standard to support their KM endeavours. I still recommend it as an introduction to KM for anyone confused by the essentially messy nature of KM and believe that much of it is still relevant.

## **Current KM Practice.**

So where is KM practice now? The KM practitioners whose views I seek out and respect have been doing KM for many years. They form a dedicated community of seasoned KMers albeit with different skills and approaches. They survive and prosper not only because a great deal of their professional lives are invested in KM but also because they appreciate how KM can be organisationally valuable and personally rewarding, despite the challenges encountered. As one of them expressed it, “there are a number of practitioners who are quietly getting on with the job of doing KM within their organisation, but it's pretty submerged”. The view of another was that KM is “basically a support function in most organisations, and not necessarily an essential one; viewed as a ‘nice to have’ by many executives. We need Finance because how else do the bills get paid, we need HR because we have to employ staff, we need IT to keep the email switched on. But KM? Where is the value?” Another colleague expressed the view that “KM is in a really interesting space at the moment, because it's no longer "the hot thing" as it was in the late 90s/2000s”. There was a time when KM was new, flashy, flavor of the month and something every organization had to have. It was subsequently described as a passing fad but it has quite rightly survived but is now more embedded in organizational structures, technologies and processes.

While those ‘in the know’ recognise and value KM, outside this inner circle KM can still be somewhat of a mystery. In a global study conducted just a few years ago, Patrick Lamb (2008) found the life of most Knowledge Managers was “nasty, brutish and short”. The results of the study showed that the vast majority of people taken on to do KM in organisations had little prior

experience, hardly any relevant qualifications and received little on-the-job training. They reported that KM awareness and support was severely lacking in most organisations and it seemed that this situation was worst in the more advanced economies.

I suspect that the situation may have improved since Patrick did this study but probably not by much. I have heard many stories of how KM roles in organisations are established basically by accident. An executive may read about a KM initiative in a management magazine or at a conference. Alternatively a specific problem arises that is seen as a KM issue (e.g. retirement of several senior people taking knowledge out the door). A position is set up and someone in IT or HR given the job or a new position is advertised with vague criteria, it gets variety of applicants and someone with little KM experience is appointed.

Large organisations often have someone in the position of Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO), whom Wikipedia currently describes, not very helpfully as someone “responsible for ensuring that the organization maximizes the value it achieves through knowledge”. The most insightful description of the CKO role that I have seen came many years ago from Earl & Scott (1999). From a study of 20 CKOs they proposed that the CKO be a direct appointment of the CEO, have been in the organisation at least 10 years but not be too close to retirement and have a roving commission but not a large budget. Such CKOs would pick up good ideas, identify potential KM initiatives, promote knowledge sharing and act as change agents.

There is no getting away from the fact that KM is by its very nature hard to pin down, difficult to define, covers a diversity of things and its effects are hard to measure. KM can be seen something related to technology such as maintaining knowledge repositories, document management systems and Intranets. Alternatively it can be seen something associated with the human capital related to staff training, appointment of staff with certain expertise, managing exit interviews such or scanning for relevant external information to be circulated within the organisation. In one consultancy job I undertook, the Knowledge Manager I interviewed saw a key part of her job as spreading her knowledge throughout the organisation and so would write a weekly ‘fact sheet’ that she distributed. Not surprisingly, it was not often read or applied but she felt she was doing her job. Several of my consulting jobs have involved attempts to democratise organisational knowledge using a corporate wiki. Although not always successful, these projects promoted the idea that all members of an organisation were knowledge worker and what they knew was valuable to others in the organisations. Contributors to a wiki not only added content of their own, they can edit and comment on content entered by others and even decide on how the whole knowledge repository can be structured. All in all, there is great variety among KM practitioners, their backgrounds and skills, the organizational arrangements for KM in their organizations and the kinds of KM initiatives and programs undertaken.

## **Wants and expectations of the future**

So far in this chapter I have talked about the past and present in order to set a context for a look into the future. As I mentioned before I use ideas from Complexity Theory in my view of the world and one of its tenets is the virtual unknowability of the future. Try to remember what our lives were like just 5 or 10 years ago and what has changed since then. How many of us would have predicted, for example, the pervasiveness of Skype, Facebook and Twitter? If change continues this way what could possibly happen over the next 5 or 10 years? Probably some quite unexpected technologies and technologically enabled activities will enter into our lives. With this



in mind, what I say here will be a best guess but may not be too coherent or prescriptive and I must thank a number of respected KM practitioners who have given me some ideas that I have incorporated here.

The first reply I received to a recent online post asking KM practitioners what they wanted was “The list of things that knowledge managers want is pretty much endless: management buy in, more resources, more recognition ...”. This I guess shows that KMers are human and implies that they don’t feel that they get such things now. My reflection on this desire for a higher KM profile and visibility is that, if the CKO or Knowledge Manager does have a higher status and big budget, the wrong people might apply for, and get, the job. Maybe part of being good at KM is the ability to stay ‘under the radar’ and ‘work behind the scenes’.

Several practitioners alluded to the ‘fuzzy’ definition of KM and the ongoing question of the need to determine just what constitutes KM practice. One stated that the basic challenge is that there are a range of activities that get badged ‘KM’. Another noted that it often seems to boil down to implementing SharePoint, implying that this is well short of what KM could and maybe should be in maintaining and leveraging the organisation’s knowledge resource. A prevalent view is that KM is full of contradictions and that sharpening up the fuzzy definition, trimming down the broad scope, updating the Standard would be on a KM practitioner’s wish list. A number of posts to online the KM discussion alluded to the overlap of KM with other areas such as change management, risk management sustainability and organisational learning so that clarification of the boundaries between them would be desirable. This was summed up in one post saying: “Because the boundaries are fuzzy, the potential coverage of KM is huge (everything from the coding data analytics to running org change projects) and it's hard for any one KMer to have a comprehensive view of everything and sufficient depth of skills”.

However not all practitioners were so sure that the uncertainty and diversity surrounding KM definitions and activities was a problem. Indeed some see it as a real strength showing where KM is today may go in the future. I am a long-time supporter of this view. My main contribution to the Australian KM Standard was the chapter on the "Build Phase" of the KM Cycle (Figure 5). It is all about exploring, prototyping, safe-fail, getting buy-in from management and bringing people along through change. While I am conscious that KM can make sense to people in different ways, and most prefer some semblance of order, I empathise with those confident enough to practice KM in innovative ways in uncertain and unpredictable circumstances.

In this vein I present some of the more thoughtful responses I received in answer to my question about the future of KM practice that I posted online.

The capability of KMers to deal with diversity is explained this way. “I'd also push back a bit on the idea that KM can't be ‘experts in everything’. An architect can't manufacture all the materials she uses to construct buildings, but she can still understand their purpose and where there are alternative approaches, their pros and cons.”

Two divergent KM approaches were described as “either having a general plan to manage information and capability that allow people to undertake KM initiatives or alternatively, you can focus on reactively identifying and addressing specific problems. The second approach is easier to prove ‘value’ and in all honesty, is where I would start given the general lack of trust in KM's overall ability to deliver”.

Another respondent put it this way. “My observation is that KM is about sharing rather than hoarding, cooperation rather than competition, social learning, team building and promoting the work of others. This is not the normal stuff that builds careers and help you climb up the corporate ladder. To that end I think that KM practitioners, more than anything else, need practical methods with a robust theoretical basis and evidence of success (as compared to wishful thinking) to gain the attention and acceptance of senior management.”

Reflecting on these statements, I return to the idea that KM practice in organisations is basically about being able to make good decisions and acting on them to solve problems and innovate. This can be in either a formal, mechanistic way or an informal, organic manner. The latter requires the establishment and maintenance of a knowledge ecosystem that encourages a cooperative culture to build and sustain collaborative relationships between people both within and across the organisational boundary.

One practitioner put it this way: “Armed with an overflowing toolbox of techniques and practices I would be surprised if the KM practitioner could not add significant value if only they can position themselves appropriately in the influence network supporting these decisions. This is about leadership without authority.”

In the KM practitioner’s toolbox are many ICT-based systems. One of respondents mentioned these specifically, saying: “With a whole raft of easy and compelling-to-use Business Information Systems (sometimes called KM systems) KM can give the business a way to use them when and where *they* want them. If these systems are easy and compelling to use and have data or information in them that is useful to the business user, then uptake is quicker and easier.” They went on to mention that CIO’s are barely looking at this, (either just don’t get it or it is all too hard)”.

Much of my work as a KM practitioner involved consultancies to do with the use of corporate Wikis. Some of this work also fed into our research and was published (see Hasan et al 2009; Pfaff & Hasan 2011; Hasan & Pfaff 2012). This research found a general resistance to, and ignorance by, mainstream IT of the whole concept of user-created knowledge repositories from which followed a more democratic view of organisational knowledge. This has changed to some extent more recently, main through the popularity of Wikipedia. However management still views with suspicion the idea that all workers are knowledge workers who can contribute knowledge about work to the organisation’s repository of knowledge in a democratic way.

Among my network of KM practitioners is Laurie Loch-Lee<sup>1</sup> an expert on Social Network Analysis (SNA) who recommends the application of SNA so that organisations can look more closely at patterns of interactions between people in order to value and leverage the existing knowledge networks within organisations. The great value that I see in SNA is its ability to allow people to visualise these patterns of interaction. The maps produce by SNA software often provide insights into the way knowledge is created, shared and used in organisational networks that are invaluable to KM initiatives and programs.

Metaphors commonly used in respect of KM are ‘organisational memory’ and ‘organisational learning’. These imply that organisations are organic in nature and behave in ways that resemble the way people behave. The corollary of this seem to me to be that such views are only valid if

---

<sup>1</sup>For more see [www.optimice.com.au](http://www.optimice.com.au) his blog: <http://governanceandnetworks.blogspot.com/>

the social networks within organisations are supported and people are empowered to co-create the organisational memory.

This leads us on to the issue of a supportive corporate culture and organization environment for KM. On this topic, one practitioner said the following: “A necessary adjunct to this is the culture of course of sharing, and developing new information for use, rather than knowledge keeping and secrecy. I think that is environmental, so while its valued it works, as soon as its not it doesn't - one of the many reasons KM doesn't stick.”

In addition to issues of networking, knowledge sharing and cooperative collaboration, the online conversation on the future of KM looked at attitudes to change, risk and personal motivation in this regard. Many see resistance to change, general risk aversions and the balance of long term against short term risk as challenges for KMers in dealing with people. The following are three interesting comments in this regard:

“When you view this thread about insights on knowledge and KM from a humanistic perspective, one lens I use is 'resistance to change' by people. Why do they resist? Besides personal gain and other political considerations (btw, I find that is something only other people do ;-); in some (many?) cases it is because their own knowledge framework (in their heads) leads to a different interpretation of information and situation. And that is both frustrating (most often to the originator) and inspiring because a lot of invention and innovation arises when people do interpret things differently.”

“An often potent lens is to gauge a person's emotional response to the information meaning, content and the person delivering it. The risk lens and 'aversion' to change can be seen as driven by the emotions we associate with that risk. If a risk became a reality and caused us harm, we naturally become more averse. If the risk has a positive effect (e.g. good bet on buying shares and/or we are rewarded for managing/surviving a risky event) then we are likely to increase our risk taking.”

“People who have never encountered a risk with adverse effects either have to be able to relate that risk to a similar risk/event (cognitive association - which most people have trouble doing) or are unlikely to be adverse to that risk. Otherwise called 'learning from experience' - sometimes we use a lot as children.”

Every now and again I come across an article or blog about KM that reminds me that one of the common attributes of experiences KMers is their ability to come up with interesting ideas that can often inspire innovative change. Some ideas that are not really new but are always interesting concern the design of spaces within organisation that promote chance encounters and provide inspiring environments from which new collaborative ventures emerge. Such an article is found here <http://www.geyer.com.au/posts/designing-physical-space-as-a-knowledge-management-and-collaboration-tool>. Such ideas can apply to both physical and virtual spaces.

In concluding this somewhat disjointed speculation on what practitioners want, expect and think about KM going into the future I must include a comment from one practitioner that “the idea of actually having a theoretically sound understanding of organisational behaviour that can be applied in practical ways excites me!” By interjecting some of my thoughts among those of the practitioners I have some hope that they may be interested in the theoretical findings of some of the research undertaken by KM academics. The challenge that we must face it how to make

these findings more accessible to practitioners who I doubt read the academic journals in which academics are required to publish if they want grants and promotion!

## **Conclusions**

One of the practitioners who joined the online conversation was concerned that the way organisations describe job roles is still largely 'industrial age'. He warned against viewing KM practice as “a laundry list of job tasks, with a list of competencies to match to those job tasks and then assessing performance against the job description. In essence we are looking to have people do the same job the same way, which was appropriate in the industrial context, but I would suggest, not in this knowledge era”. Looking around our university, supposedly a knowledge institution, the role of academics and other staff seem to be treated in an ‘industrial age’ manner in the belief that this is following best business practice and is more business-like. I am in a Management Department of a Business Faculty where we find out in our research and teach students about good ways to do KM are not reflected in the way our institution is managed in practice. I suspect this is true in many institutions, firms and organisations of all kinds. The KM practitioners whose opinions I have presented here hope to change this in the belief that fundamental core business decisions are clearly knowledge based and ‘good’ KM is desperately needed.

I have observed that very few people start off their corporate career wanting to be a Knowledge Manager. Those who go to university or college in order to study KM have rarely come straight from high-school but are usually people who have discovered KM in the workplace and want to learn more.

I suspect that there continues to be a sort of informal apprenticeship that most people need before they are comfortable in KM shoes. The Australian KM Standard was put together by a committee of representatives of interested associations and organisations over a period of 4 years. I remember almost every time a new person replaced the former representative from their organisation, we revisited the discussions on ‘what is knowledge’, how does it differ from information, can you really ‘manage knowledge’ and how can you ‘measure’ the benefits of KM. The only representatives that stayed on the committee were those who became comfortable with the notion that we could proceed to develop the Standard without definite answers to these questions.

One of my students once said “you can’t manage knowledge so you shouldn’t call it KM” to which I replied “then what is ‘it’? After nearly 20 years of use, my view is that KM is as good a name as any to describe the way organisations recognise, deal with and use what they know or need to know. It seems to help if we take the view that KM is essentially about enabling people to better understand and interpret their world in order to make difficult and important decisions. This can be sometimes be organic and informal and so fly under the radar. KM initiatives are varied and require a whole kit of tools and capabilities. Successful KM practitioners are, and will continue to be, those who can manage these, knowing their own organisational circumstances and people well enough to do this to advantage.

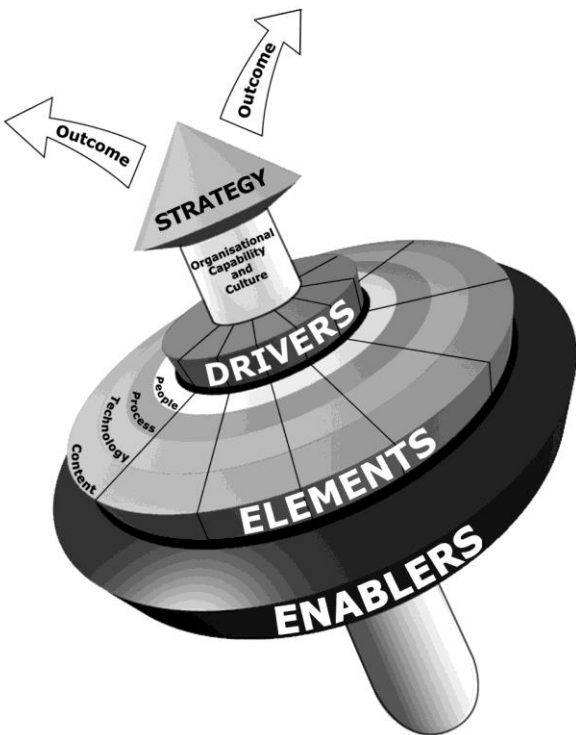
## **References**

AGIMO (2004) Knowledge Management Better practice Checklist, available from [www.agimo.gov.au/checklists](http://www.agimo.gov.au/checklists) .

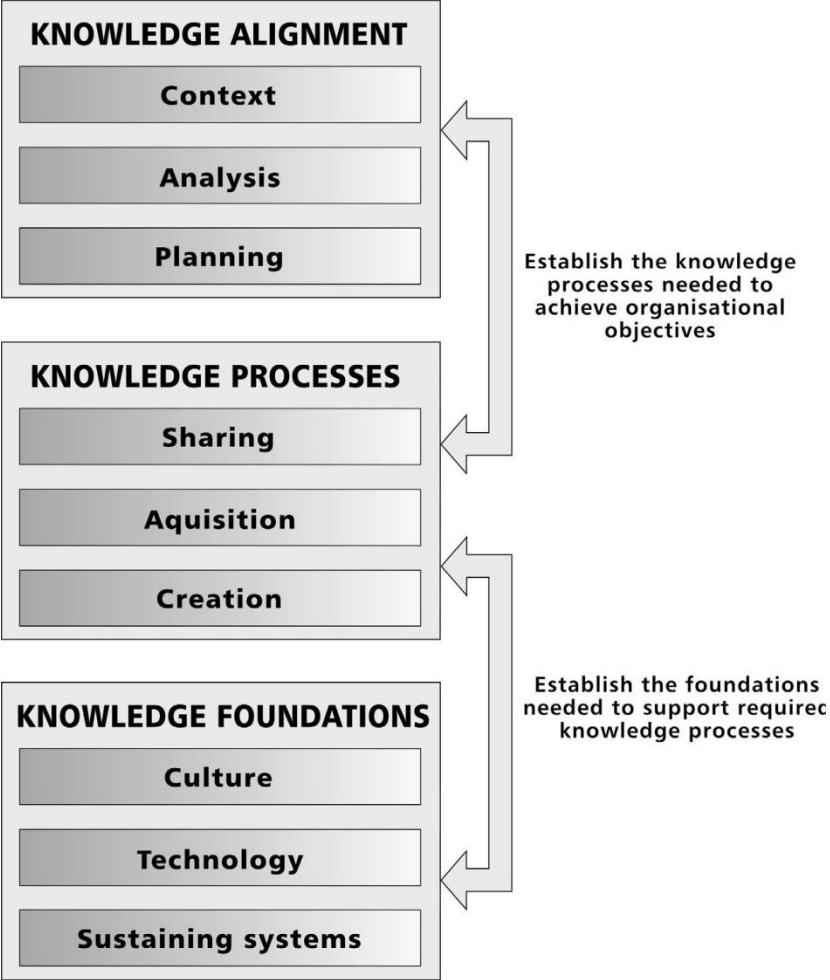
- AS5037(Int-2003) (2003) *Interim Australian Standard Knowledge Management*, Standards Australia
- AS5037-2005 (2005) *Australian Standard Knowledge Management*, Standards Australia
- Burford S., Ferguson S, (2011) The Adoption of Knowledge Management Standards and Frameworks In The Australian Government Sector *Journal of Knowledge Management Practice, Vol. 12, No. 1, March 2011*
- Earl MJ, Scott IA (1999) What is a chief knowledge officer?, *Sloan management review*, 40/2 29-38.
- Hasan H. Gould E. (2001) Support for the Sense Making Activity of Managers, *DSS Journal, special issue on Knowledge Management*, 31/3 71-86
- Hasan H Pfaff,. C. (2012) An Activity-Theory Analysis of Corporate Wikis, *Journal of IT and People* 25/4 423 - 437
- Hasan H., Meloche J. Pfaff C. Qi Y. Willis D. (2009) "Co-creating Corporate Knowledge with a Wiki" *International Journal of Knowledge Management*, 5/2 33-50.
- HB189-2004 (2004) *Knowledge Management Terminology and Reading List – An Australian Guide*, Standards Australia, Sydney.
- HB275-2001 (2001) *Knowledge Management: A Framework for succeeding in the knowledge era*, Standards Australia.
- Lambe P. (2008)  
[http://www.greenchameleon.com/gc/blog\\_detail/the\\_life\\_of\\_a\\_knowledge\\_manager\\_nasty\\_brutish\\_and\\_short/](http://www.greenchameleon.com/gc/blog_detail/the_life_of_a_knowledge_manager_nasty_brutish_and_short/)
- Mitleton-Kelly, E. 2005. "A Complexity approach to co-creating an innovative environment". *World Futures*, (62:3), pp 223-239.
- Nonaka, I. (1994). A Dynamic Theory of Organisational Knowledge Creation, *Organization Science* 5/1, 14-37.
- Pfaff C. Hasan H. (2011) Wiki-based Knowledge Management Systems for more Democratic Organizations, *Journal of Computing Information Systems*, 52/2 73-82.



**Figure 1** A visualisation of the Knowledge Eco-System from the Australian KM Standard (AS5037-2005)



**Figure 2** The KM Model from the Interim Standard (AS5037(Int-2003))



© STANDARDS AUSTRALIA INTERNATIONAL

Figure 3: The Knowledge Management Framework from the Handbook (HB275-2001)

Elements	Standalone	Connected	Networked	Adaptive
People	Individualised work functions Autonomous decision making Hierarchical structures	People work in groups or teams Sharing information is part of normal work activity Trust is developed through both formal and informal work interactions and activities Networking allows the development of shared understandings	Cross functional teams work together Trust is developed through both formal and informal work interactions and activities	Embrace change as a normal state High situational awareness High levels of trust
Process	No standard processes Knowledge activities not rewarded High levels of duplication Mistakes are hidden	Knowledge is contained in objects Processes are documented and standardised Duplication is identified and reduced	Continuous improvement Senior management embrace knowledge management Knowledge is a flow Mistakes viewed as learning opportunities	
Technology	Non-existent Information held on individual computers Lack of standards for interoperability Independent legacy systems	email Limited use of intranets Shared drives	e-business Collaborative tools, groupware Interoperability standards for hardware and software Customer relationship management Enterprise portals	Sophisticated extranets Sophisticated intelligent search engines
Content	Messy chaotic and unstructured Ad hoc and in silos Independent pools of information held locally	Document and record management systems Decentralised and trained authors for intranet Ad hoc codification of knowledge Some content available on intranet		Easy access to information Integrated sharing of content with suppliers and customers

Figure 4 The Maturity Model of the Australian KM Standard (AS5037-2005)

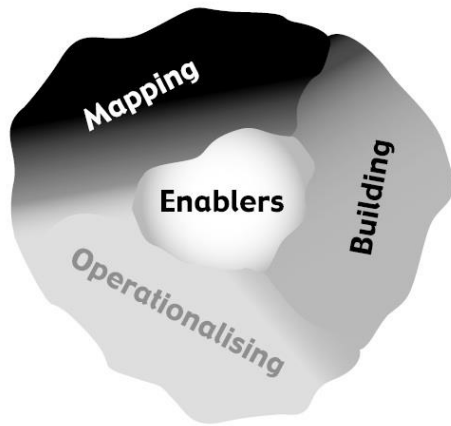


Figure 5 The Process of KM from the Australian KM Standard (AS5037-2005) - not a prescriptive, universal, linear KM process but rather a cyclic set of three phases.