

By Daniel W. Rasmus



The Tens — Knowledge Management Success Factors

1 Document the value proposition so that it aligns with organizational goals and objectives

If the knowledge management goals do not clearly reflect organizational direction, then they will appear to be in competition and will cause conflict and make it impossible for consistent adoption.

2 Embed knowledge objectives into everything

If an organization values learning and the retention of knowledge, then it must ensure that individual performance goals, as well as tactical and strategic objectives, reflect that value.

3 Integrate with what people are already doing

Although over the course of time, it is inevitable for learning, combined with strong feedback loops, to produce results that information change within the organizations, initial implementations need to go out of their way to integrate with what people are doing within the organization. Subtly introducing knowledge management techniques in conjunction with other reporting and duties can improve current practice.

4 Document the value proposition

People need to understand what's in it for them and for the organization. If day-to-day reporting, assignments, hallway discussions and meeting topics seldom mention knowledge transfer, then people will not experience the organization's mandate to share and retain knowledge as part of their work. People will quickly perceive knowledge management as extracurricular and non-rewarded.

5 Learn about the learning

Every knowledge management experience is an experiment. No matter how small the effort, if participants don't take time to reflect on the experience, and look at the learning separate from the execution, then eventually the learning will be lost among all of the other work of the day. In education they call this metacognition: reflecting on the learning to learn not only the material, but to improve on the learning experience itself.

6 Learning is an experience

Learning should be integrated, but separate and distinct from the process or activity in which it takes place. Although it is important to integrate learning

into what people are doing, that does not imply the introduction of specific learning experiences to complement existing work without interfering with it. Well-designed experiences should be a fluid part of execution, but clearly distinct from the other tasks.

7 Drive from need, not from want

Avoid implementing knowledge management as a purely intellectual exercise, one driven by abstract notions of what is good for the firm, as this leads to failure. Knowledge retention and transfer must be seen as something important to the firm and to the individual performer.

8 Rapidly discover practices

I have disdain for best practice—they imply that a practice at one firm should advisably be adopted by another. That is not the case. It is important to learn what others are doing, but it is most important to discover what is working within the firm. As above, each knowledge management investment is an experiment, so when something works, the organization should quickly understand the attributes of success and make sure, in that circumstance, as long as conditions remain constant, that the approach observed is the one best used. Avoid assuming that this practice is any more likely to fit elsewhere in the organization than an outside practice, or that the practice will remain valid in perpetuity. A learning organization constantly monitors itself, and when the feedback loop reports a practice that is faltering, it needs to be just as rapidly addressed as one that resulted in success.

9 Use technology that is already in place

It may seem that knowledge management is a unique application of technology, but nearly all collaboration technology includes features that can be used to capture documents, discussions, video and other forms of knowledge.

10 Communicate, communicate, communicate

People must be able to not only experience their own sense of time at the tactical level, but also recognize that their investment is leading toward strategic goals and objectives. Organizations need to make sure that their learning, and the effectiveness of their learning, is communicated, not just as engagement numbers, but as results oriented outcomes.