



LEARNING BRIEF

PREPARING TEAMS FOR EFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Guidelines for building systems, processes and people

The lack of good knowledge management often results in activity-based development work (rather than outcome-based) and duplication of resources as organizations invest new resources in similar projects, often with the same under par results. Good knowledge management, on the other hand, enables organizations to learn how to do effective programming, which stems directly from having systems and procedures in place that support knowledge management processes. Poor knowledge management, therefore, directly hampers organizational learning.

A definition of knowledge management

The process of data collection, codifying, storing, retrieving, sharing and using information strategically for decision making. Only when information is used for learning, to make implementation decisions, does it become knowledge.

Getting started: The value of a centralized repository



Scenario 1: The programmes personnel gave the communication department an annual report which they edited and designed. After the communication department presented a first draft, the Monitoring and Evaluation personnel and Executive Director informed them that they were working with an older version of the report implying that all the stories and data were wrong. The publication was delayed by more than 30 days as revisions were undertaken!

▶ **Simple solution:** Create centralized organization storage repository with working/draft and final folders accessible to key staff. This can be a permissions based computer hard-drive centrally accessible on the entire office network. It can also be a cloud-based storage like Google Drive.



Scenario 2: A key donor wanted to re-purpose important communication material developed two years ago. They asked the organization for the design files, however, the staff in-charge had left and therefore no one knew where the publication design files were stored.

▶ **Simple solution:** Outputs developed within the organization should be managed as organization-owned resources not individual-owned. Manage vendor submissions within the centralized organization storage repository. Request vendors producing outputs to submit raw data including design files for future revisions.



Scenario 3: A company was contracted to start work on designing an annual report that had not yet been completely written. Unfortunately, the programme person was not sure who would fill in the gaps in the written report and so they gave the design team five different programme staff emails which ensured that the design team had major nightmares and delays following up to get information. The firm was provoked to give an ultimatum to cancel the work as within a month they still did not have complete information yet the publication was due for review by the Board within 3 days.

▶ **Simple solution:** Identify and appoint key organization knowledge champions (success stories, data/statistics and facts, processes and approaches) who are tasked with contributing to the key repository folders using simple document templates and are rewarded for sharing rather than hoarding knowledge.



Scenario 4: A documentation firm was given project information for a desk review of a multi-year project to document lessons learned and good practices. A week later, having invested time and resources in review, when the firm presented the potential good lessons for further field investigation, they were informed that some partners had been dropped for non-performance and some funders had pulled the plug on funding years ago, yet the project information continued to document their involvement!

▶ **Simple solution:** Develop project one pager templates that indicate donor name, project name, start and end date, extensions, funding amounts, partners involved. The project leader should update this regularly and save it in the centralized repository.



Scenario 5: Many clients with regional offices suffer from information gaps where success stories and Monitoring and Evaluation data are not sent in on time and the over-worked manager who is charged with developing communication materials fails to meet deadlines or delivers sub-standard work as a result of a broken value chain.

▶ **Simple solution:** All organizations should have a simple editorial calendar developed collaboratively by key programme and field staff at the beginning of the year highlighting what will be documented each month and who will be responsible. Collaboration ensures that everyone's time and tasks are considered and the process of knowledge management is planned and is not overly burdening a few individuals.



Scenario 6: Recurring scarcity of anecdotal information like success stories, good photos and key statistics to include in quarterly or annual reports to showcase learning. The lack of qualitative evidence for programme results is a major hindrance to good documentation and learning. There are usually very few success stories, many of them poorly written and the statistics are subject to debate. Even more problematic is the lack of high quality photos of project work and beneficiaries with before and after scenarios.

▶ **Simple solution:** Develop a simple editorial calendar at the beginning of the year highlighting what will be documented each month and who will be responsible. All year round documentation of stories, photos and data in a single folder (managed by a single individual) will ensure publications are developed quickly with correct information. Consultants usually charge less for organizations that have well-organized information.

Where to find more resources: