



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Wealth of Knowledge

Without exception, every organization creates and consumes knowledge. If knowledge is inadequately managed, it spells doom for the organization. The four steps to managing knowledge are:

1. **Identify knowledge experts.** Identifying where knowledge lies is the first step for successful knowledge management. Having knowledgeable resources becomes meaningless if the whereabouts of knowledge are unknown.

A medium-sized manufacturing organization recently moved from where it was located for more than 25 years. However, many of the IT employees chose not to make the move. Result? The "experts" who "knew" how to guide critical IT processes were lost, which was reflected in broken systems and a lack of data. It nearly wiped out the organization, as sales representatives couldn't get the data they had once relied on and the purchasing group couldn't coordinate with vendors.

2. **Keep knowledge experts on-call.** The knowledge experts identified need to be available to the rest of the organization. Knowledge is a commodity and the more readily available it is, the cheaper it is. Conversely, when knowledge becomes scarce, it increases in value.
3. **Ensure that knowledge experts communicate.** Unless knowledge is shared, it is meaningless to the rest of the organization. Simply installing a "chat" mechanism or organization-wide data collection and reporting system would not ensure that the appropriate knowledge reaches the ultimate user.

A large professional services organization created a sophisticated intranet "knowledge-port" for important methodologies and other information. Employees were encouraged to share their knowledge by placing data into the port for others to access. After a year, the organization found that knowledge was not being deposited in the site and the entire project was a huge failure. Employees found that it was easier to talk with colleagues than to use an incomplete and ill-prepared technological tool. Users stayed with knowledge experts they knew and trusted rather than communicating their "knowledge" with unknown recipients.

4. **Act on knowledge experts' advice.** An organization's ability to adapt in today's environment will be based on two factors:
 - Knowing who the experts are by identifying the existing resources and using capabilities in new ways.
 - Openness to the process of communication and change, and acting upon the advice of your experts.



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Employees who can acquire new knowledge and skills and share them by applying them to help solve the organization's problems are the important sources of knowledge. Management needs to use them by encouraging the distribution of knowledge wealth.

Even the best knowledge management process is subject to destruction without the element of trust. Trust must be visible, with the knowledge-sharing process receiving the highest reward possible, and it should start at the top. Organizations confess that while their knowledge must flow up and across, they forget that trust can only "seep" down. Upper management's reward and action for an expert's knowledge will characterize the value of the knowledge management process and the speed with which it is accepted.