

Job Aid: Knowledge Management

Job Aid: Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is the explicit and systematic management of intellectual capital and organizational knowledge as well as the associated processes of creating, gathering, organizing, retrieving, leveraging, and using intellectual capital for the purposes of improving organizations and the people in them.

Key Points

Knowledge and information are increasingly becoming key assets for organizations. Three key building blocks for knowledge management include: data, information, and knowledge.

- **Data:** data is raw and without context and can exist in any form, usable or not—for example, numbers in a spreadsheet.
- **Information:** data that has been given meaning—for example, an annual budget for the training department.
- **Knowledge:** information that when combined with understanding, enables understanding—for example, a manager analyzing a drop in training enrollments for specific classes may take action to identify issues and carry out strategies to change the trend.

Think of the relationship of data, information, and knowledge as a hierarchy. Data gets turned into information, which then provides knowledge on which decisions can be based.

A **knowledge base** is a centralized repository where organizations capture and store data to turn tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

- **Tacit** – knowledge which is in one’s head—knowing how to do something based on experience.
- **Explicit** – includes information that has been documented or can be shared with someone.

Best practices are techniques that are believed to constitute a paradigm of excellence in a particular field. It is through best practices, sometimes referred to as “best of breed,” that organizations can use the history of knowledge to benefit their customers and employees by mapping processes of developing, sharing, preserving, and improving expertise. Best practices focus on the “leveraging” process of knowledge management.

Increasingly, organizations are realizing that the first step in almost any major project includes analyzing and defining the business processes, and then communicating those processes to employees who need to use them.

A process is how people, materials, methods, machines, and the environment combine to add value to a product or service. Everything that gets done is part of the process—how the work gets done, roles and responsibilities, and resources and systems.

Business process analysis is a structured method of documenting business rules and functions to uncover hidden inefficiencies that highlight strengths that could be streamlined or leveraged to increase productivity. Business process analysis attempts to standardize workflow in a manner that decreases redundancy of effort and increases information reuse. Business process analysis tools and techniques include:

- Six Sigma DMAIC methodology
- Six Sigma IPO model
- Flowchart diagramming
- Evaluation models

Employees should learn from experience in ways that benefit the organization's future and their current projects. Companies need to maximize individual learning and then make that learning available to other employees. To achieve this goal, the U.S. Army was the first large entity to use After Action Reviews (AARs) to identify the original intent of a mission, what went right and wrong, and what factors affected the mission and the situations presented.

Many organizations use AARs to continually improve new product development and internal processes. Some of the benefits of AARs include:

- Improving the accuracy and detail of feedback available to management and employees
- Identifying collective and individual strengths and deficiencies and leveraging or correcting them
- Reinforcing and increasing the learning that took place during a business activity
- Increasing interest and motivation
- Guiding individuals and groups toward achieving performance objectives
- Increasing proficiency of all participants