

#SUCCESSFUL CORPORATE LEARNING

TWEET

Everything You Need to Know about
Knowledge Management in Practice
in 140 Characters or Less

MICHAEL PREVOU and MITCHELL LEVY
FOREWORD BY KENT GREENES

BOOK 05

A THiNKaha® BOOK

#SUCCESSFUL CORPORATE LEARNING **tweet**
Book05

Everything You Need to Know about Knowledge Management
in Practice in 140 Characters or Less

Book Excerpt

By Michael Prevou and Mitchell Levy

Foreword by Kent Greenes



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Foreword by Kent Greenes

The rapid rate of change and increased complexity of business has outpaced our abilities to learn and perform as organizations, teams, and individuals. When these factors are combined with the emergence of competition from sources never before imaginable, we can no longer afford to rely on traditional knowledge sharing and transfer methods. Knowledge management (KM) is one of the most powerful new enablers in a business leader's toolkit.

Social media, microblogging, advanced search engines, and new collaboration software (such as SharePoint) are making a difference in knowledge sharing and transfer because of three new realities in the marketplace: the need for speed, complex problems with no right answers, and too much information.

The need for speed. No matter what, knowledge collaboration, sharing, and transfer have to be fast. In today's marketplace, speed is everything. Speed is so critical now that people are searching for expertise and content in a limited amount of time.

We need to learn at the speed of work to solve new problems quicker, accelerate innovation, get our products and services to market faster, and outperform the competition. Learning from experience is the source of most of the knowledge we need to perform. Everyone from the boardroom to the field agrees that learning before doing a task or project is how experience becomes explicit and moveable. But it takes too much time, so it doesn't get done. When we weave the tools into our business processes and organizational structures to share and find nuggets of bite-sized, quickly digestible knowledge, we reduce the time it takes to learn before doing and to disseminate learning after doing, which means people will actually use the knowledge!

No right answers. Tasks and decisions that could be effectively handled by an individual in earlier times now exceed the scope of a single person.

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This new workplace reality is driving a fundamental shift in learning and knowledge transfer from the traditional “one-to-many” approach to a “many-to-many” way of learning. This approach informs thinking and generates new ideas and solutions. KM enables many people to share their knowledge with many others and brings the wisdom of the crowds to solving big organizational problems much faster than before. It’s an awesome capability for leveraging cognitive diversity to help inform our thinking.

But that’s not all KM does. It also makes knowledge sharing and transfer more effective. It puts information in context, helps connect us with expertise, and provides us a deliberate way to capture and transfer experience before it retires and departs the organization. It helps us identify best business practices and the conditions that make them relevant and helps us organize the volumes of content we have available as a usable resource. Done right, KM forces us to be organized, thoughtful, and concise in what we share. This is what our brains really like and need—knowledge in short, sharp chunks.

Drowning in information but never enough knowledge. Let’s face it, there’s just too much data and information out there, but I have never heard anyone say they had too much knowledge. And information sources are multiplying at an ever-increasing rate. This is a great thing if we can manage the environment. But it also makes it difficult and time-consuming to find the right knowledge you need when you need it. By the nature of how it works, KM can provide a channel of relevancy to help ease the weight of too much information.

And finally, we share with people we know and trust. This means each connection carries some context to help us make sense of what is being shared. This automatically reduces the herculean task we face sorting and sifting through the vast amount of knowledge available. It’s no wonder people these days are searching for an answer to the question of how to manage knowledge more effectively.

Michael and Mitchell have done a great thing here. They have combined their experience in KM and learning to give us nuggets of insights from

real practitioners that we can quickly tap and digest to inform our thinking. Their focus on the Knowledge Environment™ is right on target. Their orientation on people and processes versus technology is a breath of fresh air. It's now up to us to use this wealth of advice to learn before, during, and after and optimize our knowledge management efforts.

Kent Greenes

Founder of Greenes Consulting and previous Head of Knowledge Management for British Petroleum and Science Applications International Corporation

Section I: What Is Knowledge Management?



Section I

What Is Knowledge Management?

KM is a deliberate approach to help organizations effectively use and reuse what they know (both tacit and explicit) to achieve a sustained competitive advantage.

Knowledge exists in the heads of people. In a business context, it is “what our employees know about their customers, one another, products, processes, mistakes, and successes, whether that knowledge is tacit or explicit” (O’Dell and Hubert 2011). It is our ability to access, learn from, and use this knowledge for a competitive advantage that drives the need for us to manage knowledge in our organizations.

While knowledge management (KM) is a relatively new discipline, it is often misunderstood and hard to quantify in terms of results. One of the reasons it is so misunderstood is the difficulty in visualizing and communicating how people manage knowledge. Our default frame of reference causes us to focus on managing documents, artifacts, and the technology systems used to store and collect these artifacts, rather than on the full spectrum of both tacit and explicit knowledge linked to improving business objectives and creating results. If we can reframe our thinking to one that manages the environment in which we want knowledge to flow, then we can address the components of that environment as tangible items that we can design, build, measure, and manage.

While the three elements of people, processes, and technology have formed the foundation for KM in the past, they are no longer sufficient to outline an effective knowledge environment. KM must orient on at least seven components we call the Knowledge Environment™ (Prevou 2011) so we can reduce the barriers and improve the way in which knowledge moves through the organization. The Knowledge Environment™ consists of: people, processes, technology, organizational structure, content, organizational culture, and

Section I: What Is Knowledge Management?

knowledge leadership. Each component must be addressed and integrated in the right balance for an effective KM effort. Likewise, KM must also be linked to the goals and objectives of the organization and focused on closing performance gaps.

Managing what we know and who knows it is too important to our success for it to be left to happenstance. KM must put people first and serve as a deliberate approach to help effectively use and reuse what we know to achieve a sustained competitive advantage. This holistic strategy to manage the entire Knowledge Environment™ is a must for any modern-day organization.



1

KM is about sharing tacit and explicit knowledge, breaking down silos, and connecting the workforce to improve performance.



2

KM is a way of conducting everyday business to ensure our corporate knowledge is embedded in our business processes.

3

KM is socially driven,
linking people across the
organizational boundaries to
share what they know.

4

KM is about managing
professional conversation by
using social applications that
link people to people and
people to content.

Section II: What Knowledge Management Is Not



Section II

What Knowledge Management Is Not

Oftentimes, when people are discussing knowledge management, the conversation quickly turns to things that KM is not—like the technical details of data storage solutions or the latest collaborative tools—rather than staying focused on the goals that KM can accomplish (i.e., business drivers such as improving human performance or business processes, or the creation of a capability to find and connect expertise with those who need it). As noted by many of the practitioners who contributed content to this book, technology alone cannot share knowledge or make the complex decisions for us. It can store data and information and prod us to action, but ultimately, it is only a tool that must be integrated into our work environment and applied in context.

Successful KM is more about connecting people to people and people to content than anything else. Technology is a key enabler, especially today when we need to span time and geographical boundaries to connect a global workforce. But technology is only an enabler, a tool. Understanding and considering each of the seven components of the Knowledge Environment™ and creating the proper balance, like in any ecosystem, is paramount to effective KM.

When considering a knowledge flow problem or gap, first ask, “What are we trying to accomplish and why?” without any discussion of technology. Then, and only then, discuss how technology can enhance and enable that process. KM should be used to solve business problems and should not be an end unto itself.

29

KM is not technology driven.
Technology is an enabler—it cannot
share or make decisions for us.

30

KM *enables* business processes—it's
not a separate or additional business
function, an extra duty, or a
step in a process.

31

Remember, knowledge must move to be valuable. Do your KM systems move it, or just store it?

32

KM is not run or managed by the IT team. They simply enable it like a plumber enables the flow of drinking water.

33

KM is not narrowly focused
on mining the knowledge
contained in documents.

More than 80% of
corporate knowledge is
in people's heads!

34

It's everyone's duty to understand how KM fits into the company processes. Don't designate KM to one position or team.

35

Don't assume people will access and use the information that is dumped into large repositories or databases.

Section III: Benefits of a Knowledge Management Program



Section III

Benefits of a Knowledge Management Program

The benefits of a KM program could include improved performance; increased productivity and profits; improved innovation; better, faster decisions; cost savings; reduced loss of knowledge and expertise from retiring and transitioning workers; happier workers; and increased individual/team efficiency and effectiveness. If your KM program is aligned directly with your business strategy (as we recommend), you are practicing KM for the benefit of your organization's bottom line. Your organization's KM and information technology practitioners and managers should be able to directly link almost every KM and IT activity to a business goal and objective.

According to the Economist Intelligence Study "Foresight 2020," KM is one of the five key trends that will determine competitiveness in this decade. For businesses to compete successfully, they will need access to actionable information and expertise faster and with more context and relevance than ever before. With so much riding on our need to connect our workforce and share what we know to learn from one another and produce for our organizations, KM cannot be left to happenstance. The benefits and rewards will be commensurate with an effective program that manages the entire spectrum of the Knowledge Environment™.

42

KM helps you learn faster and more effectively than your competition.

43

KM helps you manage the increasing volume and speed of big data and the requirement to constantly innovate and grow.

44

KM creates faster, more informed decision making, shorter time-to-market cycle, and improved employee and customer satisfaction.

45

KM improves return on investment, efficiency of processes, and information technology.

46

KM helps us connect the workforce across time, space, and organizational boundaries.

47

The illiterate of the 21st century will be those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn quickly.
KM is a tool to help you learn.

48

KM captures and distributes best practices to reduce the cost of rethinking or redeveloping solutions.

49

KM provides an essential roadmap for how we connect, share, learn, and innovate. It develops relationships that make our businesses work.

Section IV: How Do I Know My Knowledge Management Program Is Working?



Section IV

How Do I Know My Knowledge Management Program Is Working?

One of the most important conversations executives can have with their staff is about how they will know their KM efforts are working. Like any sound business function, you should be able to measure whether KM is having an effect on your business goals and objectives. Many people feel that KM objectives are intangible and very hard to measure. Most agree that if they can be measured, they take longer to achieve and cannot be measured on quarterly business cycles. Outlining a knowledge strategy that has clearly definable objectives and tasks is critical to a successful program. Like a roadmap, this framework helps us understand where we are going, how and when we will get there, and who is accountable for what. One of the most obvious ways you will know your KM program is working is by the behaviors that demonstrate a sense of personal accountability for continuous learning, sharing, and collaboration. People should be asking, "Who else needs to know this, who has done anything like this before, and how can we learn X so we can accomplish Y better, faster, and cheaper?"

When looking for tangible measures of effectiveness, organizations need to look at each component of the Knowledge Environment™ and identify metrics that are linked to their performance goals (i.e., growing the business base, improving profitability, increasing quality, improving brand recognition, saving time, having faster time to competency for new hires). KM should also produce a number of intangible benefits that will be much harder to measure. These benefits may include stronger relationships and networks, deeper commitment to the organization resulting in less turnover, higher sense of employee satisfaction, more collaboration, reductions in knowledge lost from retirements and transitions, and increased desire for lifelong learning...just to name a few.

59

KM is working when new hires start producing faster as a result of a more effective onboarding program.

60

KM is working when it is no longer referred to as a program. Instead, it has become integral to organizational behavior.

61

KM is working when the
KM processes improve
individual, team, and
organizational effectiveness.

62

KM is working when your workforce shares a common view of what is going on.

They feel informed
and empowered.

About the Authors



Michael (Mike) Prevou, PhD, is president and co-founder of Strategic Knowledge Solutions, a leading consulting firm specialized in knowledge management (KM) and organizational learning solutions.

Mike is one of the most innovative and experienced KM practitioners in the country. He is a certified Master Knowledge Management Professional and in *#SUCCESSFUL CORPORATE LEARNING tweet Book05: Everything You Need to Know about Knowledge Management in Practice in 140 Characters or Less*, he draws on that unique experience in the public, private, and non-profit sectors to bring you the most relevant and cutting-edge developments in the field.

Mike spent twenty-five years in the U.S. Army, where he co-founded the Army's lead agency on knowledge management and established and grew a nested network of over sixty online communities of practice to connect Army leaders. These communities have now grown to over 250,000 active members and have saved the military time, money, and lives. He has consulted with over thirty corporate, military, federal government, and

academic organizations on KM and learning and published over twenty-five articles on knowledge management strategies and solutions, and individual, team, and organizational learning approaches. He is a regular speaker at learning and knowledge management conferences and teaches a series of KM related courses, workshops, and seminars. His unique experiences in implementing real KM in action along with his background in educational psychology partner for a powerful combination of expertise that can help any company implement a successful KM program targeted to their specific needs.



Mitchell Levy is the author of twelve business books and the CEO of the independent publishing house Happy About®. After earning his MBA from the College of William and Mary, he spent thirteen years working for corporations in IT, Finance, and Operations. He then spent eleven years as an entrepreneur creating thirteen companies and strategic partnerships, including Happy About in 2005. During this timeframe, he created over seventy courses at various universities and online learning programs, and booked over 500 speakers at large-scale conferences.

Mr. Levy is also partner of the physical networking firm CXOnetworking and sits on the Board of Directors at Rainmaker Systems (NASDAQ: RMKR). Previously, he created four executive education programs at two different Silicon Valley universities and was the conference chair for four Comdex conferences focusing on business executives at medium to large sized enterprises. He has contributed to and written over 100 articles, and has given over 250 speeches on e-commerce and business.

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#SUCCESSFUL CORPORATE LEARNING TWEET

Improve Learning & Performance by Energizing Your Knowledge Management Program

"Prevou and Levy have compiled some 'sweet tweets' and valuable practical knowledge to get knowledge management (KM) off the ground in your organization." Jay Liebowitz, D.Sc., Orkand Endowed Chair in Management and Technology, University of Maryland University College

"If you want the big picture of knowledge management in a clear, simple format, this is THE book. It covers the seven essentials of a world-class KM program. And with the authors' experience, you get precise advice on what to do and what to avoid in implementing KM in your real world situation. You can't do better than to start here."

Bruce Jeffrey, Co-author, *On the Same Page: How to Engage Employees and Accelerate Growth*

"A must-read for all professionals involved in managing, sharing, and creating knowledge in their organization!"

Eileen U. Godines, DM, Faculty, Grantham University



Knowledge management expert **Michael Prevou** (@mikeprevou) spent twenty-five years in the U.S. Army, where he co-founded the Army's lead agency on KM. In addition to helping a diverse range of organizations implement successful, targeted KM programs, he has written extensively on KM and learning, and is a regular speaker at conferences and seminars.



Corporate visionary, acclaimed speaker, prolific business writer, and CEO of publishing house Happy About®, **Mitchell Levy** (@happyabout) finds himself frequently called upon for his strategic expertise, big picture thinking, and extensive business networks.

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