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Overcoming Barriers to Creating a Knowledge Management Culture

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Introduction

Knowledge management (KM) is now one of the key processes in ITIL®, and the payoff of an effective KM process is huge. When fully implemented, it provides a common KM system that is available to all stages in the services life cycle, improving decision making, reducing duplication of effort and rediscovery of knowledge, reducing costs, and empowering customers, users, and all of IT.

So why have so few IT service organizations been able to implement KM successfully? It's because of a number of "barriers" that stand in their way:

1. **Failing to recognize that implementing KM is a strategic initiative**, requiring time, across-the-board commitment from many people groups, and in fact, a change in the way the organization works. This mandates the use of an organization change model.
2. **Not taking a life cycle approach**, but attempting to deploy KM as a tactical project, composed of a system and assigned resources. Since implementing KM is strategic in nature, potentially affecting the entire service and support organization, it is critical that you take a life cycle approach to implementation.
3. **Failing to realize that there are organizational barriers due to silos that develop** as a consequence of the way people are organized into discrete departments, reporting to different managers.
4. **Being too focused on KM tools**, believing that the tool will deliver the value, rather than taking a strategic and process approach to KM implementation.
5. **Failing to make it easy to capture knowledge** in the workflow, and in fact, requiring knowledge workers to take extra steps to format, capture, store, and share knowledge.
6. **Failing to build it into the way people work**, so that knowledge sharing becomes a natural byproduct of work. Not realizing that support for KM needs to be incorporated into policies and procedures, roles and responsibilities, supporting systems, metrics and reporting, appraisal processes, and reward and recognition.

These barriers can be overcome, however, with the right vision, strategies, and tactics. Let's consider these barriers one by one and how to successfully overcome each to create a KM culture in your organization.

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Overcoming Barriers to Creating a KM Culture

In this paper, you will learn about the most common barriers you will face when implementing KM and how to overcome them, so that your organization begins to change, over time, into a culture where knowledge sharing and reuse becomes second nature and part of the normal course of activity.

Barrier 1: Failing to Recognize that Implementing KM is a Strategic Initiative

Taking a tactical or operational approach, and not recognizing that implementing effective KM must be a strategic initiative, ignores the need for behavioral change. This concept stems from the mistaken view that if you build it, they will come—the notion being that if you build and deploy a KM system, people will contribute and use it naturally. There should be no need to bother with how you are going to motivate people to contribute to and use the system. Won't they just change naturally? The fact is, they won't. Implementing KM is one of those big changes that requires a well thought out **organizational change plan**.

Where to start? To realize effective KM throughout an organization, all support groups should feel that they have a piece of the action. All IT support managers and practitioners, from the frontline service desk to executive management, should feel as though they are contributors to, and beneficiaries of, the KM process. How best to accomplish this sense of KM participation across the organization?

First, establish a compelling vision that all embrace, letting everyone know that this is going to require organizational change. The implementation of successful KM is going to impact the way people work, and that means organizational change. People are going to have to change the way they work in order to capture knowledge at its source, as a byproduct of their work effort. Yes, the implementation of KM will streamline processes, provide tools, and remove roadblocks to capturing and submitting a knowledge article, but driving and coordinating all of these tactical and operation changes should be a **strategic initiative** to institute an organizational change that adopts and embraces KM.

Use an organizational change model, such as [Kotter's Eight Principles](#) of organizational change, to guide and facilitate the shift to a knowledge-centered services organization over time. Follow these key steps to guide your initiative to success:

1. **Establish a sense of urgency to move to KM.**

   The reality today is that global competition is real, and the capacity to deliver high-quality IT services at the lowest possible cost is where your organization wants to be. This means you can't afford to reinvent solutions when resolving a customer issue in your support center, nor can you afford a lot of time searching for information to aid you in making the best decision. Without an effective KM process, your services are more costly to provide, decisions take longer than they should and are inherently more risky, and as a service provider, you will not be able to navigate very successfully through the rough waters of organizational change. Mergers and acquisitions are common these days, and without a KM process to ensure that valuable organizational knowledge is captured and secure, your viability may be at risk if a major organizational change should surface!

   Start by establishing a sense of urgency with your team. Let them know that a move to a KM culture is strategically important to your organization. Transforming your organization into a knowledge-powered service and support organization will increase your ability to provide high-quality services and support, increase your ability to compete in your target markets, lower overall costs, and enable a more agile and responsive service organization for the business and customers.

2. Form a powerful guiding coalition to lead the effort.

According to Jim Collins in his book, *Good to Great*, **one of the major factors leading to a great organization is getting the right people "on the bus,"** that is, on your KM planning and implementation project team. The author points out how extremely important it is to get the right people on your "bus," or team, even before you start moving down the road toward your destination of implementing KM. Why? If you start with a team that does not have the right composition of talent, skills, and knowledge for the road ahead, the team will take longer to come up to speed, will likely generate more internal conflict, compromising its effectiveness, and may even fail to get off to a good start!

So getting the right people "on the bus" is critical. Look to engage the right people to direct and guide the implementation of KM and ensure organization-wide buy-in and participation in the roll-out and adoption.

Take into consideration the following attributes for your **KM initiative team members**:

- A respected and well-liked **senior project manager** to lead the effort who can leverage project management skills and best practices to help manage the long-term project, keep it on track, and help ensure success.

- A **senior director/executive** to provide executive sponsorship support and keep upper management informed as the strategic initiative moves forward.

- A **tools specialist** who can lend support for planning, advising, and implementing required supporting tools and systems, such as an integrated knowledge base and web service and support portal.

- A representative from the **service desk function** or support center. Effective KM will be of great benefit to first-line support—the service desk, or support center, will likely be a major contributor and consumer of knowledge in the role of providing effective frontline support to users.

- Members from a second-line **technical management team** and an **application management team**. These technical- and application-focused teams provide escalation support to the service desk and are the subject matter experts (SMEs) in their domains. For example, technical management includes the network team, the server team, the database team, and so forth. Application teams provide application domain expertise throughout the life cycle, in terms of support for design, development, transition, and support activities. Since much of the technical and application knowledge is locked up inside the heads of these individuals, it's important that they participate in the KM initiative and take an active role in making it happen, so that knowledge can effectively and efficiently be transferred on an ongoing basis to first-line support.

- A representative from **IT operations**. The network operations center (NOC), or command center, is a team focused on using monitoring tools and systems to keep tabs on the entire IT infrastructure, ensuring stability and quick action when an event triggers an alert to take action to resolve an issue or restore a service interruption or degradation. Like the service desk, they will be both consumers of and contributors to a shared KM system.

Once you have selected capable, experienced, and skilled people from these respective areas, assemble the group to lead the organizational change effort. Encourage the group to work as a team. Leverage team management best practices, equip the team with budgeted time and funding to perform its mission, and ensure the team has the backing of operational and executive management.

Engaging high-level executive management to visibly support the launch of your KM initiative initially and to periodically to report on its progress is fundamental to success. Visible high-level management support reinforces the message that this is a strategic initiative, deserving of everyone's support.

3. Create a compelling vision for knowledge management.

It's recorded in an ancient document that **"Where there is no vision, the people perish."**

To be successful in a major organization change initiative such as this, you must **provide a compelling vision statement**. This must be communicated initially by your executive sponsor during the launch meeting for KM and on an ongoing basis. The vision should consist of a simple, easy-to-understand statement that portrays the knowledge-driven future of your IT service and support organization.

The vision should be **supported by a mission statement** that includes verbiage about how a knowledge-driven service and support organization will be a primary engine in reaching that vision of being a high-quality service provider that uses the latest technology and industry best practices to enable support staff, customers, and users to perform at the highest possible level.

The vision and mission statements must speak to and resonate with all audiences—support staff, management, users, and customers. What steps can you take? Consider incorporating the words *knowledge-centered* into your vision/mission statements. If you have a set of core principles, consider adding knowledge sharing as one of your core values. Communicate the vision initially and on an ongoing basis during implementation.

Your vision and mission statements for realizing a new, knowledge-driven service and support organization are fundamental cornerstones to your strategic plan. Have your team focus its efforts here first, creating these all-important guiding statements. Such statements then become the foundation for your implementation plan to move forward through design, transition, and roll-out of your KM capability.

4. Communicate the vision—initially and continually.

Having a well thought out communications plan is fundamental to the success of a major organizational change effort such as this. Why? First, a KM initiative affects a wide array of stakeholders—operational support staff, tier-two technical and applications management, IT managers, as well as users and customer executives. It's important to communicate your vision and mission clearly across the organization, so that stakeholders get a sense of excitement and are positioned to be supportive as they begin to see benefits accrue to them.

It's also important that you tailor your message to each of your target audiences—support staff, technical and application teams, customers, and users. Why? When you have a big change coming, there is automatic resistance. The questions that arise in every stakeholder's mind are, "Why change? Why should I change my behavior and lend support to this? What's in it for me?" What's more, once the initiative is underway, if you DON'T continue to keep people informed, the excitement tends to trail off. Stakeholders tend to lose interest, and widespread support—which is so essential for a major organizational change such as this—can die out.

Meet this challenge by planning, launching, and maintaining an effective communications plan. Include in your plan these key elements:

- **General message content** for all stakeholders, as well as **tailored message content** for specific audiences, letting them know how this initiative addresses their interests and can help them be successful.

- Your **channels of communication**. Plan to use a variety of channels to drive your messaging initially and on an ongoing basis: a web support page, periodic email broadcasts linking back to your KM initiative page, social media page if that is available in your organization, and regularly scheduled company/organization meetings. Use supporting facilities for posting flyers, posters, etc.

- The **frequency of your communications**. Your communications should launch with a "splash," with messages going out across multiple channels simultaneously to generate excitement and momentum. After that, plan regularly scheduled communication updates through a variety of channels—daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly. The roll-out of an effective KM culture will take time, so it's essential that you continue to reinforce the vision and mission and update stakeholders on exciting progress that is being made toward making this vision a reality!

- The **targets for your communications** (stakeholders). Create a stakeholder map, and identify who the major stakeholders are in your KM initiative—front-line support staff, second-line support teams, partners/suppliers, IT managers, executive management, customers, and users. Then list what's important to each of these groups and use this as input to developing a targeted communications plan that will run over the course of the initiative, keeping each group informed and engaged by delivering targeted messaging tailored to their interests.

- The **artifacts (collateral) you are going to use** to communicate the messaging. This can include electronic collateral such as periodic email updates, a web support page on your intranet where stakeholders can go to get the latest updates on progress and success of the initiative, and screen savers for newly deployed tablets, PCs, or laptops. It can also include hard copy collateral such as posters, flyers for departmental bulletin boards, etc.

- **Various sorts of venues that can be used to deliver your messages.** For example, if your company/organization already schedules weekly or monthly IT management meetings, schedule a time when you leverage these meetings to provide an update on progress for the initiative. If there are quarterly "all hands" meetings, see if your executive sponsor can provide a brief update to all employees on the KM initiative. This will ensure continued high visibility and general ongoing support.

Communicating your vision, mission, and high-level strategy is vitally important—not only at the launch of your initiative, but also in an ongoing fashion as the initiative progresses. And encourage your guiding team to teach new behaviors by example!

5. Empower others to act on the vision.

Get rid of obstacles that will stand in the way of a successful shift to a KM culture. **Make it easy for contributors, reviewers, and consumers to participate.** When your implementation requires practitioners and managers to take several extra steps to submit an article or solution to the knowledge base or to retrieve information from it, you are in fact creating roadblocks to adoption and usage. Instead, look to **remove roadblocks**, making use of the KM system an integral part of the workflow.

When a frontline support analyst or a second-tier specialist has developed a support tip or a reusable solution, find ways to **make it easy** for them to click a button, formatting and submitting this content into a knowledge article submission. A designated SME for that domain can then receive this input, review it for completeness and accuracy, make any needed changes, and queue it for publishing to the knowledge base and immediate reuse. Rather than designing the user interface to be complicated, requiring the submission of just the right phrase in order to retrieve something useful, keep it simple, user-friendly, fast, and effective. An open-text, natural-language search-engine interface works best.

6. Plan for and create short-term wins.

One of the challenges to overcome when launching and driving a major initiative such as adopting KM **is the initial resistance and ongoing doubt about the likelihood of success** for such an ambitious undertaking. It is human nature to love a winner, so it's helpful to demonstrate some wins early in the process of your KM implementation. These early, visible improvements will create enthusiasm and a sense that the initiative will indeed succeed as it moves forward.

What sort of quick wins might you plan for? For starters, announce the members of your KM initiative team—the people who are "on the bus," destined to drive this initiative forward to success! If you have chosen your guiding coalition wisely, just announcing who is on the team will be an encouraging message to all stakeholders. Other quick wins might include:

- Selecting a leading KM system/tool to be integrated with your service management system, website, and other support systems.

- Successfully integrating your KM system, along with redesigning and redeploying core processes such as event, incident, and problem management, so that capturing, storing, and knowledge sharing is now not an add-on to these processes, but an integral part of the workflow.

- Monthly reporting that shows that first- and second-line support staff are not only contributing on a regular basis, but they are using knowledge articles to accelerate the resolution of incidents and service requests. Success is being realized!

- Survey results from support staff, affected customers, and users showing that the KM process and supporting systems are truly having a positive effect, speeding resolution, boosting capacity of the support staff, and making service and support more effective and efficient.

Be sure to recognize and reward employees involved in supporting the KM initiative. Because this is a cross-departmental initiative that requires extra effort from many throughout the organization, it's a good idea to recognize those who go above and beyond to help the initiative be successful.

7. Consolidate improvements and produce still more change.

Once you have been able to demonstrate these quick wins, your KM initiative will begin to pick up momentum. Resistance will be less apparent, and an increasing number of service and support staff will begin contributing to and drawing value from the KM process and systems. People will realize their jobs are actually easier and they are becoming more productive. This in turn generates more enthusiasm.

Use this increased credibility to change and improve other supporting systems, tools, processes, and policies that don't adequately support the vision. The goal is to build it into as much as you can—policies, procedures,

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and supporting tools and systems—so that the process of gathering, storing, and knowledge sharing just becomes a part of the way daily work is carried out.

Remember to hire, promote, and develop employees who lend support for implementing the KM vision. Revise your orientation and ongoing training programs to include KM, as well as your reward and recognition programs to recognize and reward those who are regularly contributing valuable articles and solutions. Also, make knowledge sharing a key element in your principles of operation.

8. Finally, institutionalize the new approach!

The goal is to make knowledge sharing and reuse just the way you work. In order for this to happen, you must find ways to build it into everything that people do as a part of their daily tasks. This means:

- Build knowledge sharing and management into your organization's vision, mission, and operating principles. Even consider making knowledge sharing a core value that you expect employees to demonstrate.

- Design knowledge capture, storage, validation, and sharing into your core operating policies and procedures, including event, incident, and problem management. Redesign standard procedures so that knowledge capture, search, and reuse is an integral component of the workflow stream—not an add-on to it.

- Include KM in new-hire orientation and training and ongoing training programs. Make KM skills a component in your job descriptions, especially for first- and second-level service and support staff.

- Make KM a part of your staff performance management program, so that you make it clear it's everyone's job to contribute and share knowledge. Include support for KM in your rewards and recognition program, so that those who go above and beyond in supporting the initiative are properly rewarded. Including knowledge sharing as a core value will also help enforce the value of knowledge management.

Barrier 2: Not Taking a Life Cycle Approach

Trying to implement KM as a short-term, tactical project is a mistake. Instead, consider KM implementation an organization-wide process, requiring a service life cycle approach. Implementing KM is best accomplished by viewing it as a process, not a tool or system—one that must be strategically initiated and adopted across teams in a cultural sense—so that sharing knowledge becomes "just the way we work." KM becomes a way of working that uses a tool and/or systems to capture, store, and effectively share knowledge.

- Start with a **service strategy.** Establish your compelling vision for transforming your organization to a knowledge-centered service provider, along with a supporting mission, goals, and objectives.

- Develop a total approach with **service design.** Design your KM process, along with supporting systems, tools, metrics, and other elements, and produce a master plan for KM.

- Implement KM using a **service transition** approach. Using your master plan as input, begin work at implementing the various components over time—people, process, and supporting technology. It will take all three, plus organizational change.

- Embed it within your **service operation** processes. Make knowledge capture and reuse an integral part of every process. For example, during event monitoring, while resolving an incident, and when troubleshooting a problem. The idea is to either access and put captured knowledge to work or to capture knowledge while in the workflow.

- Keep it going with **continual improvement.** Having designed metrics and reporting for your KM process, make monitoring and reporting on KM performance part of your monthly IT management meeting. Assess performance to goal, and look for ways to improve the KM process, people aspects, and supporting tools and systems.

Barrier 3: Failing to Realize that There Are Organizational Barriers Due to Silos that Develop

Traditional IT organizations are organized along technology lines. For example, there will generally be a set of technical management teams that provide planning, transition, and operation support for the technology infrastructure. Supporting the applications will be an applications management group, providing support during design, transition, and operations—but focused on the applications that are a key part of services delivered to customers. As a byproduct of this organizational structure, supporting systems—including knowledge bases—are formed, also organized along these same boundaries.

The result? A host of separate, non-integrated technical and application support knowledge bases in various forms appear: shared directories, email files, SharePoint systems, wikis, and other sorts of repositories. Sharing of information and knowledge between these repositories is nonexistent, and transference of this knowledge to frontline support teams, such as the service desk, is fraught with difficulty.

How do you overcome these KM silos? Follow the guidelines in this white paper, starting with a compelling vision and mission that all groups can buy into. Plan and deploy an initial and ongoing communications plan that will set the right expectations with all groups and continue to reinforce the value and benefits of the new KM approach. Tear down barriers to participating in knowledge capture and submission, making it easy for all service and support groups to participate. Make it an integral part of everyone's job, from frontline support, to tier-two support teams, to management, and build it into your performance management and compensation program, so that people realize knowledge sharing is expected. Make it a part of being recognized and rewarded.

As service and support staff begin to see and experience how fundamental this is to their daily job and when they begin to experience that it is actually working and making their job more productive and enjoyable, the barriers between these silos will fade and they will begin to rally around the new approach.

Barrier 4: Being Too Focused on KM Tools

All too often management mistakes KM as a tool or system, instead of an organization-wide process. This is a common phenomenon, since IT managers and practitioners typically have an implementation/support technology background. Compounding this, vendors want nothing more than to sell lots of KM tools, systems, and databases. The problem, as the saying goes, is that "a fool with a tool is still a fool." A KM tool will not produce a KM process—that requires a process approach: defining and documenting the process first, followed by selecting appropriate tools and technology.

First, realize KM is a PROCESS, not a system, though it uses a system. Then pick the best systems and tools that fit your requirements. You might choose to use a wiki or a database or a collection of repositories to store shared

information, but without a well-designed process that provides a framework for the way people ought to do their work, your tools and databases will soon go unused and rapidly fall out of date. Like any process, a KM process needs:

- An owner and a manager—someone to be accountable for the quality of the process and someone to oversee and manage daily activities.

- Defined inputs and outputs. Where shall data be collected and transformed into information? How will this information be stored and linked to other types of information so that analysis can be facilitated and knowledge derived?

- Triggers identified. What, when, and where do we trigger capturing, storing, and sharing knowledge?

- To be measured and assessed to be managed, to enable optimal performance, and to facilitate continual improvement.

- To be documented, including how activities are an integral part of daily operating procedures.

- To support people resources (the KM support team, contributors, SMEs for review) with specific roles and responsibilities equipped with KM training, systems, and tools. It must also deliver value to all stakeholders: customers, users, management, and support staff.

Integrate your KM systems and tools so they are simple, fast, and effective. Google sets the bar when it comes to search, and your KM process should follow industry-leading examples. The search engine should allow for natural-language search, as well as search by phrase/keywords. The search engine—along with support databases—should be fully indexed to enable quick results sorted in relevance order. Give attention to supporting structured as well as unstructured data in databases and linked repositories.

Establish a set of metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure, monitor, and report on the adoption and success of your KM process. People pay attention to things that are measured and reported, and as we have said, "you can't manage it if you can't measure it." Establish a core set of metrics on KM, each with a realistic target, and make reporting on KM part of your monthly management IT scorecard. This will raise the visibility of KM in everyone's eyes and enable you to assess the growth, impact, and value of KM. Sample metrics might include:

- Number of articles added per day, week, or month—evidence of the overall growth of the knowledge base (increasing)

- Knowledge base contributions and solution reuse by support team member, showing who is contributing and by how much (increasing)

- Number and percentage of solutions reused, indicating which solutions/articles are popular and those that are not (increasing)

- Solution reuse by team member (minimal percentage of contributions should be reused on a regular basis)

- Number and percentage of incidents resolved where a knowledge article was instrumental in resolution/fulfillment—evidence that the KB is providing solutions (increasing)

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- User-satisfaction level, as measured through an ongoing pop-up survey during the close of the KB search—should show a high level of user satisfaction (for example, target 4 out of 5, or 80 percent)

Barrier 5: Failing to Make It Easy to Capture Knowledge

Systems and tools should support KM embedded in the workflow, so that a submission is a byproduct of the work effort. For example, during incident management, a search should be automatically invoked after classifying the incident. Extra steps or navigation should not be required. A match report should return the most likely solutions/workarounds at the top of the list. If no solution is applicable and the analyst ends up devising and documenting a new solution, submitting to the KM process should be just a few keystrokes.

Include an embedded QA sub-process to expedite solution review and processing. Once the submission has been made, direct these electronic records to an appropriate SME for that area of knowledge. These might be technical or application management specialists in back-line support groups. SMEs should have daily responsibility for reviewing, editing, and approval of submitted KM articles, so these can be incorporated into the KM system in a timely fashion. This also ensures that knowledge added is accurate, complete, and published only to the proper audiences (for example, internal use only or user-ready).

Barrier 6: Failing to Build It into the Way People Work

Revise your service operations standard operating procedures (SOPs), such as incident management, request fulfillment, and problem management, to embed searching and contributing to the KM system. In this way, searching and contributing to your KM system does not become added steps but is an integral part of the in-line mainstream workflow process. No extra steps required. Roadblocks removed.

Revise your job descriptions and appraisal process so that contributing to the KM system is required by operations personnel, such as service desk staff and other IT support groups. For example, support staff might be required to contribute three KM articles/solutions per quarter. Periodic appraisals would reinforce the importance of participation.

Build it into your reward and recognition program. Make the contribution to KM, and its use, an integral part of reward and recognition. For example, no awards for outstanding performance should be given where the team member failed to meet his or her contribution requirement for the quarter.

Summary and Conclusion

Realizing that implementing KM is a strategic initiative and must be planned, designed, and implemented using a life cycle approach results in an organization-wide process that literally transforms the way people work. Instead of having to think about how to search the knowledge base for a solution or an answer, service and support staff will just do that as a matter of carrying out their normal routine. Instead of having to consider how to submit an article to KM for sharing with others, the process will simply capture their knowledge as a byproduct of the normal workflow. Benefits to the organization, support staff, customers, and users will be manifold, including:

- **A reduction in the rediscovery of knowledge.** When a workaround or solution is captured and shared effectively, there is a reduced chance that someone else may have to reinvent the wheel to solve the same issue.

- **Reduced duplication of effort.** Sharing a reusable solution means colleagues are not going to have to expend the same or more effort to recreate their versions of a solution. The solution is already prepared—they just need to apply it!

- **Faster average incident and request resolution times.** Not having to reinvent solutions means incident/request average resolution times are faster than they otherwise would be.

- **Fewer escalations to other support groups.** With effective KM, a service and support provider will experience fewer escalations to higher-level support teams since back-line SMEs are now sharing information with the frontline service desk.

- **Higher customer and user satisfaction.** When solutions are return more quickly and escalations are fewer in number, higher levels of user and customer satisfaction tend to be the result.

- **Reduced costs** of IT services and support, which of course the organization and IT management are keenly interested in driving down these days!

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