

# THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN THE LARGE NON PROFIT FIRM: BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR KM SUCCESS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of knowledge management (KM) in not-for-profit organisations (NFPs) using case study methodology and advances previous KM work. NFPs are essential in developing sustainable communities providing many social, environmental, health and human services required by a vast amount of community stakeholders. With limited research related to KM in an NFP setting, this paper advances knowledge and offers a unique view of KM from the perspective of three large NFP cases. Adopting case study methodology, this paper explores the definition of knowledge in the organisation, the importance of knowledge planning, capture and diffusion; and offers recommendations for the required enablers of knowledge management practice and development from the organizational stakeholder perspective. The paper concludes by introducing the link between knowledge management, performance management and internal marketing to address the personal issues of 'me' as key to supporting knowledge renewal which is central to knowledge management.

Key words: Knowledge management, knowledge capture, knowledge distribution, socialisation, Communities of Practice, internal marketing

## INTRODUCTION

Popularly referenced Knowledge Management (KM) 'success stories' (Accenture, Boeing, Chrysler-Daimler, 3M, General Electric) to date are all private sector based (Riege 2005). However, academic research into the adoption methodology for modeling of those successful KM characteristics into Not-For-Profit organisations (NFPs) are rudimentary at best and do not translate easily into the NFP sector (Chua & Lam 2005; Choy 2005; Andreasen, Goodstein & Wilson 2005; Rainey, Backoff & Levine 1976). The business practices of commercial for-profit organisations such as differing employment guidelines and procedures, differing legal compliance and ethical constraints, different operational and managerial structures, differing accounting and taxation practices and the pursuit of profits and accumulation for owners and investors, are contrary to the purpose of serving the public or the mutual benefit of donor and recipient and the business practices of NFPs. (Helmig, Jegers & Lapsley 2004). In order to move forward in KM and the NFP research arena, we must examine and understand how these differences influence the translation and integration of for profit business cases in KM into a non-government organization context.

Increasing competitive forces prevalent in many of Australia's non-government sectors (for commercial and government funding/sponsorship and philanthropic donations) have forced all non-government organisations to adopt more 'commercial' business models and practices (Helmig, et.al. 2004) such as knowledge management (Hume, Sullivan Mort, Liesch & Winzar 2006). Although the challenging business environment of NFPs is being increasingly

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understood by their management, neither the implications nor how to pursue these practices such as knowledge management, is particularly clear or easy. Consequently, the adoption of KM in the NFP sector is limited and very informal (Lettieri, Borga & Savoldelli 2004). One argument for this limited adoption is that the limited funding, limited resources and high accountability to members and the public which NFPs face (Helmig et.al. 2004) makes it very difficult to gain the requisite financial investment, resourcing and expertise often required to pursue and develop these commercial practices (such as knowledge management) to be fully and truly effective. Another argument is that knowledge is too unwieldy to manage and should not divert NFPs away from focusing on core service delivery and fulfilling their mission. Ideally, developing a generic KM strategy could reduce the costly approach to this practice for this sector, however, with the many different NFP enterprises (Crossan, Bell & Ibbotson, 2004; Salamon & Anheier 1992) that exist with differing purposes and practices, the relative ease of developing a generic strategy is an anomaly.

It is then suggested that to move forward in NFP-KM research and develop a foundation model in this context, it is important to consider the many inherent differences of for-profit and NFPs and the differences within the NFP sector itself when developing a KM strategy in the NFP sector. Further, it is necessary to understand that the KM 'system', as many researchers refer to it, is more holistic than an IT system supporting knowledge distribution and involves a number of enabling elements of people, process, leadership and culture which must be considered. Most importantly, how to maintain the continuity of the knowledge management program as knowledge is dynamic and constantly evolving and, in an NFP context, is also a under-explored link in the KM research. Exploration of whether or not activities (Ballantyne 2000, 2003; Bennett & Barkensjo) may provide the vital energising source to maintaining continuity of knowledge management activities in NFPs is worthy of consideration and focus, particularly given NFP's staffing challenges. The purpose of this paper is to explore the current KM practice in the context of NFPs using case study (Yin 1994) methodology and to develop a knowledge management implementation-planning framework, highlighting key enablers, for consideration across NFPs. As the classification of NFPs has encountered definitive difficulties and a lack of consensus (Crossan et al. 2004; Salamon & Anheier 1992, 1996) a platform for application of research must be established. This paper will advance previous research in KM (Hume & Hume 2009; Hume Pope & Hume 2012) and advance knowledge from an organizational practice perspective using three large NFP cases.

Specifically, this paper addresses the following questions:

- What are the key business practices in these cases that support knowledge management capture, operation and sustainability in NFPs?
- What practices support the successful implementation of KM?

Clear discourse of KM practice through case analysis will aid in an enhanced understanding of current practice and the development of strategies for cost effective and efficient KM strategies into the future. This work will contribute to the theoretical and practical knowledge in fundamental strategic and operational characteristics for designing and sustaining a successful knowledge management program (Davenport & Prusak 1998; Chong & Choi 2005, Riege 2005) in NFP organizations. Specifically, the influential work of Riege (2005) in the identification of the many personal, organisational and technological barriers to knowledge sharing will be further explored by making explicit the fundamental organisational assets and processes that must occur for knowledge management operation and sustainability in NFPs.

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Further, this research will support the seminal work of Ballantyne (2000) in reinforcing the critical linkage between knowledge management and internal marketing (Ahmed & Rafiq 2004) to sustain knowledge sharing, development and renewal within the organisation. Most importantly, this work will provide an extension to the exploratory research conducted by Lettieri et.al (2004) and Vasconcelos, Seixas, Kimble and Lemos (2005) in the NFP environment on current KM practices and the challenges this diverse industry sector faces in managing its knowledge. The research will also make a number of practical contributions in the areas of knowledge management in an NFP context; and, more specifically, identifying and debunking the commonly-held perception that knowledge management in NFP is founded in information technology and advance understanding of the key barriers for the implementation and sustainability of knowledge management in NFPs.

### **KNOWLEDGE AND NOT FOR PROFITS**

After review of the available NFP literature this research work has selected the dimensions of enterprise size and geographical coverage as the units of analysis for NFP classification. The reasons underpinning this segmentation are conceptual, operational and practical in nature. Conceptually, it is known in the for-profit literature that ‘small firms’ are not just operationally small firms (Raymond, 1985). Research has shown that small firms have distinct operating practices that create differing challenges and practices (Raymond 1985). Moreover, it is known that geographical coverage creates different challenges for communication management and dissemination of information than just geographic centralisation. This size characteristic therefore supports the research dimensions as practical operational units for analysis. Finally, from a practical perspective, national, state and local legislative, taxation and legal requirements differ across regional and international boundaries. By incorporating staff size and geographical location and coverage into the context characterization, allowance is made for consideration of these factors. The initial conceptualisation of this research, size and diffusion defines the domain of NFP classification. The paper will adopt the following classifications of firms: small (locally-based, small membership 1-50), medium (nationally organised, membership of 50-250) and large (internationally organised with nationally-based management, membership 250 plus) NFPs. This classification is based on that recently adopted by the European Commission in 2005 (refer [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/facts-figures-analysis/sme-definition/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/facts-figures-analysis/sme-definition/index_en.htm)) and has been adapted for this research. The secondary element of financial turnover has not been used because small NFPs can create anomalies in this area. This classification was previously adopted in earlier conceptual research (Hume & Hume 2009).

This paper adopts a broader and elaborated definition of the NFP which includes non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and similarly labelled organizations. The reason for this is recent research has suggested that the two terms can be used interchangeably (Willett 2002; Lehman 2005)

Globally, and in particular in Australia, there is a strong tradition of non-profit organisations providing a broad range of social services from welfare and education to conservation, recreation and health and is an integral part of Australia’s economic, societal and political fabric, with this replicated globally in many economies. Estimates from Australia’s peak industry body, Philanthropy Australia and The National Roundtable of Non-profit Organisations (<http://www.accord.org.au/social/infobriefs/nonprofit.html>) suggest there are as many as 700,000 non-profit organizations in Australia, most of which are small and entirely

dependent on the voluntary commitment of members. Approximately 35,000 of these firms employ 604,000 people or 6.8% of Australians employ staff with an income of \$33.5 billion, contributed \$21 billion, or 3.3%, to GDP and made an economic contribution larger than the communications industry and about equal to that of the agriculture industry; a contribution almost twice as large as the entire economic contribution of the state of Tasmania. Approximately 3.7 million Australians volunteered a total of 600 million hours of labour for non-profit organisations of all sizes. The majority of these are small organisations with limited resources and entirely dependent on the voluntary commitment of members. The mission of these 700,000 organisations covers a very broad range of political and philosophical positions and the number of them continues to grow.

The expanding role and employment of NFPs clearly positions the sector as a legitimate and valuable element in our social landscape. However, with this increasing service role has come greater demands on NGO's resources and finances and spawned competition within the sector for the available donor funds and government grants. (<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/ngos/accruited.cfm>). Knowledge Management is posited as one of the key strategies to supporting this competitive challenge and continuing to maintain their increasing service requirement.

### **Large size NFPs**

This paper examines Large NFPs that have a significantly more developed operational landscape and mature processes and structures than smaller and medium non profits. Larger NFPs have a tendency for more developed information technology connectivity and more financial resources that enable a global knowledge management competency. Current research suggests these large firms are often internationally geographically operational and reflect significant cultural/language differences, IT and communications connectivity issues and barriers (Hume & Hume 2008). Knowledge champions are also proposed to play a significant role in large NFPs (Jones, Herschel & Moesel 2003). They must facilitate the knowledge supply chain on a global scale as a de facto, multi-lingual one-person socialisation strategy. Using Wenger and Snyder's (2000) approach, these champions must be given wide-ranging autonomy to drive the knowledge management objective in the early stages until more organisational structure is established. An 'evangelist' style of approach (Oliver & Kandadi 2006) is needed to break down any international cultural boundaries that may exist.

Large NFP's inherent cultural and environmental differences make performance management consistency generally very difficult to implement. As a consequence, there is a greater focus on leadership capabilities in large NFPs to fill this cultural gap. Highly involved and charismatic leadership, supported by the global knowledge champions, is critical to communicate the KM objectives and the expeditious leap into mature externalisation strategies. Leadership in the large NFP therefore extends across managerial and operational levels in the organisation to drive the KM program globally. This is a very challenging change management deliverable, which requires significant 'mission recruitment', training and management prowess. Locating and recruiting these charismatic individuals should not be underestimated. These discussions inform the propositions and foundations of this research.

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## DATA AND METHOD

Exploratory research is a flexible and valuable tool for social science research (Babbie 1989; Churchill 1979; Kinnear & Taylor 1996). The objective of exploratory research is to assist in breaking broad and vague problems into smaller and more precise issues (Patton 1990), increasing the researcher's familiarity with a problem and clarifying concepts (Churchill 1979; Miles & Huberman 1995; Zikmund 1991; Churchill 1979). Exploratory research has limitations. The interpretation of the findings is usually subjective and with small sample cases that cannot be projected to a wider population (Zikmund 1991; Miles & Huberman 1995). This paper adopts a case study methodology (Yin 1994) to identify overall themes and practices. The 4 cases for examination are reflective and retrospective and include a range of large Australian NFP organisations. They are documented as case A through to C.

The objective of this research is to use workplace observations and document collection to explore and gather an initial contextualized understanding of the measures and evaluations of the capture, management and renewal of knowledge in a NFP setting. This research adopts a qualitative ethnographic process in story telling of the cases (Patton 1990). As recommended by Eisenhardt (1989), the research sample will consist of three to six different NFPs. The NFPs will be purposively selected to provide a maximum variation to assess replication logic for theory building purposes. The underlying principle to the sampling technique will be to provide information-rich cases that are worthy of in-depth study. Multiple data sources across hierarchical levels, together with observation and relevant document collection, was sought within each of the case studies to provide the data variation and the theoretical saturation as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Eisenhardt (1989), Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) and Perry (1998). Data from the multiple sources will be divided into themes and categories based on literature findings and examined for frequency in response and occurrence to highlight importance and recurrence. The findings form the basis of the organisational artifacts such as the existing KM systems within organizations. The following form the foundation of analysis and are the propositions for this study based on previous research by Hume and Hume (2008), Hume, Pope and Hume (2012); and the seminal work of Riege (2005), Oliver and Kandadi, (2006) Lettieri et.al (2004) Davenport and Prusak (1998); Chong and Choi (2005), and Vasconcelos et.al (2005) will be examined and analysed in relation to the case studies.

### P1 Knowledge Definition

Knowledge is proposed as strategically and operationally mature with this reflected in structured KM processes capturing both explicit and tacit knowledge.

### P2 KM Implementation

The geographic decentralization of operations makes implementation a significant resource, financial and management challenge. Incremental implementation is proposed as the most logistically feasible approach and allows 'lessons learnt' in one country/area to be implemented in later phases of others.

### P3 Leadership

Charismatic and transformational leadership styles are proposed to be essential to driving a cross-national KM program (supported by 'global' KM evangelists) in large NFP's

#### **P4 Performance Management**

Performance management is proposed as providing the driver in large NFPs where cultural and regional barriers are significant. Money and job status are ‘internationally recognised currencies’ that must be used to drive KM outcomes and are proposed to be evident in these large NFPs.

#### **P5 Cultural Change**

It is proposed that organisational culture, international language and cultural differences add significant complexity to KM implementation in large NFPs and impede implementation.

#### **P6 Leverage Intranet Technologies**

It is proposed that email and local file server technology is used successfully to bridge the geographic boundaries in large NFPs with collaborative knowledge workspaces such as Intranets managed on individual regional grounds. It is proposed that this strategy provides a complex management challenge to common KM portals.

### **CASE DESCRIPTIONS AND IDENTIFICATION**

This section of the paper will offer the descriptions of the cases and discuss the relevant practices and activities occurring in the firm.

#### **Case Study #1 - International Humanitarian, Health, Social Welfare and Aid**

##### *Organisation*

The Australian organisation is part of an established and well-recognised international movement operating in over 180 countries. Whilst internationally headquartered, the organisation is supported by many ‘national societies’ operating in the majority of those 188 countries. National societies ‘embody the work and principles’ of the international organisation while working as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their own countries in the humanitarian field and provide a range of services including disaster relief, health and social programs. In Australia, the national society is further fragmented into state organisations. State-based organisations are heavily focused on providing an essential medical service, first aid training, community welfare services, supporting international aid and disaster relief programs driven from the international HQ, supporting fundraising, volunteer/donor recruitment and promotion of the NFP’s brand which is well recognised after almost 100 years of operation.

##### *Definition of information & knowledge*

The many operational layers internationally and nationally made internal communications and any knowledge socialisation logistically very difficult in this organisation. Added to this were significant cultural and language barriers when trying to harvest, translate and codify materials from 188 member societies. Not unexpectedly, the KM activity (if any) was very fragmented and of limited value. Knowledge access was predominately based on ‘*who you know*’ or your knowledge of the organisation layers and ‘*knowing where to start*’. A large number of the knowledge contributors (health professionals) were voluntary and/or project based and strongly operationally focused, making later knowledge collection via socialisation and documentation strategies difficult. Further, there was no defined KM role or responsibility to support KM at a national or state level. It was, however, recognised that there were large amounts of information (and knowledge) stored in regional office-based, shared server/s but there was very limited strategy, structure, people and process around managing organisational information; and certainly little or no formal strategy, structure and

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process around knowledge management at a local or national level. Further, there was limited understanding and/or knowledge of how knowledge management worked as a strategy and the underlying processes. Knowledge was largely perceived as an individual/professional responsibility which you brought to the organisation and demonstrated in your individual or group work without direction. Documentation of knowledge was embedded within standard organisational documents and work processes.

The case study typified the ‘*dis-connect*’ of many large, multi-missioned ‘franchised’ NFPs between the head office (internationally and nationally) and local branches, making it ad hoc, time consuming and cumbersome to share information and create knowledge. Knowledge management was primarily based on personal networks and experience. Further, this important experience (and knowledge) was not formally documented and shared, resulting in on-going inefficiencies and duplications looking for information and knowledge. The case organisation was a ‘busy being busy’ organisation with limited understanding of the value of examining their information and knowledge needs beyond the day to day operation and ‘*doing things the way we always do*’.

‘The reality is that we are very focused on our day-to-day operations and all our resources are aligned with that. We simply don’t have the resources, time or budgets to define and manage information and/or knowledge under the banner of Knowledge Management. It’s a nice to have but we don’t see it as essential to our operation here. Knowledge comes with the people who work and volunteer for the organisation’.

‘We are very widespread in our operations and a casualty of those multiple missions is that the organisation has to be more careful with your resources and finances. Nonetheless, we are very successful at what we do otherwise we would not still be here serving the community. We have to be cognisant of change and no doubt the information/computing age will play an increasing part. I don’t see that being driven by us though. It will come from our international headquarters’.

### *Information Technology*

ICT infrastructure was comparably more mature than small-medium NFPs with greater investment in hardware and software and inter-office connectivity nationally. However, as noted, much of the corporate information (Word documents and spreadsheets) was stored and archived on local file servers and paper-based files, with no formal socialisation strategies to create and further document knowledge and amplify it across groups in order to further develop it or increase coverage. Nonetheless, ICT was seen as a key tool for creation and storage of information, but no investment in additional tools (and people) to help create knowledge assets. Whilst perceived as a key enabler of the business, little effort had been directed to investigating other ICT applications and uses beyond the standard operating environment of a small business financial management application and Microsoft Office. The corporate website, however, was seen to provide a key ICT service—albeit with limited integration to other office systems to generate business intelligence. The website was primarily promotional information about activities/projects with strong messages and links to volunteering and donor benefits.

‘The website is the front door to our organisation for many people, so we place quite a bit of effort on that albeit that content management can be problematic at times having the right information or version to link to some times’.

‘IT is not the answer either. It’s only as good as the information you put in there and manage. We don’t manage what we have now very well. Adding more to it via more IT tools would only create more problems I believe. However, I certainly agree that improving networks between offices in Australia and overseas would be very useful but again it adds resources and costs at the expense of frontline activity’.

### *Leadership*

Senior management recognised the KM shortfall primarily due to competing organisational priorities (fund raising and donor/volunteer generation) and subsequent time, resource and budget constraints. KM was largely perceived as a ‘strategic’ activity and should be sponsored and ‘championed’ by higher level management (at high national and international executive levels) and driven by mobile/travelling subject matter experts/internal consultants if it was to be a sustainable activity. Perceived KM required large scale strategizing and co-ordination/mobilisation which was beyond their focus and capability. Senior management acknowledge the need and value of KM, however, sponsoring and actioning was deemed a lower priority against other operational activities.

‘Being part of a large, international organisation that has a long history, I would see that strategic activities such as knowledge management need to be driven from head office in order to co-ordinate strategy and resources. I do understand the need and the value more locally here and in Australia but we would really be taking away from our core business and simply don’t have the resources to do it properly which would not be well received I’m sure’.

### *Performance Management*

Respondents universally opposed the concept of performance management in a NFP environment due to the volunteer culture and the humanitarian principles of the organisation. The notion of performance management linked to KM, which was still seen to be a valuable activity, was not culturally feasible and lower in priority to other organisational activities. One respondent suggested that the nature of the volunteering should probably drive the offering of knowledge, but measuring it and valuing it would undermine the altruistic nature of the organisation and volunteering. Again, it was seen as more a strategic activity that should be driven by ‘senior management’ and subject matter experts and not detract from the operational activities.

‘I don’t think performance management works in an NFP environment. It’s hard enough competing to get volunteers and people to work for lower level salaries compared to private industry. To introduce performance management in our organisation in that context would not work. Everyone who joins our organisation is committed to the work we do. It’s then up to individual managers to try to get people to do the best job possible’.

### *Internal Marketing*

Without any KM structure, processes and people to drive KM across the national and international organisation, internal marketing (Bennett & Barkensjo 2005) by itself would not

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create and/or sustain KM in this NFP. Further, the KM infrastructure would need to be co-ordinated on a significant organisational scale given the size of the organisation requiring substantial investment (which was not available) and time to mature. Only when that maturity was achieved would internal marketing activities help 'fuel' KM activity. Internal marketing in this case could be substituted for promotion by leaders and subject matter experts until a level of maturity and scale was achieved.

'We probably don't beat our drum as much as we probably should and some things are difficult to measure to know what impact we making exactly. However, it is something we probably need to look at doing, but again it's the time to do it and where the priorities are'.

'Our focus is very external. Promoting what we do among ourselves would seem wasteful, although I understand why you would do it, but many people would not'.

### *Organisational Culture*

The respondents did not distinguish its organisational culture apart from suggesting it was '*just like many other large NFP organisations*' they had worked/volunteered in previously—a focus on operational activity to deliver services, attracting volunteers and donors and working in multiple roles to achieve these objectives. On further investigation, this revealed similarities in informality around many processes and some strong formality around some others which was largely due to the individuals responsible for them and their tenure in the organisation. Organisational hierarchy brought status and power, and leadership style pervaded the organisation. However, respondents still largely saw the NFP as 'different' from corporate entities and many 'normal HR practices' such as performance reviews, career planning, etc. simply did not apply to an organisation based primarily on volunteers and providing humanitarian services plus they did not have resources to do it.

'A big part of the reason for working in an NFP is to get away from all the corporate %\$\$#@# like timesheets, performance reviews, titles, etc. The other part is that people who work here genuinely believe in what they are doing is making a differences. That being said every NFP organisation has its own little idiosyncrasies and focus and that is normally driven by the senior management and where they have come from. You often find a lot of former accountants as CEOs in large NFP organisations and there is a big focus on managing the limited finances as you would expect'.

### *Summary*

Like many large NFP's, strong marketing/donation/volunteering frontline, but it would appear that the back office operates on minimalistic resources and budgets (although office location contradicted that slightly).

KM was viewed as a 'strategic activity' that was perceived to be very complex, expensive, and the responsibility of head office and individuals/professionals in the organisation. Basic concepts of knowledge management process were not well understood.

Very much an 'act locally' franchised type organisation which many very large NFPs create to extend service reach but loose connection with other office/s to help knowledge sharing and development.

Senior management/CEO personified the culture and the operational approach. Old school office culture was evident. CEO (female) enjoyed status and location, but very operational and not strategic. Similar pattern with other managers. Mature aged executive enjoyed status but lacked energy to drive any new initiatives. Leadership was distanced from operations so KM 'as a new/strategic' initiative was not in scope.

It could be argued that the longevity and strength of the brand was a source of inertia for change and adopting KM practices.

### **Case Study #2 – International Social Welfare**

The Australian arm of this international NFP was born out of the merger between two high profile international development agencies. The international organisation's history extends back to providing refugee relief during the Second World War. Quite simply, the organisation's goal is to bring about positive change in the lives of people living in poverty. To achieve that, the organisation recruitment volunteers and works in partnership with a number of corporate, government, academic and other aid organisations in development projects in Australia and overseas, as well as coordinating a number of major fundraising campaigns.

Some further insights:

- In 2010–2011 the Australian organization had over 3,000 volunteers contribute 130,000 hours of service
- That volunteer contribution represented a dollar equivalent of \$4.4 million in productivity or 76 full-time positions
- 71.5% of volunteers are aged between 18 and 30 years
- As part of a corporate volunteering program, 132 employees from Australian companies such as Origin Energy, Deloitte, Mallesons and Goldman Sacs volunteered 1,819 hours
- 73.6% of volunteers are women and 29.8% come from a non-English speaking background.

#### *Definition of information and knowledge*

This organisation distinguished itself immediately with a defined role and person in the position of Manager, Knowledge and Information Strategy—highlighting the recognition of the process and value of KM. Despite the formality of this role the organisation took 'a very pragmatic view' of information and knowledge and did not dwell on 'definitions' and theoretical models explaining the differences between tacit and explicit knowledge. That level of theoretical understanding was the responsibility for the KIS (Knowledge and Information Services) Manager and KIS Team (staff of 3) and driving the KM process. A high level documented KM strategy existed to direct activity in the capture, codification and distribution of information and (tacit and explicit) knowledge.

'What's important is that as long as it (information and/or knowledge) is available when they want/need it. We take a pragmatic view to filtering and categorising and use our own experience and user feedback to help make improvements, additions etc.'

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A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle.  
– Kahlil Gibran, 20<sup>th</sup> century poet

#### *Extract from KM Plan*

There was strong recognition of information and knowledge categories and the sources of creation and development. Again, it was ‘simplified’ to help a resource constrained organisation, but it helped create organisational understanding to support the strategy. Following that was strong focus on documenting knowledge assets, distributing and refining them (*‘in active pursuit of knowledge’*) via socialisation functions such as a *Question & Answer* information service (KM Help Desk) and informal Communities of Practices.

#### *Information Technology*

The important and valuable role ICT was well recognised, albeit that investment—like most NFPs—was constrained against other organisational operational priorities. However, a distinguishing feature was an international and national connectivity via a NFP global extranet which allowed affiliates to post/file key documents to share globally. After ‘a slow start’, the extranet quickly became ‘very active’ with issues of content management quantity and quality surfacing. This was subsequently addressed with a team of 2-3 full-time staff now managing the collection process to improve presentation, assist codification and promotion and distribution. Further, ‘a lot of effort’ had also gone into overcoming language and cultural issues to improve ‘usability’ among the NFP network and ultimately knowledge transfer. Clearly, the use of ICT greatly assisted knowledge amplification across the NFP which was now facing the issue of volume/scale. Experienced K-team members were assisting with the collection, codification and distribution process, albeit being quite labour-intensive dealing with the increasing volumes. However, the Q&A service helped focus this to ensure priority knowledge requirements and prioritised ad hoc/project enquiries were being met. Investment in business intelligence toolsets were recognised as ‘*nice to have*’, but were perceived to be an ‘enterprise’ tool beyond the financial capability of the Australian organisation and of questionable value. ICT was still strongly considered a key enabling tool but not a leader in KM. People and processes were the priority focus and leveraging the available ICT.

‘There are lots of KM tools we would like to use but they are at an enterprise level which is overkill for how we operate and what we can support. The reality is that ICT is just an enabler, an important one, but KM starts with people and process focused on driving it. Small things can be very effective as we have found and adapting things from our other offices that have worked’.

#### *Organisational Culture*

This NFP made a number of references to the strength of its organisational culture, particularly in driving KM activities and delivering successful outcomes as a result. The connection between information and knowledge capture, documentation and distribution and service delivery was well recognised which helped to fuel an ‘*active sharing culture*’ which extended internationally and nationally.

‘I would like to suggest that our collaborative culture is what distinguishes us from other NFPs in many ways. It makes our job (as the KM team) a lot easier’.

‘There’s definitely a different vibe to this organisation from others I have worked in. There are no power plays from managers or senior people. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that a lot of the people here are relatively young and very keen to get involved in some way and don’t question everything in detail, they get on and just do it’.

### *Internal Marketing*

The need and value of ‘knowledge socialisation’ was reinforced regularly and informally via Communities of Practice and the Q&A service. Budget limitations did not permit more ‘formal and glossy’ internal marketing activities such as television advertisements, brochures and posters, etc. The regularity and consistency of the KM marketing message was considered essential, however, the delivery mechanisms would always be constrained by other operational priorities. The use of informal Communities of Practice, Intranets and Q&A supported by a ‘sharing culture’ was seen as sufficient at the time, but could be significantly improved with greater internal marketing resources because of the practical experience of the value of KM.

‘Again, while it would be nice, there are other priorities at the moment. For us, the visibility of activities like the Help Desk and consistency of other KM activities like our Lunch & Learn presentations and few key documents help market what we are doing in terms of knowledge management. It would be nice to close that loop in terms of measuring changes/impacts it has made but again we just have not had time’.

### *Leadership*

The organisation prided itself on being an ‘egalitarian’ organisation, but recognised the need for strong leadership to champion and support internally-driven services such as KM. The success of KM activities to date was correlated to the leader’s understanding of the value of KM. The current CEO was strongly focused on the HR (operational staff, volunteers) and was open to taking advice from the K-team in particular, using a weekly newsletter from the CEO to promote KM activities.

‘It would certainly help with the boss knew more about KM but people know what we do, so it’s not critical at the moment, but certainly, executive support is important to help reinforce the KM messages across the organisation and build the needed budgets and resource to make it really effective’.

‘I guess if the leadership did not support or believe in KM we wouldn’t be here but making that connection more visible and tangible would certainly help our cause’.

### *Performance Management*

Respondents understood how individual and group performance management could support KM objectives, however, they were very reticent to adopt it.

‘It’s not something that NFPs do. It’s more a corporate activity. Many people work in NFPs to get away from that sort of thing. Having a simple KM strategy and promoting it among individuals and groups is hopefully enough to guide people as to what we are trying to achieve as an organisation and where they can contribute’.

The link between adopting ‘corporate practices’ such as performance management and knowledge management is emotive. The link to individual performance was viewed by many respondents as threatening and undermined the fundamental humanitarian ethos and voluntary basis of NFPs. However, the need to measure and report performance is a fundamental corporate governance responsibility. This creates an opportunity to focus performance management not from an individual input perspective but possibly from a group and/or organisational output. The collective assessment supports many NFP’s egalitarian culture and ‘success’ used for promotional campaigns. The connection to individual performance is somewhat blurred but can be connected through the use of targeted internal marketing, leadership and the individual connection with group.

‘Everyone’s here for a reason and it’s certainly not for the money/salary, so to introduce performance management would be very counter-productive I think’.

### *Summary*

This NFP organisation was a standout for their comprehension of the knowledge management function, their pragmatism, process simplicity (Q&A Help Desk, Lunch & Learn, SME directories) and use of basic ICT tools to support KM at a national and international level. Highlighted the need for ‘people and process’ foundations for KM. Simplicity works and builds growth of adoption and KM development. This extract from the organisation’s KM Plan highlights the pragmatism.

‘This vision is supported by the following KIS Team objectives:

- To enable knowledge sharing by connecting people to people
- To connect people to information
- To foster organisational cohesiveness
- To enhance organisational governance and accountability
- To identify knowledge gaps in the organisation and work to fill them’

A ‘sharing/collaborative culture’ was the ‘fuel’ that made KM strategy possible and successful in this firm. A simple connectedness via processes and people enabled the organisation to be globalised with a ‘fit for purpose’ (in alignment with organisational maturity-capability) KM strategy that was simple, actionable and more achievable; rather than a wish list of unfeasible activities and ICT. A K-team was evident that was small, agile and committed and who fulfilled a number of roles to ‘plan, manage, drive, do everything in the name of KM’. The KM strategy was replicated in other countries which helped create the connectedness and continuity”

### **Case Study #3 – National Environmental**

This large environmental agency was established in Australia in the early 1980s when the focus on global environmental sustainability gained momentum. With the support of the Australian Federal Government, corporates and universities, this organisation has achieved significant service delivery success, public profile, donor and volunteer support across Australia in a relatively short time. To achieve this coverage, the NFP is federated into a number of state-based offices with a national headquarters.

*Definition of information and knowledge*

This case organisation distinguishes itself with a large volume of information being available courtesy of a strong scientific input to core services via professional employees, university researchers and volunteers with professional science qualifications. The distinction between information and knowledge, defined as ‘the why’ element was ‘*somewhat/often missing*’, albeit that it was recognised. A number of reasons given for this missing link are:

- Assumption that it will be captured (and often it is not)
- Time/resources constraints allowing only basic capture at times or not enough resources to refine (particularly version control) and codify (summarise for consumption for particular audiences) large amounts of information.
- Timeliness is sometimes an issue as well.
- Knowledge is a covert source of status within the organisation, particularly technical knowledge on which the organisation relied heavily.

Interestingly, there was recognition of a certain bias towards qualified, technical knowledge over experiential based knowledge from volunteers. This gap was recognised in part and was being addressed in an innovative socialisation/Community of Practice strategy known as ‘toolbox conversations’ (audio recorded facilitated conversations between project members during a co-ordinated work break/morning tea). Transcribing and codifying those materials were time consuming and required extensive review in order to develop something useful for publication and create a knowledge assets, so its use was mostly selective.

‘A lot of knowledge capture often happens by chance but as an organisation we all generally understand the need and value of it but it’s not well managed for the reasons I outlined (above) before’.

‘We have a lot of scientific information around the organisation but that does not always translate well for operational purposes which is a weakness’.

‘As an environmental science based organisation, a lot of people understand the need and value of information and knowledge management but they don’t always do it for a lot of reasons. It’s a time problem, a management problem, a strategy problem and more’.

‘K is largely technical-based information – What and How is there but not so much ‘the Why’ which is where the important knowledge reside. The Why is a missing link in many of the documents we have’.

‘A lot of “unofficial” information and knowledge gets generated within work/projects groups that again it’s about getting the work done. The informal channels work pretty [well] sharing it within the group well but not always timely and accessible and available to other groups which is what needs to happen from a KM perspective’.

One of the biggest KM challenges the organisation faced was around the renewal of knowledge (as a result of documentation and internalisation). Version control of documents was poor and file management was poor due to a lack of resourcing, formality and focus so

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finding the ‘latest version’ was often difficult. Informal and formal communication networks helped address this situation but it was often not effective: ‘*a lot of out of date information/data gets reused*’. Some information and knowledge was prioritised by using a ‘Projects of Natural Significance’ categorisation to assist users identify knowledge sources. The simplified summary Source/Function categorisation approach which had accepted meaning to the organisation was viewed as effective to gaining access to key knowledge assets.

### *Information Technology*

ICT infrastructure was described as ‘*basic*’ (PCs/local servers/email/Intranet). Attempts to provide remote access for project work had experienced many connectivity problems and were being used less and less. ICT was ‘office-based’, however, the development of mobile devices’ functionality (such as iPads, iPhones/Android phones, etc.) and improving connectivity was viewed very optimistically, albeit budget constrained and lacking the required in-house technical support. ICT was a ‘frustrating’ element. The role and value was understated yet was seen as essential to much of the organisation’s operation and KM activity. This was further compounded by the lack of ICT strategy and support for what was operating, resulting in large quantities of information and knowledge being stored haphazardly, out of date and then archived periodically on a large scale—resulting in further loss of key knowledge.

ICT is a key enabler to KM, however, its mere existence is not effective without support and alignment to operations and KM strategy. Regardless of the scale of ICT investment, information and knowledge must be planned, managed and supported from the outset to support KM as an organisational asset.

‘It’s probably one of our greatest weakness and one of my biggest frustrations. But at the same time, even if we did have it, we don’t have the finances and resources to support it properly. A lot of people forget that when they complain about the lack of ICT resources. While everyone wants the latest and greatest, they don’t want to pay for the support that’s needed. We need to use what we have more effectively and that can start by simply organising our information better and not just archiving everything’.

### *Organisational Culture*

Like most NFPs this organisation perceived itself to be egalitarian and universally committed to its mission above all else. The scientific background of the work did give status to subject matter experts: however, this was covert through a QA/peer review process of documentation. The organisation was ‘not well accepting’ of praise or promotion of individuals or group achievements, instead preferring a more academic review and referencing approach.

‘We do occasionally note the effort related to a project contribution/outcome but is rarely/if ever related to an individual or group, it is usually project based. We should do more but there does not seem to be our style. It’s the outcome, contribution to sustainability that is more important which is very much based in our scientific culture I guess. That being the case, there are some amazing people, including volunteers, who do great things should be recognised by the organisation.’

The link between organisational culture and KM is strongly linked within the NFP mission and service delivery which is based in environmental science and occurs naturally, albeit that 'inter-state rivalries' and 'subject matter expertise jealousies' exist which compromise KM activity. A national initiative to share key documents via email channels amongst subject matters experts and work groups failed to develop due to overzealous 'peer reviews'.

'We actually thought about removing authors' and contributors' names from documents at one point. The review comments appeared to be quite personal on some occasions and people just stopped contributing and those that could have started never did for fear of being wrong or questioned it. It was really petty and disappointing'.

'We have a strongly shared mission about "changing landscapes", so the barriers to KM are not that strong really when you think about it objectively, it's probably more "personal" in some cases. Also, funding competition between states also undermines collaboration and has created an inter-state rivalry that is ridiculous'.

### *Performance Management*

Similarly, this NFP dismissed the need and value of performance management supporting KM.

'Using a mandated/corporate style approach involving performance appraisals etc. will not work. As an NFP, many people work for the mission and personal satisfaction, not the salaries. With that goes a certain acceptance by everyone that a dictatorial approach will not work and would not be acceptable to many volunteers and/or full-time staff.'

Interestingly, performance management was perceived as a punitive activity rather than a career development activity. Respondents were sensitive to the need to task and measure KM activity when it was being done (albeit in a somewhat haphazard way). Like many NFPs, full-time staff juggled a number of roles and responsibilities to the best of their abilities and resources. Salary levels were inflexible and performance management was seen to add little value to them individually, or the organisation.

### *Leadership*

Leadership was considered 'supportive' of KM but 'not as strong as would like' to remind people of the importance of knowledge capture, documentation and sharing. Leadership was also considered to extend 'beyond the rhetoric' to visible action/s of the leader/s themselves. Often this responsibility was devolved to administrative support and lost some credibility.

'[It is] Human nature that if people see the boss or other people they respect doing it, they generally follow'.

'There is little doubt in my mind that with the right people involved and some additional resources, we could do a hell of a lot more'.

It was also espoused that leadership supporting KM had several layers from the 'office to the project site' to ensure continuity and focus of KM capture and renewal. This mature level of thinking (and operation) of 'connectedness' across the organisation (at national and inter-state

levels) and ‘continuity of effort’ (from all operational areas) distinguished NFPs who were ‘successful’ with understanding KM.

### *Internal Marketing*

Without actively delivering it under the function of internal marketing, the prioritisation of information and knowledge via the categorisation of ‘Projects of Natural Significance’ helped generate understanding of the value of knowledge capture and sharing within the organisation and externally. With a strong project-based focus (not individuals or groups), the promotion did not offend the perceived egalitarian nature of the organisation and its people. Nonetheless, it was highly valued at an individual and group level to have this value categorisation which served to incentivise efforts to the project to maintain its status. This distinction is important to note: whilst internal marketing may leverage a group or organisational activity to communicate, the impact on individuals who work in or identify closely with that area should not be underestimated. Whilst the culture may not support individualism, the ‘*what’s in it for me?*’ factor is ever-present.

Socialisation strategies were valued, albeit they were informal and ad hoc and most focused on capture rather than promotion of knowledge. Budget constraints were partly a driver of this because of the perception of the need for many people/subject matter experts/scientists to be involved, travelling and meeting face-to-face as per traditional ‘academic conferences’. ICT facilities were not available to help overcome this at the time.

‘The culture is not well accepting of praise and promotion. It tends to be more critical—in a scientific and academic way. Hence, many people have been scared to participate based on previous experiences of being reviewed very critically. We do not promote our successes very well internally or externally. Scientists do not tend to do that—they are inherently reserved I guess. Similarly, the field workers are a very egalitarian group.’

### *Summary*

The ‘scientific’ background to the NFP mission was a key element in the organisational culture which supported KM activity, however, a lack of strategy and structure made KM difficult and, interestingly, professional status/jealousies undermined this in some cases.

Leadership was operationally/project focused primarily and did address these cultural issues. This was compounded by an absence of performance management.

Whilst there was strong recognition of the importance of KM, efforts to plan and manage were under resourced for the large amounts of information and knowledge that was used and generated. Subsequently, the value of a KM function was compromised; and transferred much co-ordination to subject matter experts/work groups which supported the knowledge-status cultural hierarchy somewhat.

Basic KM categorisation of the ‘Project of Natural Significance’ work assisted with the collection and codification of information and knowledge and incentivised participating team members to contribute given the high profile the work received via the Internet and internal communications.

There was a strong perception that ICT could support KM activities more, but connectivity issues and ICT support were seen as the major weakness at the time. Improvement in storage, digital photography and reduced costs of personal ICT tools (such as laptops, iPhones, iPads) would potentially overcome many of these issues but the lack of aligned ICT planning would not see these tools implemented for some time.

## DISCUSSION

This work has elaborated previous work of Hume and Hume (2008), Hume, Pope and Hume (2012) and advanced the understanding and research of Riege (2005), Oliver and Kandadi (2006) Lettieri et.al (2004), Davenport and Prusak (1998), Chong and Choi (2005) and Vasconcelos et.al (2005). Proposition one is marginally accepted. One firm was aligned with the proposition and showed maturity of KM process and capture; the second was partially aligned and mindful of the lack of detail; and the third dismissed KM as being a corporate responsibility and too difficult. NFP organisational size does not necessarily translate to organisational capability and maturity, particularly in the KM function. This was evident with the largest and more established NFP case having the lowest level of understanding of KM and the lowest level of adoption and practice. The most 'successful' level of application of the KM function was strongly linked to a combination of elements including a broad knowledge and understanding of fundamental knowledge management principles and processes such as SECI. Knowing and understanding the *How* and *Why* of KM is key to planning and operationalizing effectively. Many respondents did not understand basic concepts and theories, partly due to a perception that it was a 'strategic activity' and not their responsibility. The disconnect between the individual and the organisation highlighted underperforming KM. Organisations with KM understanding were able to use guiding theoretical principles and adapt within their organisations.

Managing information volume (capture) and subsequent filtering and codification was a common challenge for all cases. Almost exponential growth was experienced with successful KM practice highlighting the need for KM strategy and organisational structures (people, process, technology) to be aligned/developed together to support the growth. Improvements in KM practice corresponded to greater ICT storage and support costs almost immediately. Determining information/knowledge categories was largely based on corporate functional lines (Finance, Administration, Legal, Policies and Procedures, Templates and Projects) with subsequent subject matter determining a second level. Beyond that level required significant information management resourcing. Two levels of codification allowed for an efficient, timely service. Simplicity in the early stages facilitated and expedited the filter process and the timely delivery to users. With maturity came greater KM refinement and development of KM categories and presentation, but it should be noted that it should be an evolutionary process driven by maturation of KM practice and user needs when expediting adoption.

Proposition Two was accepted with all NFPs agreeing that KM processes, whether evident or not, were incremental and a significant resource. Proposition Three was accepted and evident in all operations with charismatic leadership evident in driving KM activities. This was also evident for KM champions and sponsors at other levels in the firm. Active leadership and sponsoring by delivering key messages and displaying supporting behaviours underlined successful practice. Consistency of the message/s and behaviours are also important to sustain the cultural lifeblood needed to sustain KM. Skilled/knowledgeable resourcing is critical to managing the flow between capture, filtering, codifying and distribution. The process required 'human intervention' to quality assure and quality control, otherwise the

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volume of information remained unwieldy and difficult to navigate. KM teams were formed from 'experienced' volunteers/employees who were able to identify/define knowledge requirements quickly and subsequently filter, code and distribute on behalf of many knowledge workers.

Proposition Four was partially accepted. The philosophy of appraising and incentivizing was seen as beneficial. However, under the current human resource styles evident in these large NFPs it was highly impractical and unfeasible. The concept of goal setting and rebranding of performance management was seen as a more ideal strategy. Focusing resources at the opening/delivery end of the 'information/knowledge funnel' allowed some filtering and codification to happen simultaneously. Achieving 'timely knowledge flow' was seen as important to creating perceptions of value of KM function. With more 'process experience' and accepted categorisation, focus could be shifted to valuable 'analysis' activities to add to the knowledge base. The development of operational manuals such as a Subject Matter Experts directory and Project 'Survival Guides' were good examples of this.

Performance management was perceived to be a 'corporate' activity and at odds with the 'humanitarian' and voluntary ethos of NFPs and a disincentive for permanent staff that were largely lower paid compared to their peers in the private and government sectors. Perceptions of performance management were that it was 'subjective and punitive'. This could partly be attributed to previous 'bad experience/s' in other organisations and the poor application of the function in focusing, motivating and rewarding employees who achieve; and identifying weaknesses and building support for those who require assistance. Performance management needed to be 'redesigned and rebranded' to change a number of perceptions about it in a NFP environment to help drive and sustain KM. Without sustained contribution, KM's value is eroded. The subtle recognition of performance via internal marketing promotion may have focused and motivated other groups/individuals to improve their performance to be included in other promotion/communications.

Proposition Five and Six were accepted. A supportive 'sharing' organisational culture where information and knowledge exchange are openly demonstrated and valued was endorsed. Organisational culture is a well-documented cornerstone of successful KM practice. Creating and, more importantly, sustaining this culture where the functions of internal marketing, leadership and performance management should operate. Culture does not sustain itself, particularly in an NFP environment where staff /volunteers are transient, hence, action is required to induct, inform and invigorate new staff and volunteers to the mission, operation and roles and responsibilities of the organisation. KM can be a key outcome of those initiatives.

The use of available ICT as an enabler (rather than a driver) of KM activity was evident with the practice of driving 'connectedness' through dedicated KM programs/services, processes and education first, and technology second. Focusing and aligning the use of ICT as a key KM capture, documentation, storage and distribution tool was required rather than the expectation that endorsed ICT assets lead to KM. Educating staff and volunteers on organisational information and knowledge needs, how to capture it, their specific role and responsibilities in the KM processes and the value/benefit would assist staff in using available ICT more effectively for KM purposes.. Adoption and adaptation of 'successful practices' from other international office/s helped create KM economies of scale and a tangible feeling of 'global connectedness' and shared mission which was a defining feature of the NFP brand

and volunteer attraction. Cultural and language similarity was an underlining feature for failure and success (notwithstanding that this was not fully investigated)

These case studies re-enforced that successful KM is a chemistry of people, process and socialisation. Creating mechanisms whereby people communicate directly with other people at explicit (a document, presentation, drawing/map/photo) and tacit (explaining their thoughts/perceptions/beliefs on what, how and why) levels about work processes, specific inputs and/outputs and outcomes, risks and assumptions is a critical first enabler. Communities of Practice, whether formal or informal, continued to prove successful, with this chemistry assisting shared goals and values. Size of these groups varied although 'small' appears most effective to facilitate discussion and involvement.

Finally, the less 'successful' level of application of the KM function was strongly linked to a combination of elements including:

- Lower level of understanding of basic KM theories and principles and hence limited planning and/or focused processes to support KM.
- A perception of information 'overload' and a '*do not know where to start*' mentality.
- A perception that ICT was a driver and they were 'underinvested' to be able to implement KM effectively.
- An expectation that KM was a 'strategic activity' that needed to be sponsored, planned, financed and co-ordinated predominately from global head office/s.
- An expectation that knowledge management was an individual responsibility where organisational resources were limited.
- An operationally focused culture and organisational structure that focuses on service delivery and a service orientation.
- Mature aged, operationally focused managers.

## **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research has expanded the knowledge management research paradigm away from a strong focus on understanding the concept of 'what is knowledge' emphasizing its various attributes and formalizing different taxonomies to a much needed pragmatic research program on the 'how' organizations manage knowledge from a process and people-oriented view. By developing a contemporary understanding of what are the priorities in implementing and operating knowledge management programs in structurally different NFPs this work is helping managers and organisations recognize that that knowledge (both tacit and explicit) is primarily created by people within the organization.

This paper suggests that for the sharing process to begin, mature and sustain itself, understanding and managing the primary psychological elements of personal value or '*What's in it for me?*' it needs KM champions, and shared values and goals are vital. This paper introduces the practice of internal marketing, rebranding of performance and champions as some of the essential ingredient for KM success and this can be broadened to include 'knowledge' as a 'product/service' within the organisation that should be marketed to facilitate exchange both within organisations and with customers. Linking knowledge management and people through internal marketing to address the personal issues of 'me' is

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key to supporting knowledge renewal which is central to knowledge management. Large NFPs did not seem to have distinctly different needs to that of other firms, however, in some part size contributed to economies of scale in investment. The implementation needs of KM appear more focused on people and commitment to KM as a philosophy.

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