© Dimitra

Sophie Treinen
Knowledge and Communication Department,
Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building Division

FAO

Sophie Treinen has more than 20 years' experience in communication and information. She is currently working as an Information Management Specialist for Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America, providing assistance to projects which address the role of information and communication in rural areas. Her major responsibility is to develop approaches for building institutional and individual capacities to share knowledge and create information systems which make the most of digital and more conventional technologies to address stakeholders' needs. She is also applying participatory approaches and examining gender issues linked to the introduction of new digital Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Sophie joined FAO in 2000 as Information Officer for the Gender and Development Service. Before her assignment with FAO, she worked for international cooperation and development organisations (European Commission, NGOs and private sector) as a journalist, communication adviser, information officer, team leader, programme director and head of information and communication department.

Knowledge management and gender: clarifying the concepts

The Dimitra project forms part of the programme "Knowledge Management and Gender", which is financed by Belgium and which aims to integrate gender issues into the projects of the programme as well as to promote the exchange of knowledge between its different actors.

Knowledge management[1] (KM) consists in getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time, in an accessible and easily usable form. It also involves helping people share and put knowledge into action in ways that strive to improve organisational performance. KM needs to focus on creating a culture of knowledge-sharing and learning.

Why implement a programme linked specifically to KM? The answer is that when a project is completed, there is a substantial amount of knowledge which disappears with the departure of the persons who worked on the project. In the absence of an effective strategy to make the most of the knowledge acquired, the risks are that much of what has been learned, done, developed, discussed and negotiated in the course of the project will be lost because there has been no systematic documentation, no exchange, no sharing, and hence no knowledge implementation to improve existing practices.

The challenge facing a programme such as the "Knowledge Management and Gender" one lies in convincing all the parties involved that more can be gained by sharing what each knows than by keeping information to oneself. To put it in a nutshell, someone who is open to dialogue and sharing will gain more social recognition than someone who controls everything and represents a real bottleneck in information sharing. Everyone has knowledge and everyone can learn from others. The sharing will be all the more fruitful if it involves men and women, as well as young and older people. Because of their different backgrounds and roles and, more generally, because of the division of tasks and responsibilities, women and men have different ways of learning and specific forms of knowledge. It should also be noted that not everyone has the same opportunities to apply knowledge, given that to implement what you have learned you must also have the means, skills, permission, courage and confidence to do so.

This article is an attempt to clarify a number of concepts that are used in the field of KM. It thus examines the notions of knowledge ("savoir" and "connaissance" in French), information, communication, experience capitalization and good practice and presents several tools and methods adapted to KM in the field.

1. Some historical and etymological aspects

The concept of KM appears in business management in the 1980s. In French, "knowledge management" can either be translated as "gestion des connaissances" or "gestion du savoir".

In Roman languages "know" as two different meanings: "savoir" (French), "saber" (Spanish), "sapere" (Italian) and respectively "connaître", "conocer" and "conoscere".

"Know" and "knowledge" come from Old English "cna-wan", which is the Anglo-Saxon form of Proto-Germanic "knoeanan", which in turn is the Germanic version of the prehistoric "gno-" root and is related to the Latin verb "cognoscere". We use "know" to mean both "to know as a fact" and "to be acquainted with (something or someone). Knowledge is acquired through cognitive processes such as perception, learning, reasoning, memory, experience and records.

The word "communication" comes from Latin "communicare", which means to share something or establish a relationship with someone, while "information" comes from Latin "informare" and means "to shape", "describe".

2. Some definitions

Much too often "knowledge", "savoir" (in French), "information" and "communication" are considered interchange-

able terms when in actual fact they are not. Rather, they form part of a chain comprising several links, ranging from raw data to knowledge:

— **Data:** facts, raw elements of information.
— **Information:** a fact or judgment that we convey to another person or an audience by means of words, sounds or images. Information consists of data that have been interpreted, translated or converted to highlight their deeper significance. Information is a vehicle of knowledge.
— **Knowledge as "connaissance":** what is known, what you know because you learned it. It can be the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject or the awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation.
— **Knowledge as "savoir"** is defined as the expertise and skills acquired by a person through experience or education that can be reproducible.[2]

Thus, for example, in order to improve farming practices, act effectively on the environment and make positive changes, we need the ability to turn information into knowledge, knowledge into know-how and, eventually, into expertise. Having information is not enough – we must also know how to make use of it in practice.

The following example will highlight the point. During a radio programme presented by an agricultural extension worker, a group of rural women heard him say that the local soil was suitable for growing sunflowers and that this was a profitable activity. When the advisor learned that the women had decided to follow his advice, he travelled to the area to see how they were getting along. He was surprised to find that the seeds had been sown haphazardly rather than in appropriately spaced rows, as is required for this crop. These women didn't know that they had made a mistake but, thanks to the visit of the extension worker, were able to improve their practices. Subsequently, they shared their knowledge with other women and men in their community, explaining the "do and don't" (good practice). They are now recognised by the community as innovators who are knowledgeable about farming methods.

In the above example, following the visit by the agricultural extension worker and subsequent exchanges with him, we moved from a linear communication or broadcast model (radio programme without questions from the audience being answered by a guest or panel of experts) to participatory communication, also known as "communication for development".

Communication involves several elements, which includes: a sender, a receiver, a message (which conveys information from the sender to the receiver), the code or language used for the message and the channel or means of communication through which the message goes from the sender to the receiver.

Information and communication are indissolubly linked. In fact, information is only useful to people to the extent that it is communicated to them. Information which does not circulate, which someone keeps to himself or herself, is not information as far as other people are concerned.[3]

Communication for development highlights the importance of promoting participation by involving all stakeholders and giving a say to those who need information and whose voice is not always heard. Communication for development comprises numerous media and approaches, including local media and traditional social groupings, rural radios for community development, videos and multimedia modules for training farmers, and the Internet as a means of networking researchers, educators, extension agents and producer associations as well as of accessing global information. Whatever the means employed – whether a village is linked to the outside world through modern telecommunication networks or its inhabitants learn about healthcare practices through popular sayings and songs, whether they listen to radio broadcasts on the best agricultural practices or obtain information from some other source – the processes and results involved are the same: people communicate and learn together.[4]

In different eras and cultures, knowledge has been preserved and transmitted by different oral and/or written communication means. Libraries are typical examples of institutions established to preserve knowledge. Today, new information and communication technologies (ICTs) provide new forms of storing and conveying information, including e.g. Wikipedia, the free collaborative encyclopaedia on the web. As in the case of documents available in a library, digital information and documents must be classified and indexed so that they can be easily retrieved, consulted and exchanged.

Information management covers the various stages of the treatment of information: producing, collecting, processing, storing, classifying and disseminating information, which can originate from different sources and be made available in different formats.

Knowledge management systems are often mistakenly called information management systems. Companies and institutions use a lot new ICTs and related tools such as websites, wikis, blogs and intranets. These tools are not in themselves enough to manage knowledge efficiently. A technological system cannot be used to managed knowledge as such, which is something in people's heads, though it can be used to manage information and documents (written records, audiovisual materials, etc.). In this connection, it is appropriate to draw a distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge, also called "implicit knowledge", includes a person's innate or acquired skills, as well as his or her know-how and experience.

Explicit knowledge is expressly and clearly able to be formulated in words and figures, documented, and substantive. It can more easily be shared than tacit knowledge, which is more individual in nature.*

In order to record tacit knowledge and make it explicit and available by means of a document, it is necessary to develop a knowledge exchange culture, recognise the benefits of knowledge exchange and invest time in sharing and thinking. Numerous methods – which we will briefly review below – exist to achieve these aims. Documentation is only one particular stage in knowledge management. Good practice can be documented to serve as an example to others and a guide for implementation.

Experience documentation, in addition to its archiving and accountability functions, is directed at "learning in the future" and making information available to third parties. The objective is to establish a retrievable memory.

Experience capitalization aims at changing a practice or structure. It also differs from external evaluations which, being determined by an "outside agenda", are not guided exclusively by the direct participants in the experience. Experience capitalization is the transformation of (individual and institutional) knowledge into capital by those involved in order to change a collective, institutional practice. Aimed at changing one's own practices or structures, it can be described as a "learn now for the future" process. Experience capitalization is made up of learning processes that prepare change. Its output is lessons learnt, and good practices; its outcome is induced changes; a redesigned practice fulfils its purpose.[5]

A good practice is a tested process or methodology which has achieved good results in the past. It can therefore be rec-ommended as an exemplary model. Identifying and sharing good practices involves, essentially, the ability to learn from others and reutilise existing knowledge. Thus the benefits of this process increase with the accumulation of experience.[6]

3.   Tools, methods and techniques

With the development of new ICTs, many open source and proprietary software applications (e.g. intranets and extranets, websites, wikis, blogs, chat rooms, SMS, photo sharing applications, networks, on-line communities, yellow pages, etc.) have been created to assist KM, but these are only technological tools.

As mentioned above, these tools cannot, by themselves, provide a comprehensive solution. Rather, they must be carefully selected on the basis of the needs, capabilities and skills of the users concerned, and also take into account their willingness to share the knowledge and information they possess. Mutual respect and trust are essential to the success of this process.

Knowledge managers have a special role to play as facilitators and providers of a link between people, their knowledge and the chosen (ICT-based or other) supports. Knowledge managers use methods and techniques which rely on interpersonal relations and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience. Among other such methods and techniques, the following may be mentioned:

French terms	English terms
la rétrovision	After Action Review
le soutien entre collègues	Peer Coaching
l'assistance par les pairs	peer review
les bonnes pratiques	good practice
les études de cas	case study
les histoires et récits	story telling
le forum ouvert	Open Space
SEPO : Succès- Echecs - Potentiels - Obstacles	SWOT: Strengths - Weaknesses- Opportunities -Threats
les foires au savoir	knowledge fairs
le remue-méninges	brainstorming
les cartes cognitives ou cartes mentales	cognitive mapping or mind mapping
les communautés de pratique	communities of practice
la modération ou animation de groupe - facilitation	facilitation

l'aquarium	fish bowl
le café du monde	world café

Detailed descriptions of these methods and techniques are available on the following websites:

— "Collaboration and Advocacy Techniques", on the FAO-EU website "Food Security Information for Action": http://www.foodsec.org/tr_res_07.htm, including a section on Distance Learning: http://www.foodsec.org/DL/dlintro_en.asp and on lessons: "Techniques for improving collaborative work" at http://www.foodsec.org/DL/course/shortcourseFK/EN/pdf/lessons/lesson0308.pdf
— Consultative Group for International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) – Knowledge Sharing Toolkit: www.kstoolkit.org
— www.daretoshare.ch and their toolkit: http://www.daretoshare.ch/en/Dare_To_Share/Knowledge_Management_Toolkit
— CARE Knowledge Sharing Workshop: www.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/CARE_Knowledge_Sharing_Workshop
— Knowledge Management for Development: www.km4dev.org

4. Stages of knowledge management
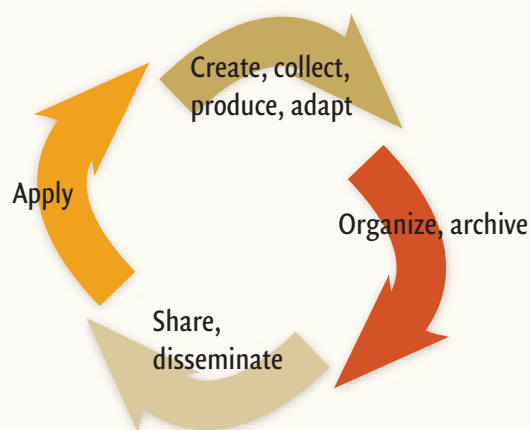
Knowledge management comprises **several stages**:

1. The first consists in identifying and acquiring the relevant knowledge in order to document the existing experience/know-how, translate it into different languages, and adapt it to the intended audience.
2. Secondly, a system must be put in place to manage all the contents in accordance with appropriate informa-

tion management rules. It is essential to archive materials so as to be able to retrieve them easily.
3. The above tasks are pointless unless the data, information and knowledge are shared and disseminated through specific means of communication appropriate for each group of users.
4. Lastly, the shared knowledge must be effectively applied in order to ensure ownership by users and achieve the desired impact or change.

An effective KM strategy requires a great deal of flexibility as well as the ability to act and conceptualise at the same time. More specifically, the following actions have to be successfully implemented:

— Map out the existing information and materials: locate, collect, document, analyse, classify and process materials, starting with those already produced by the project;
— On the basis of the results of the training/action sessions and the support available in the field, fine-tune the methods and tools for identifying, collecting, capitalising and building on achievements;
— Translate, adapt, repackage and disseminate information in different forms and formats, depending on the target audiences;
— Collate, standardise, catalogue and classify the various products;
— Regularly review the materials developed and test them in the field;
— Develop databases to monitor which take into account the development of data/information over time, including lists of resource persons, partners, projects, etc.;
— Organise and support the sharing and dissemination of the available knowledge;
— Produce and publish appropriate training and technical materials and methodologies;
— Develop communication tools and supports (websites, CD-ROMs, videos, radio programmes, newspaper articles, brochures, etc.).

To **disseminate information, all means** whether **modern or traditional**, can be effectively used, bearing in mind that each tool has comparative advantages in terms of sharing with specific target groups according to the nature and scope of messages to be disseminated or exchanged.

Here are some examples:

— **Training and dissemination materials:** ranging from comprehensive guides, technical dossiers, datasheets

and specifications to posters, leaflets, etc., all of these materials must be produced taking into account the interests and learning needs of the target groups.

— **Written information** (articles, story telling, good practices, case studies, etc.): the project team and/or partners prepare written materials to be included in **newsletters** for distribution at regional or national level.

— **Digital films** on technical issues, for distribution in villages.

— **CD-ROMs and/or DVDs** with general information on the project, including its approach, aims, training syllabuses, guides, reports, etc. Every opportunity should be taken to present the CD-ROM (at meetings, workshops, training sessions, talks with project partners).

— **Media events,** including fairs, information caravans, agricultural exhibitions, etc. and other events which can be used to compare and share experiences and open up new prospects.

— **Radio programmes and radio drama/serials:** while ICTs are accelerating the development of the information society, older technologies such as the printed press and radio can also play a major role in this process.

— **Creation of a website** including a discussion forum (e.g. using SMS), enabling on line information open to participants and stakeholders in the project, and links to other relevant websites.

— **Provision of training** in the use of electronic media and IT, for participants in the project. This is now essential.

— **Exchange visits.**

— **Knowledge fairs.**

— **Networking.**

— **Community theatre, songs, story-telling, sayings and proverbs.**

During the implementation of action-oriented research projects, ATOL, a Belgian NGO, developed the so-called **DVDE** approach ("**D**écouvrir, **V**aloriser, **D**évelopper, **E**valuer" – discover, enhance value, develop, evaluate). The basis of this approach is the concept of "knowledge" explained in terms of "**ACCES**" ("**A**ttitude, **C**apacités et **C**ompétences, **E**xpériences et **S**avoir" – attitude, capacity and skills, experience and knowledge). The starting point of any learning process is attitude, and knowledge-acquisition necessarily implies moving through the four DVDE stages.

The first stage involves identifying the implicit knowledge of the target group in terms of ACCES. It is then necessary to make the most of this knowledge and enhance its value, and this means that facilitators must be able to recognise participants' capacity, experiences and knowledge making them explicit and sharing them with others. The next stage consists in developing, strengthening and expanding existing abilities through training activities and support during implementation so that abilities/capacity become accomplished skills. In order to monitor knowledge-acquisition effectively, some form of evaluation is also necessary: What did the individual or group learn and implement? What is the project's added value? Did men and women have equal opportunities to learn and put into practice what they had learned?

Clearly, KM in the field requires a relatively different approach from KM in an organisation, but the aim is the same in both cases: to collaborate, share and exchange knowledge in order to increase efficiency. The process is one of continuous learning which involves action, reflection, conceptualisation and planning for action (i.e. practice), and again reflection (documentation – after action review), conceptualisation (good practice), and planning for improved action with a greater impact – in other words, constant development.

---

1. This definition of knowledge management and implementation is derived from the one provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, "Dare to Share" : http://www.daretoshare.ch/en/Dare_To_Share

2. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skill and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge

3. Frochot, 2000.

4. FAO.

* The following passage from the English Wikipedia article on knowledge management may usefully complement the author's account of the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge: "The former is often subconscious, internalised, and the individual may or may not be aware of what he or she knows and how he or she accomplishes particular results. At the opposite end of the spectrum is conscious or explicit knowledge – knowledge that the individual holds explicitly and consciously in mental focus, and may communicate to others." See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_management. – Translator's note.

5. From the "Dare to Share" website.

6. This definition is freely adapted from those provided by CGIAR and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.