

Key messages and challenges emerge from Ontario KM Summit

In June, Knoco's Nick Milton participated in the 2006 Knowledge Summit held in Kingston, Ontario in Canada. Hosted by Queens University, this event brought together 'leading thinkers from the practitioner and academic world' on knowledge management. Along with Nick, those academics and KM practitioners invited to attend included such luminaries as Larry Prusak, Tom Davenport, Steven Denning, Hubert St. Onge, Nancy Dixon and Dorothy Leonard.

The process of the event was unusual: all participants were required to prepare an anonymous 'thought piece' in advance, which formed the starting points for a number of round-table discussions. On day two, a computer-moderated session helped define key messages and identify areas for future work, followed by a general plenary discussion.

One key theme permeating the event was the re-

Key messages from plenary discussion

- Effectiveness of KM depends on the organisation's ability and willingness to learn. 'Knowledge sharing is driven by the power of the question.'
- Concept of community is key to KM
- Dialogue is the core process behind the creation and sharing of knowledge
- Knowledge eventually becomes embedded in tasks and activities
- There is a 'first learning advantage' in acquiring crucial know-how before your competitors
- Within Knowledge-Based Organisations – and unlike others – employees are the owners of the key resource

emphasis of the importance of organisational culture, values and hierarchy, in enabling knowledge sharing. The consensus – academic and practical – is don't wait to change the culture before getting started with KM, but make sure the conversation about organisational values begins

very early in the process.

Leadership must boldly state its aims to be a learning or sharing organisation, because this creates tension with the default behaviours in the organisation, and opens the way to effective low-level interventions.

An interesting, crisp definition of knowledge was offered by Hubert St. Onge: 'Knowledge is the intellectual ability to take effective action'. Hubert spoke strongly about knowledge being in service of capability, and knowledge management being in service of helping the organisation reach its



KM set sail when this St. Lawrence riverboat hosted some of the world's leading KM thinkers on a Thousand Islands cruise

strategic intent by developing the required capabilities. He also discussed the concept of 'metacapabilities' or those things that allow you to learn, such as collaboration, empowerment, strategic thinking. These give a sort of 'learning agility' to an organisation, Hubert said, making some organisations into better and faster learners.

Another persistent topic of discussion was the importance of dialogue and conversations (although Nick says he made the point that not all conversations are about sharing knowledge!). One participant offered this quote: 'Organisations perform at the level of their ability to have conversations'. There was also general recognition between the practitioners that KM should be driven by knowledge pull not knowledge push, though there was no consensus about how to drive that pull.

Plans are in progress to publish a book of the conference workings, and we'll let you know when this is coming out.

Future challenges for KM, identified and ranked at the Summit

- 1 How does a firm identify which knowledge is most strategic?
- 2 How are authority, leadership and governance exercised to enable knowledge production?
- 3 How do we define/measure the real contribution of KM?
- 4 How do we rework the definition of 'the firm' to incorporate the knowledge resource?
- 5 How do we make dialogue more productive?
- 6 How do we support sustained long term commitment to knowledge growth?
- 7 What is the emotional side of knowledge based organisations?
- 8 How do we enhance the demand for knowledge in an organisation?
- 9 How do we reliably implement and sustain KM?
- 10 What exactly is included in, or excluded from, the term 'knowledge management'?

Knowledge Management Plans

One of the most exciting KM developments in the last few years is the introduction of Knowledge Management Plans. These documents may well provide the 'missing link' between an organisation's desire to learn and improve, and the need of each individual employee to know 'what I need to do'. These plans provide a way both to focus the KM effort for a project or within a department, and to make clear the actions needed to deliver the value inherent in the knowledge. We have helped apply KM plans in the mining, construction and petroleum sectors, and are convinced of the value they can bring.

Those of you familiar with risk management processes will understand some of the principles involved. Before a project or major cycle of work, the team members meet in a KM Planning Workshop and define the core knowledge they need to acquire in

order to deliver their aspirational performance. They discuss where this knowledge may be sourced from, the processes that need to be put into place to acquire it, the actions which need to be taken, identify accountable individuals, and the mechanisms by which any new knowledge will be captured and shared with the rest of the organisation.

By creating a KM plan and keeping it live as work progresses, the team not only ensures that the right people take the right actions to get the right knowledge at the right time, but also provides an audit trail so that senior management can be confident that their expectations for KM are being met, and that their investment in KM is worthwhile. It also gives an external demonstration of KM, and at least one major procurement organization recently used the 'inclusion and description of the vendor's KM plan' as a key differentiator between bids.

KM training courses, public and private



Delegates at the Volvo Group KM course run by Knoco's Carol Gorelick in Curitiba, Brazil.

Knoco continues to offer both public and client-specific training in KM

Recently, Carol Gorelick was in Brazil, offering training to project managers within the Volvo Group as part of the selective leadership development Challenger Program (offered by Chalmers University). Participants came to Curitiba, Brazil from different Volvo line organizations in France, Sweden, U.K. and U.S.

At the London-based public event (operated by Unicom) attendees came from a diverse range of industries – insurance, call centre management, pharmaceuticals, and construction. Participants ranged from people starting to learn about KM to a newly appointed Knowledge Manager looking for hints and tips on how to be successful in the role.



Knoco's Tom Young presents Aspen Insurance COO Sarah Cooper with her certificate in KM at the London public course.

Knoco in print

Would you like to be a 'published author'?

Tom is currently working on a new book called *Knowledge management for services, operations*

and production (a follow-up to

Nick's acclaimed book *KM for teams and projects*) and is looking for case studies. We are already hoping to include case studies from BP, the BBC, Baker McKenzie, General Motors, Orange and Chase Manhattan Bank, but if you have a good story to tell about how you currently manage knowledge in continuous operations, then contact Tom at tom.young@knoco.co.uk

He would be delighted to include your contribution.

Meanwhile, we hope you caught Ian's cover-page article in *Inside Knowledge* called 'Blue Sky thinking; KM and culture in South Africa'. If you didn't, it's summarized on page 4 of this issue. The current issue of *Inside Knowledge* (volume 10, issue 1) contains an interview (pictured opposite) with Nick Milton as part of the series 'The Knowledge'. Later this year, the magazine will contain a *Masterclass* article from Nick and Tom entitled 'How to implement KM', based on our six-step implementation model. In addition, Nick is co-authoring an article on the latest implementation in BP Major Projects, which is being submitted to the Society of Petroleum Engineers.

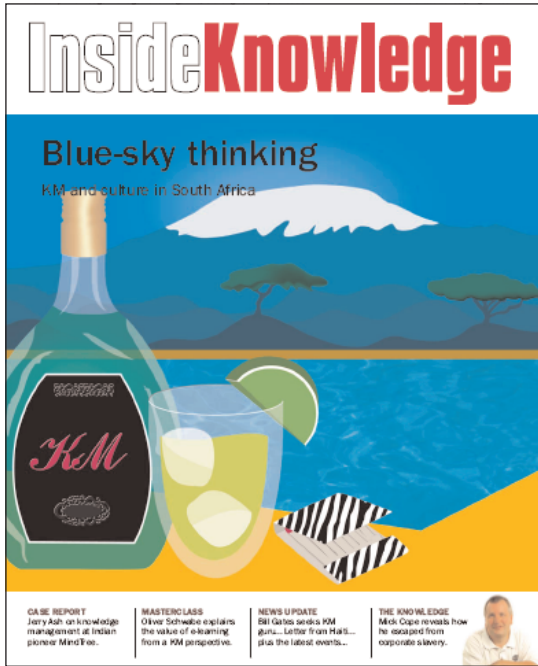


source: Inside Knowledge

Knoco family update!

Our latest piece of good news is that Nick has become engaged to be married. I am sure we all join in sending Nick and Cathy our very best wishes for their new life together.

Blue Sky thinking



Knoco South Africa was asked by *Inside Knowledge* for a perspective on KM in post-apartheid South Africa. The article became the cover feature for the July/August issue. Although knowledge-centered leadership isn't new to Africa, the modern business concept of Knowledge Management is. In a

booming economy, where almost every facet of business is faced with the same challenge, namely delivery, Knowledge Management should be playing a significantly more active role to maximise the

capacity of scarce resources available. The challenge is one of executive/ managerial understanding and perception of value.

The application of KM best practice should not only serve to protect the existing knowledge base into the future, but also to develop it through the integration of new knowledge from the new, rapidly emerging breadth of diversity now available to South African organisations. Despite some excellent examples, where first-mover advantage is being enjoyed through knowledge sharing and development of innovative new ideas, KM is not yet a serious agenda topic for most organizations. This is tragic, as many new employees need to access knowledge and experience in order to develop faster in this demanding environment of change.

To read more, take a look at *Inside Knowledge*, v9, issue 10. Ian would love to know what you think, too, so send him your thoughts at ian.corbett@knoco.co.za.

KM casts off!

What was it about KM and riverboats this summer? We don't know! But here are two more KM-related vessels to complement the Ontario Summit riverboat ...



This lovely vessel, at Streatley on the Thames, was the June dinner venue for the KIN (Knowledge and Information Network) ...



while this boat took the BP Drilling KM workshop, plus guest Ewen Semple, on a Thames cruise at Windsor two weeks later.