

SDC's Knowledge Management Tool Kit

Instrument to understand and exchange

by Axel Roduit¹

The right tool

A hammer is a hand tool consisting of a heavy usually steel head held transversely on the end by a handle, used for driving in nails, etc. A saw is a hand tool too, for cutting wood, metal, etc., having a blade with teeth along one edge.

These objects are similar in their nature. Both are hand tools. Both are used to build or to destroy, to work or to fix things. But they are different in their functions. A hammer is used to hammer, and a saw to saw. Of course you could hammer with a saw and saw with a hammer and never notice that you are acting a little bit strangely.

When you have a work to achieve, you need tools. And when you have a very specific job to do, you have to choose the right instruments to do it in the most appropriate way. But sometimes, when you are not aware of the huge variety of tools existing, or when there are so many tools in the messy box, the possibility is high to be mistaken in the choice of the right one. It could conduct to a waste of time, money, strength and maybe reputation, especially if you are hammering with a saw!

This allegory can easily be translated in the development field, particularly in the knowledge management part of this complex activity.

An organisation such as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation doesn't work with hammers or saws in order to tackle its challenges. It uses knowledge, competences and experiences of its collaborators.

¹ Axel Roduit studied political science and is presently on an internship with SDC's section Knowledge and Research.

These are the only capital of such an agency. SDC knows this fact and uphold that this capital grows when it is used, when it flows.

But this capital proves to be really hard to manage. Bringing the right person with the appropriate knowledge at the right time isn't an easy task. You have to foster a culture of exchange, to ease interne tensions, to create an environment which permits people, together with fellow workers and external partners to share knowledge and to learn in order to make knowledge flow through the institution and between people. You also have to develop instruments and methods enabling people to achieve their jobs efficiently using their own capacities or those present in the institution. You have to ensure that important knowledge or competences don't leave the institution. And so on.

That is the work of the Knowledge desk of SDC's section Knowledge and Research (see box).

Knowledge desk of SDC's section Knowledge and Research

The SDC defines "knowledge management" as a more conscious use of knowledge and experience. Learning means adapting – and changing – practices, procedures, and programs with the aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of the activities. By embedding the knowledge of the collaborators, the experience gained from programs and projects as well as the new insights obtained from research and the international discussion into the SDC, the foundation for different practices is created. The objective of the SDC as a learning organization is to make this endeavour a core concern.

Established in 2001, The "Knowledge" desk is mainly concerned with advising the SDC, its organizational units, staff, and partners on the optimization of knowledge development and learning processes, as well as on the safeguarding of knowledge both in its own work and in the partnerships and networks in which the SDC is actively involved.

Knowledge Management Tool Kit

Storytelling is a narrative technique that helps individuals and groups to connect with each other, share their experiences and reflect on practice in a way that energizes and creates lasting bonds. "Yellow pages" is a tool to help people to find others in their organisation who have the knowledge and expertise they need for a particular task or project.

These tools are similar in their nature. Both are knowledge management methods. But they are different in their functions. And that was the purpose of the SDC's Knowledge Management Tool Kit to define, explain, present and distinguish the different tools and methods that have proved useful in practice.

Indeed, the SDC did dispose of a considerable number of documents containing or describing such methods. However, up until now, there was no individual document or sharewebsite, i.e., no SDC Tool Kit, containing all of the methods necessary for implementing the tasks of our institution.

The Knowledge desk of SDC's section Knowledge and Research, in partnership with Agridea, has now developed such a toolkit. Henceforth, all of the pertinent methods existing will be available for downloading in all of the SDC's working languages on the sharewebsite:

<http://www.daretoshare.ch/>

Moreover, in order to ensure that this new toolkit is embedded as firmly as possible at Headquarters level, every method is presented individually, month after month, in the form of a do-it-yourself calendar and of business cards for collectioning.

In the end, the SDC's Knowledge Management Tool Kit aims to provide to SDC's staff a whole range of methods helping them to achieve their tasks by enabling them to use and exchange their knowledge and experiences most appropriately.

The two faces of the business cards

Yellow Pages

An organisational "yellow pages" is a tool to help people to find others within their organisation, who have the knowledge and expertise they need for a particular task or project. It is like a staff directory including details about knowledge, skills, experience and interests. The greatest value comes from a multitude of simple ten-minute conversations in which people ask each other for a quick word of advice or a steer in the right direction.

SDC – Knowledge Management Toolkit

How to go about it?

1. Define the purpose of the yellow pages.
2. Create ownership with the people.
3. Balance formal with informal information.
4. Include name, job title, team, job description, current projects, professional qualifications, CV, areas of knowledge and expertise, areas of interest, key contacts (internal and external), membership of knowledge networks or CoPs, contact information.
5. Organise entries for ease of loading and retrieval.
6. Keep it up-to-date.
7. Encourage use.

More information: www.daretoshare.ch

The SDC's Knowledge desk visual identity



The June calendar sheet with the explanations of the “Yellow Pages” tool



Yellow Pages

An organisational “yellow pages” is a tool to help people to find others in their organisation who have the knowledge and expertise they need for a particular task or project. It is like a staff directory including details about knowledge, skills, experience and interests. The “yellow pages” is electronic rather than paper-based, so that users can efficiently search information. “Yellow pages” are particularly beneficial in organisations that are over a certain size or that are spread around in different locations, and so people don’t have the opportunity to get to know each other well. “Yellow pages” are helping organisations to ‘know what they know’. They allow to find people and to get access to their tacit knowledge. A “yellow pages” is not necessarily aimed at those embarking on a major project or piece of work; often the greatest value comes from a multitude of simple ten-minute conversations in which people ask each other for a quick word of advice or a steer in the right direction.

How to go about it?

1. Be clear about your aims: What purpose will the yellow pages serve?
2. Create ownership with the people contributing to, and using, the system.
3. Balance formal with informal information. Personal information and a photograph help in building contacts.
4. Include name, job title, team, job description, current projects, professional qualifications, CV, areas of knowledge and expertise, areas of interest, key contacts (internal and external), membership of knowledge networks or CoPs, contact information.
5. Organise entries for ease of loading and retrieval.
6. Keep it up-to-date.
7. Encouraging use – make marketing efforts to create peoples curiosity.



SDC – Knowledge Management Toolkit
More information: www.daretoshare.ch