Summary of KM Australia 2014 (Crossing Borders)

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Overview

I was invited to speak on a panel at the Knowledge Management (KM) Australia Congress in Sydney 22-23 July. The panel was focused on KM across organisational functions and chaired by Brigid Costello from Comcare. The other panel members included Alice Balnaves-Knyvett (Alrosa Services) and Luke Grange from Yammer (Microsoft). We were invited because of our experience across a range of sector areas and how this experience has contributed to how we share knowledge and build capacity in our workplaces. We were also invited as we are not 'knowledge managers' explicitly by trade. Bridget was particularly interested in my work as a media artist and researcher and how this "crossed borders" and informed my work in the public sector.

The conference covered a broad range of topics through the frame of "crossing borders". There was a diverse representation from private and public sector agencies including NSW fire Service, Vic Transport, World Bank, NSW Office of Environment, Microsoft, Oracle, National Library, Deutsche Bank and many more.

I found that many of the papers were of great significance to our work in the Information Management team and the broader department. In short, the execution of a successful KM strategy in organisations trigger higher levels of engagement from staff, better communications across the organisation and better outcomes for business. Some of the key principles around Knowledge Management are documented in the "Background" section of the paper.

Highlights

The keynote by Dave Snowden ([@snowded](#))set the stage by throwing out some very challenging statements about human behaviour and knowledge management. A number of his provocations resonated with regards to our current work environment, in particular: change management and the 'energy efficiency' narrative. You can listed to the podcast of Dave's presentation here: http://cognitive-edge.com/library/more/podcasts/km-australia-2014-keynote/

One of the first things he said, that immediately resonated for me was the difference between 'narrative' and 'storytelling' and how that the narrative process is highly structured and codified, and therefore not conducive to learning or human understanding. He then talked about how storytelling did work in terms of building knowledge in communities and organisations as the story is brought to the scale of the human and there is a direct connection to the individual, rather than a grand meta-narrative that is supposed to be a catch all. There are some relevant points in this post on Dave's blog: http://cognitive-edge.com/blog/entry/6306/scaling-avoiding-the-perversion-of-order/

He also talked about the value of anecdotal data, where knowledge can be easily passed on through peer-to-peer channels because the information does not get diluted, lost, mediated and interpreted. And why is this approach useful in terms of knowledge frameworks and decision making? In short, this is because our brain does not work like a computer. He states that:
The brain is not a 'computer' but it is:!

- **Embodied:** extra-neural!
- **Embedded:** scaffolding!
- **Enacted:** co-evolve with reality!
- **Extended:** into the environment!

He did touch on the problem of Cartesian thinking or the Cartesian Error (mind split from body): because we are embodied and our minds are not separate from our physical existence in the world.

Dave talked about the success of developing micro-narratives by peer-to-peer storytelling. He used the example of young girls who were exposed to sexual abuse in Africa working with other children in the community as 'cultural ethnographers' to build awareness of danger signs and teaching children in the community ways to be safe. The experience of these young people provided a direct link, both in terms of culture and experience. To think about this in reverse, when a European aid worker or psychologist tries to communicate to young people at risk, they face two barriers - one of culture and one of experience.

One of the things he mentioned in his talk, was about the meaningfulness of gathering knowledge and that it is always the coffee conversations and not the formal presentations that generate ideas and linkages. This was very true for me, as I met a knowledge manager working for DB Results and they have done some work with Sustainability Vic about developing an app for renovators called the "Smarter Renovation Planer". Here is a link to the project: http://www.dbresults.com.au/news/db-results-partners-deliver-sustainability-victorias-online-tool-smarter-renovations/ They have also been doing some work with the Victorian govenrment with smart meters.

Another presentation which I also found very useful/relevant was titled "Knowledge management improving the effective delivery of science" by Angela McCormack (@AngeMcCormack) who is the Senior Team Leader Knowledge Management, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage.

Her presentation looked at some of the great work that had been happening across OEH in knowledge management. I was especially interested in the work that has been evolving on an app developed for scientists to record data in the field. I am hoping to find out more information about the app project, especially how it relates to the focus on sustainable behavior change in some some programs in OEH. Here is a link to the recently published Knowledge Management Strategy for OEH: http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/knowledgestrategy/index.htm. The OEH website states that:

The strategy identifies six 'knowledge themes', each with a Steering Committee. The Steering Committees work together to identify and review existing and emerging knowledge needs. Steering Committees include managers, scientific experts and planners from across OEH (and the EPA for the Pollution knowledge theme) who assess the data, information and knowledge that are already available and identify knowledge needs. Steering Committees develop, prioritise and evaluate actions to meet the priority knowledge needs. Environmental monitoring, and biophysical, social, cultural and economic knowledge, are fundamental needs for each theme.

More information on the knowledge themes is available in information sheets:
- [Biodiversity](#)
- [Climate Change Impacts & Adaptation](#)
- [Coastal, Estuarine & Marine Environments](#)
- [Landscape Management](#)
- [Pollution](#)
- [Water & Wetlands](#)

There is also a pdf of the high level strategy on the website here:
http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/knowledgestrategy/130598KnowledgeStrategy.pdf

To summarise, the conference was very valuable in terms of thinking of ways to improve the way we work together, share and build knowledge about our work. There are many potential opportunities to improve outcomes for policy and programs by taking on board some of the principles in the field of knowledge management. It was also good to see that some of the approaches that our team have taken in the past have currency in this context, in particular having two way communications channels (e.g. social media) and providing opportunities for audiences to contribute to the knowledge making process. We have used qualitative and quantitative measures: through gathering "Your Stories" via the LivingGreener and YourEnergySavings websites and using Google Analytics data to inform what content our audiences are interested in. It is also good to know that the diversity of the background, skills and experience held by our team is valuable in terms of supporting better knowledge management of our material.

Find out more about the KM Australia Congress
More information can be found in Twitter using the [#kmaus](#) hash tag, or you can view the Twitter feed on this spreadsheet:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0ApIpy4UhniKadGZwamgyRTlBeXdkMDlLTWpDdG5ib3c&usp=sharing#gid=1

There is also a Storyify board to see images and selected tweets:
https://storify.com/soscall/km-australia-2014-2015

Background
What is knowledge management? What makes it different to information management?

Not having much experience with the discipline of knowledge management, albeit being assured that my work and career had great context, I was keen to learn more.

Knowledge Management is a term that started to get used around 1990 as a way to describe organising an organisation's information and knowledge holistically. KM World shared these definitions:

> Very early on in the KM movement, Davenport (1994) offered the still widely quoted definition:"Knowledge management is the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge."

A few years later, the Gartner Group created another second definition of KM, which is perhaps the most frequently cited one (Duhon, 1998):

> "Knowledge management is a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving, and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets. These assets may include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and previously un-captured expertise and experience in individual workers."

So the concept certainly includes all of the types of material that would be thought of as relevant to "information management" but includes much more - the information that people hold and the value that they add to an organisation. Corporate knowledge is one such example.

To demonstrate how KM differs from IM: organisations realise that intellectual capital or corporate knowledge is a valuable asset that can be managed as effectively as physical assets to improve performance. The focus of knowledge management is connecting people, processes and technology for the purpose of leveraging corporate knowledge.

Knowledge management efforts usually focus on organisational objectives such as improved performance, competitive advantage, innovation, sharing lessons learned, integration and continuous improvement of the organisation. KM efforts also overlap with organisational learning and may be distinguished from L&D by a greater focus on the management of knowledge as a strategic asset and a focus on encouraging the sharing of knowledge. KM is seen as an enabler of organisational learning.

A simple way of describing the difference between IM and KM was located on the Knowledge Management for Development website, as a comment contributed by Nondlela Ndabezith:

Information has emphasis on human involvement in auditing, acquiring, storing, retrieving and disseminating information while knowlwdge (sic) management has emphasis on human involvement in capturing, creating, sharing, learning and contextualising information.

It would appear that to create strong KM in an organisation involves taking the next step from just managing information and data to seeing where the opportunities lie in streamlining and improving business processes and organisational capacity.

Knowledge Management and Innovation
Driving innovative projects and processes on budget and on time is a challenge; however organisations are increasingly realising the value of knowledge management in terms of working through such challenges – with positive outcomes.

With constant pressure to be lean, produce more with less, to share knowledge and be more collaborative, knowledge managers and their teams are playing a changing and critical role in the development, management, and successful delivery of core business objectives and projects.

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