

Extended abstract
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Communities of Practice and the Development of Comprehensive Knowledge Management Models

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The eOSMO - *Providing Support for Advancing Social and Health Care Services through New Innovations in Knowledge Management* project¹ developed knowledge management (KM) solutions for four organisations in the social and health care sector. The project also developed a regional network of KM and a knowledge-enhancing career path model.

Communities of Practice as Developers

The core of the development efforts was built around different communities of practice (CP). Members of a CP wish to share their knowledge, to learn together, and to develop new knowledge and skills through constant interaction with one another within the framework of the shared values (see Wenger 2006; Hakkarainen et al. 2003). The CPs developed knowledge management tools and comprehensive models which were suitable for their own organisation. The development efforts were supported by coaching, which used an approach that emphasised dialogue to create a shared understanding of the subject to be developed. This is how the CPs produced different solutions and chose the most well-suited ones for their own organisation.

Comprehensive Models of Knowledge Management

KM can be defined as referring to all purposeful and planned activities which are used to renew, foster, develop, share, utilise and acquire the knowledge required by the strategy of an organisation (Viitala 2007). Hence development efforts relating to the organisation's KM were started by a CP which involved the organisation's top leadership. This CP defined the strategic core competencies of the organisation, which were founded on the organisation's strategy, goals, future challenges and changes in the operating environment.

¹ The eOSMO – *Providing Support for Advancing Social and Health Care Services through New Innovations in Knowledge Management* – project is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), the North Karelia Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, as well as by the Joint Municipal Authority for Medical and Social Services in North Karelia, the City of Joensuu, the Liperi-Outokumpu cooperation area and the municipality of Heinävesi. The project is carried out in cooperation between the North Karelia University of Applied Sciences, Aducate – the Centre for Training and Development of the University of Eastern Finland, and the Adult Education Centre of North Karelia.

After this, a CP involving the superiors and employees of the organisation was set up to develop tools and instructions for mapping the existing knowledge and drafting a knowledge development plan. These tools and instructions included knowledge maps, knowledge surveys, individual and group discussions and knowledge development plans at different levels of the organisation. The tools were tested in trial projects. The experiences gained from the trial projects served as the foundation for the organisation's leadership to develop, with the help of a 'dynamic puzzle', a comprehensive KM model suitable for the organisation's needs, strategic goals and structures. The pieces of the puzzle describe the different components of KM (see Figure 1), which can be dynamically joined together in different combinations to meet the needs of the organisation. The KM models were described in writing and they included process descriptions and flow charts.

Knowledge management in organisations (eOSMO project)

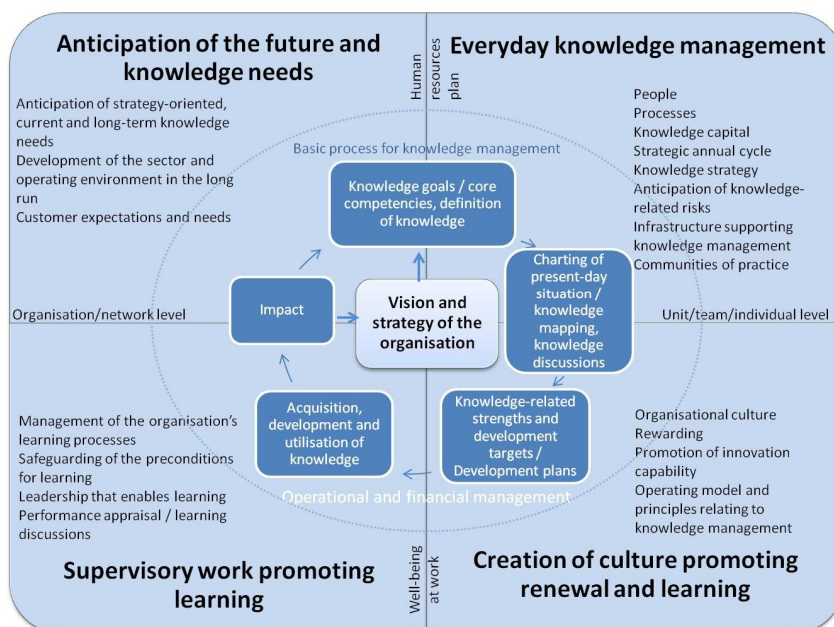


Figure 1. Knowledge management and leadership in the eOSMO project. © The eOSMO project, Arttu Puhakka, Katja Väyrynen, Päivi Sihvo.

KM should be linked to decision-making which is dependent on, or affected by, knowledge resources (Boudreau & Ramstad 2010). Hence, the KM models were included as part of the organisations' operational and financial management. This can be seen in the process descriptions, in which KM is linked to financial and operational management and human resources planning. This is how KM supports operational and financial management and enables activities which are in accordance with the organisation's strategy (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Knowledge management as part of operational and financial management. © The eOSMO project, Arttu Puhakka, Katja Väyrynen, Päivi Sihvo.

Knowledge-Enhancing Career Path Model

The project also developed operating models promoting knowledge assurance, renewal, sharing and development. This gave birth to the idea of a knowledge enhancing career path model, which looks at knowledge development from the viewpoint of the goals of the organisation and the individual². The significance of tacit knowledge and knowledge sharing were highlighted, which gave birth to the idea of a 'key expert'. A key expert has strategically significant knowledge the sharing and transfer of which should be taken care of within the organisation. This is why it is important to recognise key experts and to utilise their knowledge.

Regional Network of Knowledge Management

The project established a regional network of KM for the social and health care sector, which works in accordance with the principles of the community of practice. The central tasks of the network are to foresee regional knowledge needs, to direct the knowledge development efforts in accordance with the regional strategy, and to support the regional actors in issues relating to knowledge management. This is how the network plays a role in the renewal of social and health care services.

² At the time of writing this article, the modelling is still ongoing.

Conclusions

A total of four comprehensive, organisation-oriented KM models were created. These models cannot be transferred to other organisations without making the necessary, organisation-specific alterations. Indeed, each organisation should develop and create a model of its own, which is suitable in view of the strategy, goals and operations of the organisation.

The KM model presented in Figure 1 and the 'dynamic puzzle' have proven to be efficient tools in the development of the KM models and in their integration into the organisation's operations. The development of the process descriptions, instructions and forms relating to the comprehensive model provide support for understanding the significance of KM, the structuring of the entity, and the introduction of the model. They can also be used to ensure that KM becomes part of the organisation's operational and financial management. However, the main benefits of the development efforts relating to KM can be found in the emerging dialogue on the organisation's future, goals and knowledge base.

The CPs in the eOSMO project were consciously constructed and the members had been selected based on their interest and they represented the different levels and professions of the organisations. They served as communities for learning and development in which the members learned and developed their organisations' knowledge management and the related tools while seeking to overcome the limitations of their current practices. In this respect, the CP can be referred to as innovative communities of practice. The organisations also have unofficial CP, but in our opinion, it is the consciously formed CP that constitute the unused resource within organisations.

It seems that the introduction of the KM model requires the following things: KM as an integral part of operational and financial management, commitment of the leadership and superiors, in-depth understanding of KM throughout the organisation, and goal-oriented leadership that enables learning at different levels of the organisation. Understanding of KM requires personal reflection of its significance, testing the developed tools within the organisation, and thus a clear vision of KM and leadership as a whole.

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