

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn

The actions knowledge and information managers should consider to keep knowledge flowing in their organisations during a downturn

Sandra Ward, Principal Consultant

Beaworthy Consulting

Ian Wooler, Director

IDW Ltd

Abstract

A knowledge rich or knowledge enabled organisation is one in which knowledge flows – through creation, sharing, transfer and retention activities – seamlessly from the parts that have it, to the parts that need it. Any restriction or blockage to the flow of knowledge can cause partial or total failure of the organisational system. Equally, any restriction or blockage to the flow of knowledge within an organisation's supply chain, including its business partnerships and relationships with others, can cause a partial or total failure of the organisational environment in which it operates. Knowledge is the lifeblood of an organisation and knowledge and information managers have a key role to play in keeping knowledge flowing, used and retained in their organisations. This role is particularly important during a difficult economic climate. The impact of budget cuts, office closures, voluntary and compulsory redundancies, falling demand and reductions in bank lending can each have unintended consequences, including acting as barriers - the restrictions or blockages - to the flow of knowledge. This article identifies some of these barriers and highlights the knowledge transfer and retention actions that knowledge and information managers should consider to avoid knowledge loss and keep knowledge flowing in their organisations during a downturn.

The final peer reviewed version of this paper was published in Business Information Review, Sage Publications, 2010, 27/4, 253-262, <http://bir.sagepub.com/content/27/4/253.full.pdf+html>

Knowledge - the lifeblood of an organisation

Organisations are complex adaptive systems (Pascale, Millemann, Gioja, 2000) and knowledge is the lifeblood flowing through their veins and arteries (their people, culture, processes and technologies). If an organisation is to operate effectively and efficiently its knowledge should flow freely and quickly from the parts of the organisation that have it to the parts that need it. Any restriction or blockage to the flow of knowledge can cause partial or total failure of the organisational system. The role of knowledge and information managers in organisations is, in part, to ensure that all forms of knowledge - tacit¹, implicit² and explicit³ - flow freely and quickly. This means treating knowledge as an organisational asset and having in place the appropriate approaches, tools and techniques - enabled by supportive leadership - across 'The Blend' of the core processes and enablers which underpin the flow, and access to organisational knowledge. This blend is often depicted as a knowledge cycle that links the following steps in a circle of activity: Creation and/or Finding; Capturing, Organising, and Maintaining; Sharing, Disseminating, Transferring; and Using; Re-using which leads back to Creation in a virtuous circle. (Nakkiran N Sunnassee, David A Sewry, 2002).

The model below presents the blend of processes in linear form and shows how they can be underpinned by some of the knowledge and information management tools and techniques that support knowledge flow within teams, projects and across the organisation. Whilst the tools and techniques included in the model below have been aligned with core elements of knowledge flow, it is recognised that the application of each individual tool and technique will, of itself, contribute to aspects of knowledge creation, sharing transfer and retention.

Figure 1 - The blend of core processes and enablers (approaches and tools and techniques) of knowledge flow

¹ Tacit knowledge is knowledge that is very difficult to communicate and express (make explicit) in documents, processes and systems for use by others

² Implicit knowledge is personal and organisational knowledge that can be transformed, by using, knowledge management techniques, into formats that can be shared with and transferred to others

³ Explicit knowledge is knowledge that is easily codified and normally shared asynchronously

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn

Knowledge Flow	Knowledge Creation	Knowledge Sharing	Knowledge Transfer	Knowledge Retention
Approaches	Actions to enable organisations to acquire and create the new knowledge required to develop and grow; awareness that new knowledge is created through work experience and as a result of sharing, transfer and retention activities	Developing an organisational environment and culture that values and recognises the power of knowledge sharing – internally and externally – as a key enabler of knowledge flow and success	Having a plan in place to identify and prioritise knowledge transfer targets; actions to facilitate knowledge transfer; and measures to assess the effectiveness and impact of knowledge transfer activities	Knowing what knowledge is important to an organisation; having an understanding of the areas of knowledge at risk; and managing organisational knowledge as a strategic asset
Tools and Techniques include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After action review • Anecdote circles • Knowledge cafés • Knowledge speed dating • Learn before doing • Peer assist • Sense making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities of practice • Expertise finders • Keep in touch meetings • Lunch and learns • Social media • Story telling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmarking • Boundary objects • Gifted network • Good practice guidance • Lessons learnt • Role shadowing • Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alumni • Knowledge assets • Knowledge domain mapping • Knowledge harvesting • Social network analysis

Knowledge Flow and its enabling building blocks

We have used the term knowledge flow to encompass the core knowledge management processes and enablers of knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, and knowledge retention. Each is important and, together, they need to be managed holistically as part of the 'building blocks' foundation framework highlighted in Figure 2 below. For us, knowledge flows are about understanding the way knowledge currently operates and works for an organisation i.e. its knowledge ecosystem. Mapping knowledge flow provides a foundation for knowledge management action. This understanding can be developed by exploring how the organisation operates its business processes through a knowledge lens – and examining just how knowledge flows through each process and between processes as well as up and down the organisation.

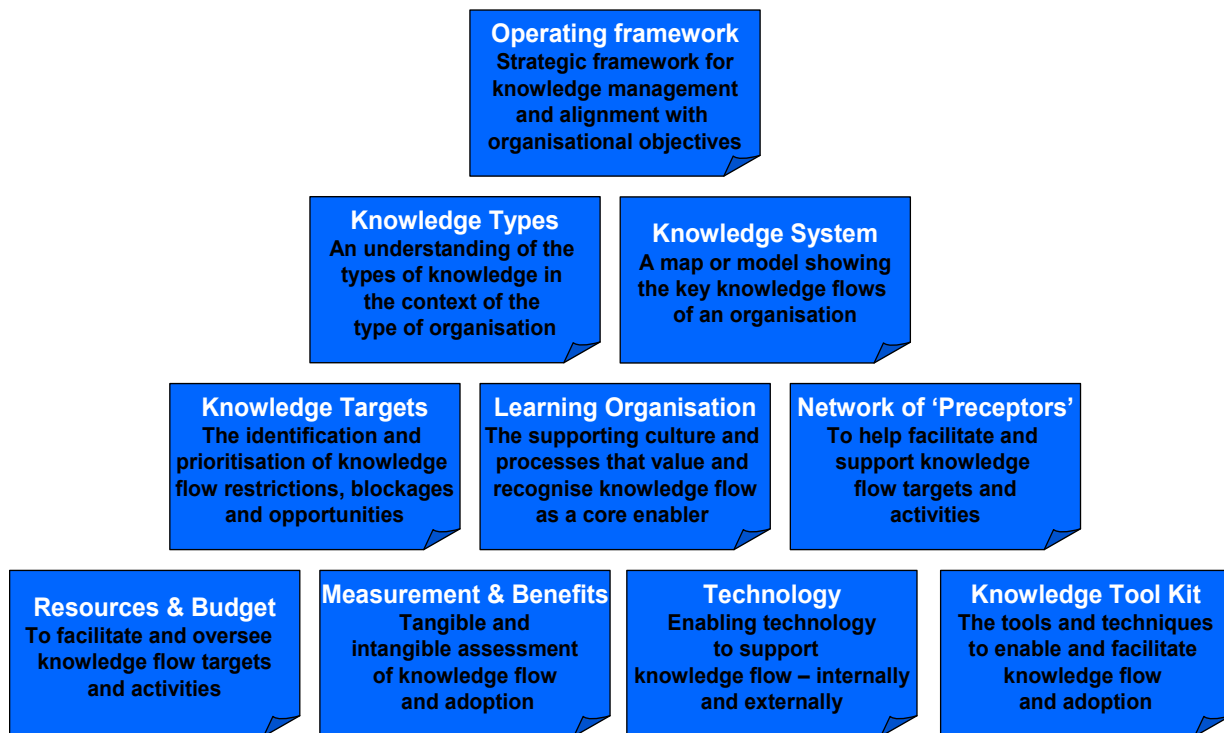
The analysis of flow and its purpose determines the knowledge needed at key points and its sources; the knowledge created and its use; the opportunities for reflecting on experience; the enablers and barriers to the flow; and how these flows fit together to build the organisation's knowledge system as noted in our model, Figure 2. This view is reinforced by others: "Knowledge flows along existing pathways in organisations. If we want to understand how to improve the flow of knowledge, we need to understand those pathways". (Larry Prusak, 2009).

Many readers will be familiar with the value, benefits, approaches, tools and techniques of knowledge and information management, (some of which are illustrated in Figure 1 above). They will have 'quick wins', plans, projects, resources and strategies in place to pilot, use and embed those approaches, tools and techniques. These will have been selected as best supporting their organisation's culture, challenges, business needs and level of knowledge and information management maturity. Readers will also know that the alignment of the approaches to knowledge and information with an organisation's overall strategy and objectives is absolutely critical for success.

An example of the alignment of the key aspects of knowledge and information management required to support the flow of organisational knowledge is illustrated below. The model presents a set of 'building blocks' and has been developed and used by the authors of this article to help organisations identify and prioritise their knowledge flow challenges.

Figure 2 - The building blocks required to keep knowledge flowing in organisations

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn



The model reinforces the importance of understanding how knowledge works for the organisation (its knowledge types and knowledge system) as a foundation for identifying opportunities to enhance knowledge flow by facilitating knowledge creation, sharing, transfer and retention. It recognises the importance of culture (organisational values and behaviours) and also skills. Preceptors understand the principles, practices, tools and techniques (the knowledge toolkit) used to enable knowledge flow and work with groups to help them to learn about and embed approaches to accelerate knowledge flow through the organisation. Resource investment, technology and the knowledge toolkit fuel knowledge flow and measurement techniques assess the value reaped by the organisation.

But what happens when something disrupts or disturbs an organisational system and the environment in which it operates - a change so powerful as to cause a restriction or blockage in the flow of knowledge?

The knowledge flow related challenges of the current economic climate

The powerful change we are talking about is the current economic climate and specifically, the organisational knowledge flow challenges resulting from downsizing, redundancy (voluntary or otherwise), budget cuts, doing more with less, relocation, staff movement and operating in an uncertain and changing environment. For those in the UK Public Sector the plans announced in the October Spending Review (HM Treasury, 2010) and subsequent announcements are dramatically impacting their organisations and the services provided. For those working in UK non-departmental public bodies - sometimes referred to as quangos - the prospect of closure/merger is very real. Key points announced in the Spending Review, with further work and decisions still to be taken, include: plans to axe 192 public bodies and merge 118; an average 19% four-year cut in departmental budgets; and about 490,000 public sector jobs likely to be lost. For those in the Private Sector the increased costs of doing business - including the Government's planned increases to VAT, regulated rail fares and retirement age - will impact their organisations at a time when growth figures are weak and the prospect of a double-dip recession remains in newspaper headlines. And for those in Charities and Not for Profit organisations the current economic climate has resulted in less funds, increased costs, and consequent pressure on capacity for action. In all these contexts, effective use of knowledge can help achieve organisational survival and transformation.

Knowledge flows are transient and difficult to manage. Many would argue that you can't manage knowledge but what you can do is manage the environment - the organisational culture, processes and technologies - that optimises knowledge. This is challenging at the best of times, but very challenging given the current economic climate.

The further complexity facing knowledge and information managers and the changes impacting organisational systems currently includes:

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn

- Dealing with uncertainty: the uncertainty of individuals about the future of their role, team, department and organisation. Uncertainty can lead to a reduction in performance as the strategic direction of an organisation becomes less clear because budgets and targets have yet to be agreed. Many readers may be able to relate to a feeling of 'a rabbit caught in headlights', not knowing which way to turn or what action to take. Uncertainty can lead to inaction. It can also lead to knowledge hoarding as individuals protect their patch
- Understanding trends in motivation and morale: the motivation and morale of individuals is likely to be impacted by organisational and personal change. Many readers will be familiar with approaches to change management and the Denial, Resistance, Exploration, Commitment change curve model adapted from the 5 stages of grief (Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, 1969) which highlights the psychological stages experienced by individuals going through change. A lack of motivation or a dip in morale can lead to time wasting, risk avoidance, and missed targets
- Mitigating against knowledge loss: the knowledge that is likely to be lost as a result of downsizing or budget cuts (impacting use of consultants/contractors). Many readers and their organisations will be in the process of downsizing, through voluntary redundancy or other means. Tacit knowledge can be lost as staff (and consultants/contractors) leave an organisation and tacit knowledge can be made harder to access as staff move to different roles and locations within new functions or merged organisations. Explicit knowledge can be misplaced and access made impossible as systems and processes falter. Lost knowledge, in whatever form, can result in re-inventing wheels and frustration at all levels.

Merger or takeover or restructuring present the most challenging scenarios of all, creating uncertainty, lack of motivation, interruption of business and tremendous knowledge challenges as businesses determine their new shape, the structure and competencies they need – and which staff and sites to retain. The potential for knowledge loss is enormous as the organisation focuses on transformation. Knowledge flows are disrupted and contacts disappear. Even where knowledge management techniques are embedded in the organisation attention to knowledge management can wane. Yet this is the very time when knowledge, expertise and know-how are assets to exploit and which should be harnessed to shape the future.

How should a knowledge or information manager react and specifically, what knowledge transfer and knowledge retention actions should they take to ensure that their organisation adapts to the change and keeps knowledge flowing?

Knowledge transfer and knowledge retention - actions knowledge and information managers should consider

Knowledge transfer contributes to knowledge flow. For the authors of this article knowledge transfer is concerned with the deliberate fostering of the movement of specific knowledge from its creator(s) to others who need it. Knowledge transfer can be driven by specific opportunities and problems. It can also be concerned with creating, capturing or organising knowledge for future use by others.

Transfer deals with all forms of knowledge, for instance the use of a 'before learning' process at the start of a new project to bring people with useful experience together with the project members. Many of the established knowledge and information management tools focus on capture and transfer e.g. Lessons Learned, Knowledge Cafés, and Knowledge Asset development.

Knowledge retention contributes to knowledge access. For the authors of this article knowledge retention is concerned with activities targeted at retaining tacit, implicit and explicit knowledge within an organisation so it continues to be available. The knowledge and information management tools and techniques an organisation selects to enable its knowledge to be retained and accessed can be informed by answering the questions "when best to connect? when best to collect?"

Connection in this context is focused on 'people to people' and enabled through e.g. Expertise Finders, Face to Face conversations and Alumni. Collection in this context is focused on 'people to information' and enabled through e.g. Knowledge Assets, Good Practice Guidance and Boundary Objects. The core activities of an organisation, its drivers and business environment further inform the balance - between connection and collection – best suited to achieving organisational success.

The actions knowledge and information managers should consider to keep knowledge flowing in a downturn are presented below against four key headings:

- **Baseline actions**
- **Strategic actions**

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn

- **Tactical or 'salvage' actions**
- **Issue-specific actions.**

Readers who have some or all of these action themes in place can use the following as a checklist or 'health check' to assess their current approach, whilst readers who have few or none of these action themes in place should consider commencing with a baseline assessment and then quickly building through Tactical, Issue-specific and Strategic actions as appropriate.

Baseline actions are aimed at taking time to stand back, reflect and baseline how well the organisation is currently supporting and encouraging knowledge flows. Establishing a baseline or current position is critical in enabling knowledge and information managers to select the tools, techniques and approaches best suited to addressing their business challenges. Baselining can also be used when an organisation first begins to consider whether investing in knowledge management approaches will be of benefit to achieving its goals. It can stimulate strategic, tactical or issue-specific actions. Baselining can be used for an entire organisation or for a sub-set e.g. a department, process or directorate.

Key questions knowledge and information managers should answer when establishing a baseline include:

- Where is the organisation performing sub optimally because its knowledge and expertise are not supporting its vision and objectives?
- What is the likely impact on the organisation if this sub-optimal performance continues?
- Who knows - stakeholders are needed if the organisation is to improve matters - and who is interested and prepared to champion action?
- Currently, what tools, techniques and approaches best accelerate knowledge flow in my organisation? Where, why and how are these delivering value? Can they be used to transform organisational performance?
- Can I see other tools and techniques that I should use for the challenges I've identified?
- What strategic actions do I need to take?
- What tactical or 'salvage' actions do I need to take?
- What issue specific actions do I need to take?
- How does our current approach compare with that of other organisations?

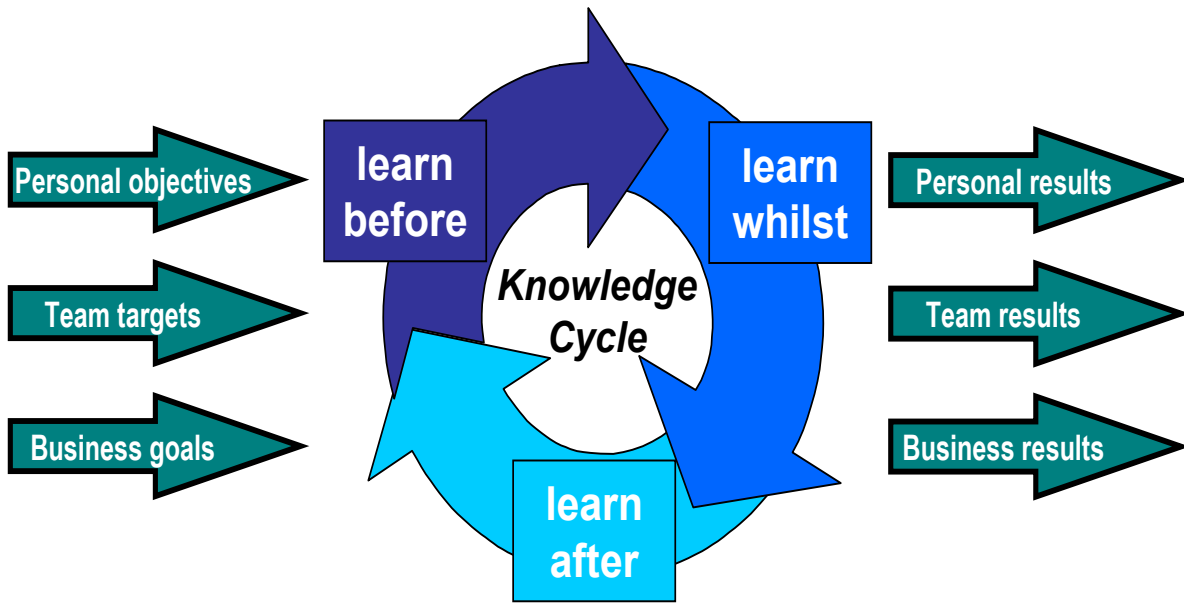
Once established, the baseline can then continue to be used to assess progress against agreed knowledge flow targets and key performance indicators on a regular basis and as part of an organisation's overall performance management process/system. Even if you started this year with a clear view of your organisation's current position, the baselines for many organisations, given the current economic climate and the knowledge flow related challenges discussed earlier, have changed and will continue to change.

Approaches to baselining are many and varied. In exploring current baselines, the authors have found the following two models to be of value in considering where knowledge and expertise are/are not working for an organisation and presenting the results. The first model, Figure 3, describes a knowledge cycle and can be used in diagnosing barriers to knowledge flow. It is derived from the principle that using and reflecting on their experience is an important component of knowledge flow enabling organisations, teams and individuals to learn from their own and other's experience (inside and outside the organisation).

Established techniques such as Peer Assist, the After Action Review, Lessons Learned, and Peer Review encourage teams and individuals to seek out relevant know-how and experience before they embark on new work and to reflect on their experience as work progresses and activities finish. The outcomes enable the individual or group to improve performance – and enable others to build on their success or learn from their pitfalls. Considering how well the knowledge cycle works in different parts or different processes in your organisation can quickly deliver a valuable baseline perspective as well as stimulating ideas for improvement.

Figure 3 – The Knowledge Cycle

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn



The second model, again, based on the knowledge management learning cycle of learning before, whilst and after doing has been developed and used by the authors of this article to help organisations visualise and assess their knowledge flow challenges. This model assesses the contribution of each stage of the learning cycle to an organisation's key processes. The use of coloured traffic lights - provides a high impact picture of where the organisation's performance is being impeded by sub-optimal knowledge transfer and a trigger for action that is easily recognised by senior managers and other staff.

Figure 4 – Knowledge transfer and retention baseline

Knowledge Transfer and Retention Baseline		Core Business Processes (examples include)				
		Research and Development	Production	Account Management	Innovation	Business Development
Knowledge Cycle	Learning before doing	●	●	●	●	●
	Learning whilst doing	●	●	●	●	●
	Learning after doing	●	●	●	●	●

- In place and fit for purpose to support knowledge transfer and retention activities
- In place but with room for improvement to support knowledge transfer and retention activities
- Not in place and introduction would benefit knowledge transfer and retention activities

Understanding the baseline and the opportunities it presents is critical as a foundation for other activity.

Strategic actions are aimed at ensuring that knowledge flows from those who have it to those who need it and eliminating the risk of knowledge loss. These actions should be presented and evidenced as a longer term plan or programme that is capable of responding to current organisational change. Strategic actions can be stimulated through a baselining exercise or through an in depth critical analysis using approaches such as knowledge auditing or social network analysis to:

- Identify and map core knowledge flows
- Identify and map core knowledge and knowledge at risk - domains (technical and subject) and people (expertise)

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn

- Consider what existing knowledge is required in the 'new world' and what is not.

Your analysis needs to be undertaken with the support of a senior champion or champions given the need to consult a range of stakeholders in the steps above and the strategic importance of your findings. The results will be unique to your organisation but strategic actions often require initiatives in the following areas:

- Strategically manage the organisation's corporate memory as a core asset, and with the appropriate performance measures/metrics - this will require the embedding of techniques such as knowledge harvesting as a routine process; fostering the development of knowledge assets relating to projects, teams and functions; and the introduction of techniques such as peer assist to encourage learning from the experience of others. Communities of practice and of purpose are good ways to ensure that the risk of knowledge loss is contained by its ownership and sharing within the community
- Find ways to acquire new knowledge - e.g. around new processes or new relationships; communities of practice can be useful here as they often 'own' a subject area which is critical to the organisation's development. Identifying partners and experts that the organisation can use to bring itself up to date is a rapid route to acquire external know-how and expertise. And explore the knowledge already in the organisation – what you need is often already known by a staff member
- Connect with and support alumni - people who have worked with the organisation previously can be, in many instances, people that the organisation may be able to tap into as expert and partners in the future. Maintaining relationships with them does take effort but this effort links to a potentially valuable dividend. The trick is to part on good terms
- Make knowledge sharing an organisational priority enabled through leadership, key events, recognition and skills/competencies - this action is critically important to underpin the others. Whilst some individuals and groups will instinctively recognise the importance of sharing their experience and asking questions of colleagues, others require considerable encouragement to do so
- Consider incentives for sharing and adopting knowledge - and be clear that financial incentives are not a route to follow; praise, recognition, empowerment, and a sense of mission are far more effective
- Capture and harness the new knowledge created through change - new knowledge is being created all of the time; all techniques that support knowledge flow can help with this challenge. The key factor is a culture that encourages recognition of new knowledge and its implications.
- Strategic review of an organisation through a knowledge lens can provide an invaluable perspective whenever major change is considered – but sadly is only infrequently part of the change process. To avoid the situation captured in the following quotation requires recognising the problem and putting in place relevant and strategic solutions. "On any given day, in any large organisation, there are many people working on the same problem – duplicating work, re-inventing the wheel or, worst of all, failing to use what the organisation already knows" (Miller P, 1998).

Tactical or 'salvage' actions are aimed at unblocking urgent or unexpected restrictions to knowledge flow and mitigating against knowledge loss. The obvious situations where action is needed are staff changes – through a new role within the organisation, resignation, redundancy, and retirement – though the latter can be planned for. Whilst knowledge and information managers will inevitably encounter situations where tactical or salvage actions are required, the number of times these emergency inventions occur can be kept to a minimum by implementing the strategic actions outlined above. When required, the following tactical or salvage actions should be considered:

- Facilitate an 'audience with' - useful for sharing transferring tacit to tacit knowledge; the audience can include colleagues, the line manager and significant contacts, and good practice recommends gathering and organising questions in advance so that the individual can prepare
- Work with the individual to develop a knowledge asset that represents their working knowledge – calendars of events, important reference materials and their context, regular contacts (their social network) and sources of advice
- Extend the leave date where possible to provide time for colleagues to secure important information or put in place temporary contact arrangements so that the individual is still available for advice; this is best agreed as 'in exceptional situations only' especially if the person is moving to a new job elsewhere
- 'Sit with Mary' for an afternoon and gather/capture what you can, for example, draw a relationship map.

Tactical action opportunities are not just restricted to the departure of staff or their move to a new role. Organisations often cancel or change projects at short notice, often following a regular portfolio review or following a critical project review point. Project cessation and redirection are danger points in the knowledge risk stakes, particularly if project team members are reassigned to new projects immediately. A knowledge asset that embodies the team's work and its reflection on its experience provides an effective starting point if the project is resurrected. Including the context in which key project decisions were taken is an important component of a project knowledge asset – a distilled collection of the project's activities, decision points with evidence, and the roles of project team members plus essential data, documents, and other records. The After Action Review by the team or a Peer Review with others interested – or needing to learn - from the

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn

project's experience can further enhance the project's knowledge asset which should also contain the contact details for team members. For both individual and project assets, advice on the asset's 'use by' date is essential.

The situations above are, of course, a microcosm of those that occur in major reorganisations and mergers. As these occur the scale of activity needs to increase to a 'production' level process. The knowledge and information manager will need to enrol and train others to manage the transfer process and will need to ensure that they have the support of senior managers to do so. Partnerships with others concerned with the people related aspects of reorganisation e.g. Human Resources and Strategic Planning will be essential for success.

Issue specific actions are aimed at addressing specific knowledge flow and knowledge at risk issues identified by the organisation. They provide routes to embed knowledge transfer and retention techniques step by step in the parts of the organisation where barriers to flow and risks have a serious impact. The need for action may be identified by baselining, by a strategic knowledge audit, or by a sharp-eyed knowledge manager spotting areas to act on. Techniques to use can be selected from the range featured in Figure 1. In our experience the following actions are particularly useful:

- Establish a knowledge transfer portfolio of tools and techniques for your organisation, mapped to typical business scenarios to aid use - this portfolio can be used to work with groups to identify the issues they have and the approaches that will resolve them. You can then facilitate knowledge transfer at the appropriate, depth and breadth to enable a group to deal with the knowledge related issues they face. As a knowledge and information manager one of the dividends is the natural spread of interest in the techniques used which often leads to requires for help from elsewhere
- Enable knowledge handovers - support 'baton passing' activities between individuals and teams of individuals. Situations that require this approach include reorganisation necessitating transfers of responsibility between functions and individuals; the redirection of projects; and the introduction of new staff
- Facilitate knowledge harvesting – the approaches often used have been mentioned earlier and can enthuse the individual being harvested but do recognise the challenges of redundancy and the types (voluntary and compulsory), and acknowledge that you cannot capture everything and that you cannot force an individual to share
- Provide the collaboration tools and techniques - to support knowledge flows and build connections, communities and knowledge assets for the future. Where introduced, communities of practice and of purpose are attributed with many benefits – keeping the organisation's knowledge at the leading edge in the area of community focus, speeding up problem resolution, providing a sense of belonging to the organisation, creating knowledge assets in their areas of interest
- Develop knowledge and lessons learnt systems for specific areas or as a core component of your portfolio of tools and techniques. Failure to learn from experience is, for senior managers, one of the most common stimuli to instigating an interest in knowledge management. (If only HP knew what HP knows, Charles G. Sietoff, 1999)
- Help support and nurture a knowledge sharing environment for the survivors. In situations of redundancy, whatever the cause, survivors can feel threatened and guilty. Your responsibility (with others) is to determine the future knowledge environment for the organisation and to develop tactics to ensure knowledge keeps flowing in the new situation.

The enablers and barriers to action

For every action there is a reaction and there will be barriers to keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn which must be identified and overcome. Equally there will be enablers, both existing and new, which need to be leveraged and introduced to ensure that blockages and restrictions to knowledge flow are kept to a minimum. Given the 'change-management' nature of implementing knowledge transfer and knowledge retention actions in a downturn, the authors also recommend that a short assessment be undertaken to identify and weight – by order of importance – the current enablers and barriers of planned actions.

Figure 5 below highlights some of the enablers and barriers the authors have experienced and helped mitigate in their knowledge and information management consultancy work with organisations. Where appropriate, the enablers and barriers have been linked to assist readers in using these 'forces' in their own organisations.

Figure 5 – Enablers and barriers to knowledge transfer and retention actions in a downturn

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn

Enablers of knowledge transfer and retention in a downturn include:	Barriers to knowledge transfer and retention in a downturn include:
A knowledge and information manager in place with a baseline and approach (strategic, issue specific and tactical) to keep knowledge flowing internally and externally	In difficult and uncertain times knowledge, for some, can become 'power' i.e. they perceive that their position and status in the organisation will be more secure and valued if they keep their knowledge to themselves
The current economic climate and drivers for change – a 'head in the sand' approach is not an option	The survivors of change, downsizing or reorganisation will need time to grieve for colleagues 'lost' and unlearn previous ways of working
Knowledge and information management tools and techniques that support and enable knowledge creation, sharing, transfer and retention activities	During the period of change staff morale and motivation can 'take a hit' and minds can become closed to new ideas and new ways of working. For some this may include a period of denial (e.g. that the change is happening, required or will impact them)
Those with roles in newly formed or merged organisations will require new ways of working, new knowledge and will need to establish new working relationships	Organisations do not have a knowledge flow baseline or approach from which to assess and build for the future
Knowledge activists and champions 'seize the moment' and embrace and embed knowledge flow activities into projects supporting innovation, development of new products and services, and elimination of waste	A stakeholder engagement plan is not in place to ensure that all interested parties and specific departments/functions (e.g. HR) are aware of the actions that will be taken to ensure that knowledge keeps flowing

Conclusions

The proactive and strategic use of knowledge and information management disciplines, and their associated tools and techniques, is vital for any organisation, at any time, but critically important given the current economic climate. In positioning knowledge as the lifeblood of an organisation the authors have highlighted the importance of the role that knowledge and information managers have in ensuring that all forms of their organisation's knowledge - tacit, implicit and explicit - flows freely and quickly.

The authors are of the opinion that there has never been a better time to be a knowledge or information manager, nor have there been more opportunities or urgency for those in these roles to facilitate and support their organisations through the changes brought about by the recent downturn.

However challenging the economic climate and increased level of organisational complexity – illustrated by the changes and drivers of change outlined in this article - there are actions that knowledge and information managers should and must take if their organisations are to continue to operate, hit new and stretching targets, re-focus or re-invent themselves given the changing environment in which they operate.

The actions the authors recommend that knowledge and information managers consider comprise Baseline Actions, Strategic Actions, Tactical or 'salvage' Actions, and Issue-specific Actions. Further, it is recommended that before any action is taken that it should first be positioned in the context of the enablers and barriers to that change.

Knowledge and information managers who already have some or all of these action themes in place can use the actions in each category as a checklist or 'health check' to assess their current approach, whilst those who have few or none of these action themes in place should consider commencing with a baseline assessment and then quickly building through Tactical, Issue-specific and Strategic actions as appropriate.

Organisations and their drivers, challenges, opportunities, cultures and knowledge 'come in many shapes and sizes'. No two organisations are identical. Knowledge and information managers must therefore work in partnership with their internal and external stakeholders to decide what action or actions are required to keep knowledge flowing in a downturn, and must then turn this thinking into implementable action within the context of their organisation's system and purpose for being. The rewards from the right actions are high and the incentives for determining the actions needed by most organisations are unavoidable.

References

Keeping knowledge flowing in a downturn

HM Treasury (2010) Spending Review. Available at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Hundreds of quangos to learn their fate, (2010). Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11538534 and final decisions at: http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_191543.pdf.

Kubler-Ross E (1973) *On Death and Dying*, Routledge, ISBN 0415040159.

Miller P (1998) *Mobilising the Power of What You Know – a Practical Guide to Successful Knowledge Management*, Random House Business Books, ISBN 10: 0712679138.

Sunassee NN, Sewry DA (2002) 'A Theoretical Framework for Knowledge Management Implementation'. ACM International Conference Proceeding Series; Vol. 30. Proceedings of the 2002 annual research conference of the South African institute of computer scientists and information technologists on Enablement through technology, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, p. 235 – 245.

Pascale R, Milleman M, Gioja L (2000) *Surfing The Edge Of Chaos - the laws of nature and the new laws of business*, TEXERE Publishing Ltd, ISBN 1-58799-064-4.

Prusak L (2009) www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/id/L001064/

Sieloff CG (1999) 'If only HP knew what HP knows': the roots of knowledge management at Hewlett-Packard", *Journal of Knowledge Management*, Vol. 3(1): 47 – 53.

Biographies

Sandra Ward is Principal Consultant, Beaworthy Consulting, working in the business, public and third sectors. Her passion lies in helping organisations improve their performance through wiser and more effective use of their knowledge and experience and the information environment in which they operate. Throughout Sandra's working life, she has sought to raise the profile of information skills; ensure that information services deliver the best possible value to their organisations; and stimulate the interest of organisations and information professionals in knowledge management. Sandra was a Director of TFPL Ltd. until November 2006 and previously the UK Director of Information Services for Glaxo Wellcome R&D. She is now a Senior Associate of TFPL Ltd. She is an Honorary Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals whose Council she chaired for its first four years.

Ian Wooler is Director of IDW Ltd and a knowledge management professional with extensive experience in public, private and start-up organisations. His work in and for organisations has been underpinned by an interest in blending people skills, knowledge and experience; learning styles and personality types; with organisational processes and technologies for improvement in self, team and business performance. He has an active interest in all things relating to knowledge transfer and retention and also specialises in workshop and team event design and facilitation, stakeholder engagement and influencing, and personality types and preferences. He delivers consultancy, training and coaching in these areas. Ian is a Senior Associate of TFPL Ltd and a qualified Myers Briggs (MBTI) practitioner at levels 1 and 2. His MBTI profile is ENJF.

For further information please contact Sandra Ward or Ian Wooler

Sandra Ward – s.e.ward@btinternet.com Ian Wooler – ian.wooler@idwconsultancy.com

