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What others are doing in “Knowledge
Management”

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(SQ2M Project)

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Authors: Francesco Badioli (TL)

Jorge Vivar-Mariscal (SE)

Lucile Petitpierre (JE)

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Your contact persons
with GFA Consulting
Group are:

Inge Gaerke (Backstopper)

Constanze Schaaff (Backstopper)

GFA Consulting Group GmbH

Eulenkrugstraße 82

22359 Hamburg

Germany

Telephone: 0049-40-60306-170

Telefax: 0049-40-60306-179

E-mail: inge.gaerke@gfa-group.de

E-mail: constanze.schaaff@gfa-group.de

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	Operator	EC Consultant
Name:	AIDCO / E5	GFA-IDOM Consortium
Address:	Rue de la Loi 41 1000 Brussels Belgium	Eulenkugstrasse 82 D-22359 Hamburg Germany
Tel. number:	0032-(0)2 29 57 907	+49 (0)40 603 06-170
Fax number:		+49 (0)40 603 06-179
E-mail:	agnes.hano@ec.europa.eu	inge.gaerke@gfa-group.de
Contact person:	Agnes Hano ROM Task Manager	Inge Gaerke GFA Backstopper

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Author of report: Mr. Francesco Badioli, Team Leader
Mr. Jorge Vivar-Mariscal, Senior Expert
Ms. Lucile Petitpierre, Junior Expert

What others are doing in “Knowledge Management”

“Knowledge management is the way organizations create, capture, enhance, and reuse knowledge to achieve organizational objectives.

The word “management” is a misnomer, as knowledge cannot be managed. What need to be managed are the processes by which knowledge is created, acquired, stored, accessed, validated, disseminated, and applied”.

1.

Institutions as large as governments produce a large amount of outputs which are a consequence of their need to be accountable to the inputs they receive to disburse benefits. In turn these disbursements of benefits are the end of the planning process where financial means are transformed in public goods. However, the cycle tends to end at that point without much thought for improving, measuring and upgrade the methods used within it. The predicament is further exacerbated by the common lack of human resources which are most of the time just enough to perform this incomplete cycle. However, accountability in terms of efficiency of the systems in place has caused that institutions look at their own systems and stop reinventing the wheel over and over again. This has prompted to capture and extract information from processes and outputs already in place in order to make the subsequent ones more efficient by learning how they perform at a given time. The problem in this stage is to balance human resources with a system that is good enough to provide an accurate idea of where the flows of the system are greater or where good practices are located and how these can be shared, found in the system and replicated within. This supported in the short and medium term by intellectual capital of their employees and in the long term by institutional memory or systems that are conducive to access and share stored information.

2.

The following seem to main obstacles to data management:

- Codifying the data so it can be searched “intelligently” i.e.
- Codification complexity correlation with human resources that enables more data less codified vs. less data and more sophisticated codification.
- Continuity: Most databases cannot keep up their planned updating or uploading levels and are soon out of date and lose their reliability.
- Realising the complexity and labour of an intelligent searchable database many organisations concentrate instead on statistical data.

The following are a small sample of a host of organisations and countries on how they manage their information. The sample was selective random which resulted in a wide spectrum of approaches to data management and/or accountability.

3.

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

ADB pays importance to knowledge management and learning from it. In 2002 it established the ADB-wide Knowledge Management Committee with the mandate to

develop and support implementation of a strategy and plan for knowledge management. A comprehensive site open to the public (Evaluation Information System- EVIS). The site covers searchable evaluations in a database according to key words inserted on a box inside the very reports. These keywords have already been entered, either by the author/editor of the evaluation. This allows for a basic lessons learnt search. The system is basic but efficient enough to search for specific topics, countries, type of intervention, theme, country, and other keywords taken from the “lessons” area of the report into a summary type on the “Lesson Details” page. (<http://lnadbg4.adb.org/oed001p.nsf/SearchLessons?OpenForm>)

Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)

It has formed a PDF-format searchable database of general documents and/of projects executed since 1995 (over 15,000). The search engine provides results on any words within the PDF documents uploaded. A “lessons learned” search yields many returns and the results indicate that staff have access to an internal database, as they refer to other similar projects, where they seem to draw conclusions and these are mentioned as lessons learned in several of their documents or project proposals. (<http://www.iadb.org/projects/searchDocs.cfm?keyword=&IDBOperation=&dept=&Country=&docType=&subregion=&Topic=&fromMonth=&fromYear=&toMonth=&toYear=&projDocLang=&orderby=IDBIDOLSORTDATE&sort=reversealphabetical&recsPage=10&lang=en>)

Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

It has developed a Knowledge Forum where among other options “Best Practices” offers 12 areas of expertise compiled by a consultative process within the FAO staff. It is considered a first step towards summarising its experience. Although the site has a search engine, the search is limited to the 46 texts on each of the sub areas of expertise. (<http://www.fao.org/corp/knowledgeforum/en/>)

International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

It has not developed a database or an electronic form of knowledge management. It has developed an internal system that relies on peers sharing information orally at different stages during an intervention or a given task, with the idea of continuously refresh the memory of those involved and to divide the formulation of a final report in three stages which commences at the beginning of the execution. The process called Rolling Project Completion Report (RPCR) is developed by different people at different stages of the execution. It claims that by injecting rigour in to the process, it stimulates new thinking, less institutional memory is lost and lessons learned can be had more easily. (http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-120091-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)

International Finance Corporation (IFC)

Counts with what it calls its Lessons Retrieval Network (LRN) which has been designed to provide access to lessons learned from its investments. Search for and extract lessons indexed by the following independent criteria: Region, Sector and Subject, as well as a free-text search. Subjects are defined according to a customized thesaurus. The LRN database claims to include more than 2,000 lessons extracted

from IFC's post-evaluation reports. However, the database has not been updated since 1999 and there seems that there are far less than 2,000 lessons learnt examples. However, because of their Expanded Project Supervision Report (XPSR) system (an instrument to systematically evaluate the development results of IFC's investment operations) it is assumed that internally they might count with a database that allows them to carry out such a task as they rely heavily on lessons learnt for this. (<http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/oeg.nsf/Content/lessonslearned>)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

The Evaluation Knowledge System (EKSYST) is a database of project and country evaluations. All the text of the documents fed into the database can be accessed by keywords. Whilst producing several returns the system returns a high amount of non relevant data as all the text in all documents is searched. (http://www.ifad.org/list_eval.asp)

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Has developed "Labordoc" which is a database primarily aimed for internal use or subscribers. It comprises a library of documents which can be searched by any keyword found in their documents. Whilst this facility produces several returns and potentially in this way reducing its usefulness, the keyword option allows for more than one keyword and to include or exclude certain words increasing the relevance of the results. (<http://labordoc.ilo.org/>)

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

Uses what they call the Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre's Internet Lessons Learned Database (LLDb) which is a tool that aims to coordinate the staffing of NATO operational and exercise lessons. Searching is based on a text field called Observations where some keywords are filled in relevant to the document. Searching can also be done by individual data fields (Status, Activity, Originator, Classification or Approving Authority). Not accessible to the general public. (<http://www.jallc.nato.int/>)

Organisation of American States (OAS)

Operates a database which is searchable by keywords. Although the search by the "lessons learned" keywords produced a relatively high number of entries, these lessons learned pertain individual documents and not an aggregate of various interventions.

United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)

Developed a simple and inexpensive site where documents are simply organised by either country order or year of publication. Since the amount of reports is relatively reduced a visual/manual search is still a viable option. (<http://www.uncdf.org/english/evaluations/documents.php?sort=alt>)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Human Development Reports counts with a Search option which yields results on any keyword entered. However, the relative limited amount of uploaded data and return on lessons learnt as keywords, diminishes the usefulness stored data can have. (<http://hdrsearch.undp.org/query.html?qt=&col=hdro+hdrodocs&style=hdro&la=en&x=26&y=11>). On the other hand, the Central Evaluation Database (CEDAB (<http://stone.undp.org/undpweb/eo/cedab/eotextform.cfm>)) contains summaries of evaluation reports that could provide useful information on previous evaluations and lessons learned. Nevertheless, whilst the interface is promising, the limited amount of data (because of the low number of evaluations or uploaded evaluations) diminishes its potential.

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)

Within the UNEP exists the mission of the Evaluation and Oversight Unit (EOU) whose role is to provide advice to senior management and programme staff, to review progress made in programme implementation, and to reflect on the constraints and challenges of delivering its global environmental programme. It is searchable by Sector Name (Agriculture, Capacity Building, Climate change, Economics and Trade, etc) and then sub-search by Lesson (learnt) type (awareness building, capacity building, project design, etc). Open to the public but with very limited amount of data having been input so far. (<http://www.unep.org/EOU/>).

United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO)

The Industrial Development Abstracts Database (IDA) is a compilation of the organisation's 21,000+ reports which are accessible via simple keywords. It counts with over 11,000 indexed abstracts where a summary of the documents can be accessed saving time to the users (http://www.unido.org/index.php?id=4835&ucg_no64=1/data/ida.cfm).

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

It has merged the contents of information on their various web sites with reports which are downloadable. The combination produces an important amount of data which can be narrowed to few entries due to its advanced search capabilities (region, language, file format, omissions, etc.). (http://qsearch.info.usaid.gov/search?as_sitesearch=&sort=date:D:L:d1&client=default_frontend&lr=&entqr=0&as_q=++mexico&as_dt=i&oe=UTF-8&as_lq=&as_ft=i&ie=UTF-8&as_epq=lessons+learned&proxystylesheet=default_frontend&site=default_collection&btnG=Search&access=p&ip=91.183.61.172&as_occt=any&num=100&as_eq=&as_filetype=&as_oq=&ud=1&output=xml_no_dtd&proxycustom=<ADVANCED/>)

US Government Accountability Office (GAO)

It is otherwise known as the investigative arm of the US Congress and watchdog (vis a vis Federal Government). It is a database with information on how certain policies or projects are performing and makes recommendations whilst pointing out what agencies are responsible or affected by this. (<http://www.gao.gov/index.html>)

World Bank

Concentrates on complex statistical data which can be used to observe patterns at a macro level. Also impact evaluation reports or “second look” studies on specific projects are carried out years after the end of an intervention with the aim to learn what the actual impact was. This information is useful although not searchable and only contains information on 33 projects. A general search engine is operational which can be used to access documents produced about certain sectors’ lessons learnt. Apparently the Bank has focused on lessons learned as there are several documents available with these keywords even though this is the form of studies as mentioned above and not a result of an “intelligent” search. Nevertheless their database contains a large amount of uploaded documents of studies and projects dating back to the 1960s.

(<http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/0,,menuPK:476823~pagePK:64165236~piPK:64165141~theSitePK:469372,00.html>)

4.

What can be learnt from this small sample of efforts to organise data by international organisation or governments is that there is a need to demonstrate accountability and to attempt, to different degrees, to use the information gathered in a way that can be exploited to increase efficiency. Whilst the first point can be achieved to a certain extent by publishing successes and failures, the latter one is more difficult to attain as technology and resources are not always available. More importantly, this effort is never completely accomplished as data needs to be constantly gathered, input, updated, amended and, ideally, analysed. Some systems are built on a sound plan but soon after become obsolete as they are no longer updated or lose reliability as some areas are out of date (e.g. Agence Française de Développement: <http://www.afd.fr/jahia/Jahia/engineName/search/home/publications/pid/2838>)

Others are constantly fed data but the quality is poor, lack clarity, and the search engines render poor or irrelevant results. Some are of good quality but invariable are expensive to maintain. Additionally, others (e.g. GTZ: <http://www.gtz.de/en/5429.htm> or African Development Bank: <http://www.afdb.org/en/documents/>) choose to simply upload information and make it searchable by keywords or pre-established options but with no value added to the information provided. However, it has to be mentioned that what is placed by institutions on the public domain is not necessarily what is available in an intranet system (not always available or visible to the general public) which could be a sophisticated and more complex data management programme. But even when an organisation does not count with a sophisticated database designed to provide lessons learnt it is not uncommon to observe in the uploaded documents chapters devoted to lessons learnt. It can be assumed that, despite what can be perceived as a rudimentary information system, institutions are aware of recycling their information for their own benefit. The degree of usefulness of this information remains a challenge.

5.

Some institutions or governments are aware that the wheel keeps being reinvented by their staff. In order to mitigate this, data systems are being implemented to different

degrees and levels of success. However, some organisations rely on institutional memory (a relatively inexpensive alternative) to pass on previous experiences thus an expensive and time consuming data bank is not always the most feasible option. Whilst this might be adequate for an organisation with a history of low staff turnover, it is inadequate for an organisation that requires its staff to shift placements after a short period of time.

6.

In a study included in the handover documents (file name: knowledge management Comparison_Analysis April 2009) from Particip to E5 and passed on to the SQ2M team entitled “Comparison of different approaches or online collaboration and knowledge sharing” an attempt is made to showcase some examples of data-sharing websites with a view to aid in the design of the platform for the TC strategy reform. This study looked at libraries and specialized social networks which in principle are established to share and build knowledge through communication exchanges by individuals in specialized networks. In this document reference is made to the “Knowledge Share Fair” (<http://www.sharefair.net>) which took place in 2009 and is set to repeat itself in 2010. It can be observed that a growing tendency to increase capital knowledge by recycling the investment already made in acquiring it the first time round, is now more visible.