

# Debriefing for Knowledge Management

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A Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Partners in Innovation Programme funded project

An Approach to Knowledge Management for SMEs



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## KNOWLEDGE-EVENTS

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Rather than just look generally at what is done this project is focussing on Events. What makes an event a Knowledge-Event is the act of recording, reflecting and making use of the knowledge gained. Debriefing, which is the subject of this leaflet, helps us with reflection and also helps us to bring out knowledge in a form to be communicated to others.

Events, because they describe the complexity of the real world, have different types of knowledge. The knowledge that we are most familiar with is **factual knowledge**: like the cost of a brick or the mix of concrete for a particular circumstance. However, events also show **process knowledge** which involves the appreciation of situations, the negotiation of position and the making of decisions. Process knowledge is more difficult to determine and encapsulate thus often gets neglected, however, it is what is most important in real world activities. Knowledge-event management can capture some of this process knowledge as well as factual knowledge and through debriefing some of this can be made explicit.

Unlike other forms of Knowledge Management, Knowledge-Event Management is not immediately abstract. Thus the standard categorisation of knowledge does not fit well. Debriefing allows us to learn from events by working across the standard categorisation.

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## LEARNING FROM EVENTS

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Events are complex in the sense that there have multiple interacting issues producing them; for example:

### *Example*

A site manager on a small site, told the story of how the sand he had ordered for one day did not arrive. This was planned for making mortar to lay bricks. His problem-solving dilemma was whether to lay off the bricklayers for the day and upset them as they do not get paid, keep the bricklayers on but lose the cost of the work time.

The solution taken was a compromise in that he talked to the bricklayers to engage them with his problem and lay them off for only half a day (loss of 4 hours money).

These issues occur at different levels: firstly the direct contributing and consequential issues, and secondly the wider and longer term organisational and industry issues.

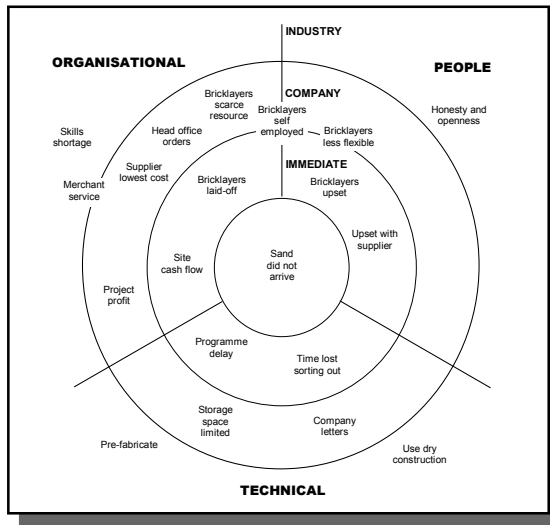
Determining what are the first level issues is important in learning. This is often viewed as what caused the event and leads to us seeking whose fault it was. However, as there are multiple issues, it is often not possible to determine a primary cause and so fault. This in itself is important learning. But we can also see the skills in handling the event.

As well as determining the immediate issues producing the event, there are wider issues set by the way the organisation does things generally or even the way that the industry operates. It is these wider issues which cause events to be repeated and where interventions can be made to prevent the event happening rather than just working with the event more effectively.

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## DEBRIEFING

Knowledge—event management **'debriefing'** follows a line of questioning which leads to an analytical dialogue about the event. These questions are in three groups to analyse the different learning levels mentioned above: what happened? What contributed to event? What are wider issues? We have found it useful to ask these questions under the headings: **technical, organisational** and **people** and then present the details on a chart during the debriefing; as shown here for the example:



At each level there are contributing issues and also consequential issues. The consequential issues are what was in the recorded story; they relate to physical outcomes, informational outcomes and also emotional outcomes. The contributing issues are the aspects of current practice which are necessary for the event to happen. Some of these are peculiar to the company in the way of procedures, management style or structure. Others are to do with the formation and operation of the industry.

## THE PROJECT

This leaflet is part of a DTI funded project to test and improve an *Approach* to Knowledge Management for construction SMEs

The *Approach* is a simple and low cost technique for Knowledge Management using; Dictaphones to **Capture** Knowledge from events, Debriefing to **Transform** the Knowledge, and visual communications to **Disseminate** Knowledge within the company and the industry.

People have **Knowledge** when they can make use of information from the past events for a current situation.

**Tacit Knowledge** is personal knowledge in people's minds including know-how and intuition. **Explicit knowledge** is generalised knowledge that can be put into documents or databases.

**Knowledge-Management** involves appreciating this Knowledge base and actively collecting it, sharing it and creating new knowledge within an organisational setting.

**For Information on the Project**  
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## THE PARTNERS

This is a DTI funded project that involves 12 construction companies, 3 construction networks and 2 universities. The companies involved are part of the new progressive thinking in the industry and demonstrate their own willingness to be the champions of change.

