

Self-Operation for Knowledge Management



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

An Approach to Knowledge Management for SMEs



UCE
Birmingham

SELF-OPERATION

This research aimed at testing a robust yet simple approach for knowledge management which is suitable for SMEs. Participants recorded audio diaries into a Dictaphone each week and facilitators carry out a debriefing each month to help the participants to generate wider knowledge, useful to others in the organisation, from their experience. So far, 264 knowledge events have been recorded and 109 debriefing sessions have been carried out, producing abundant learning. The ultimate objective of this research is to make this knowledge management practice operate without the involvement of an external facilitator and be embedded in the organisation's normal routine operation, and in the end an organisation's performance and competitiveness can be continually improved.

This knowledge management approach, called Knowledge-Event Management, has three stages: event-collection, debriefing-analysis and dissemination. (Leaflets on each of these are available) In the research, organisations were encouraged to adapt the initial idea to their own practice and operations in order to create workable approach. This leaflet presents these approaches, which we have called:

- Audio Diary Approach
- Operational Debriefing
- Post Project review

You are encouraged to use these as they are or to adapt them to work with your organisation. We would be extremely interested in your comments and adaptation and our contact details are presented overleaf.

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1. Audio Diary Approach

This is the original format of this knowledge management approach. It requires the participants to record an audio diary every week. They are then debriefed by an internal debriefer after four audio diary entries to make the experience and tacit knowledge explicit and generate transferable knowledge.

The debriefer can be company director, contract/quality/marketing manager, peer project manager/site manager/quantity surveyor. Ideally, the debriefer is not the direct line manager of the participants in order to avoid interest conflicts and obtain honest and truthful opinions.

2. Operational Debriefing

Lack of time is the most mentioned barrier to knowledge management practice in this research. People in construction, especially in SMEs, are normally very busy as the pressure to finish projects on time is constant. Some people may find it difficult to spare time to record audio diaries and listen to them before debriefing.

Under such circumstances, an *operational debriefing* can be undertaken. Instead of recording an audio diary each week, the event diary and debriefing are conducted together. The participants are asked to present one or two events first, then are debriefed immediately on them by the internal debriefer. The sessions are audio recorded and the result is filled in the target diagram like the original format (see debriefing leaflet).

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3. Post Project Review

The best way to start knowledge management practice is to fit this approach into your existing practice. For example, some companies have used Knowledge-Event Management in their monthly project review or post project review meetings to produce lessons learnt. This overcomes a number of problems with current approaches to project reviews including: them just being an opportunity to blame people, an unwillingness to address problems, a lack of interest because the next project is up and running, and an unwillingness to search more deeply to the roots of problems.

At the post project review, each participant presents two events from the project: one that involves success or achievement, the other that involves a problem or disappointment. These events should as much as possible refer to what happened not why it happened. By using the target diagram (see debriefing leaflet), the consequential and contributing issues of the events are identified and analysed by the project team. The wider implications from the events are then outlined that are not specific to the project but to the operation of projects, organisations or the industry in general. At the end of the meeting, each participant is asked for his/her major learning points. The results, which can be recorded, include a deeper and wider appreciation of the current project and a list of learning points attached to events.

In all cases the events and the analysis become part of a companies knowledge base. They are then used to inform similar projects or for general staff knowledge and skill building. (See dissemination leaflet).

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.

