

Chapter 10

The Four Levers for Change in Knowledge Management Implementation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to argue the connection between successful knowledge management implementation and a robust change management platform. The framework emanating from the platform is that of four levers: Mobilisation, Communication, Infrastructure, and Sustainability. Drawing on the research literature and the writers' combined experience in implementing change and knowledge management in the Public Sector, the content examines utilisation of the four levers in overcoming the barriers to knowledge management systems and promoting commitment to their success. A planned outcome of this chapter is that Public Sector managers can consider and "leverage" the opportunity offered by knowledge management and sharing in the formulation and delivery of government policy. The framework of the four levers is considered from a conceptual perspective and acknowledges the opportunity for their exploration and testing in future empirical research.

INTRODUCTION

The principle argument set out in this chapter is based on the contention that: If the public sector is to maximise operational capability in the 21st Century, it must find a way to effectively leverage its capacity to build, disseminate, retain and apply

mission-critical knowledge in supporting the formulation and execution of government policy. The way to do this is by developing and implementing a robust knowledge management strategy. As the remainder of this chapter points out, this is most likely to occur if the knowledge management implementation process is itself underpinned by a robust change management platform.

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In order to set the scene for this argument, a short history note to provide context is useful. Knowledge management emerged as a formal business function in the early to mid-1990s; its arrival greeted with enthusiasm in both industry and government sectors. The business schools also became interested stakeholders, precipitating waves of academic research literature (cf., Polyani, 1967; Barney, 1991; Nonaka, 1994; Grant, 1996; Snyder & Cummings, 1998; Gore & Gore, 1999; Cross & Baird, 2000; Bollinger & Smith, 2001; Clarke & Rollo, 2001). The momentum in research continues; one of the reasons being recognition, by managers in both industry and government sectors, that the way in which an organisation leverages its management of knowledge is a major potential source of mission effectiveness in a business environment increasingly characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (referred to as the VUCA Syndrome). The VUCA Syndrome has been used to describe the state of global competitive economics in a world re-calibrated by such disruptive phenomena as the SARS pandemic, the events of 9-11, and most recently the still-lingering effects of the Global Financial Crisis. This Chapter will present four leverages for implementing knowledge management in the public sector, within a framework of change management. The impetus for this implementation is the promotion of knowledge management as a conduit for turning information into intelligence in the learning, successful public sector organisation. The framework is put forward from the perspective of practitioners, but also as a potential area of focus for further research in the area of knowledge management and change management.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Together with the subject of organisational leadership, Change Management (CM) has received significant attention in the Organisational Behaviour and Management literature over the past 60 years (cf., Swanson, Newcomb & Hartley, 1952; Bennis, Benne, Chin & Corey, 1969; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Hassard & Sharifi, 1989; Nutt & Backoff, 1993; Yokota & Mitsuhashi, 2008; Rusley, Corner & Sun, 2012). Further, as with leadership, there are as many definitions of CM as there have been authors writing about it (Pries & Stone, 2004). A definition we find useful in our consulting work is the following: “Change management is a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state.” We find this construction of the term useful because it makes clear the central importance of the human element in the CM calculus. By implication, the meaning of the definition for this context is: If responsible for implementing knowledge management (KM) in an agency, then be sure to make adequate provision for the human element when undertaking planning!

Over the years it has become apparent that making adequate provision for the human element can be greatly assisted by bearing in mind the following observations (Waddell & Sohal, 1998; Mabin, Forgeson & Green, 2001; Nelissen & van Selm, 2008):

- Change is often perceived to involve some form of personal loss, causing the individual to be cautious, ambivalent and fretful when faced with change.

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