



"Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning for Development"

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Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning for Development¹

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1. Introduction

The huge wealth of definitions and theories relating to knowledge management and organisational learning can be overwhelming. As these terms have been increasingly used in the development context, questions are being raised about their meaning and implication. What's the difference between the various terms and approaches? Where did they come from? What do they all add up to? Where are they going? Specifically, what does it all mean in the field of international development?

Knowledge Management: Systematic approaches to help information and knowledge emerge and flow to the right people, at the right time to create value.
World Bank
knowledge.usaid.gov/what.html

There are no simple answers to the above questions, but in these few pages we try to draw out some useful frameworks for thinking about these issues, and offer some suggestions for advancing our own thinking and practice. In the following section, we highlight some of the key differences between the fields of knowledge management and organisational learning,

highlighting the range of theoretical perspectives which underpin these bodies of work. We then look at the directions of more recent thinking and whether there is a convergence between the disciplines. The next section of the paper considers what organisational learning and knowledge management mean in the context of international development and what the key challenges are. We finally propose some theoretical and practical perspectives that we believe can help to advance OL and KM practice in the development field.

2. KM and OL – what's it all about?

To understand the current thinking around organisational learning and knowledge management it is worth setting it in the context of the theoretical disciplines from which the literature has emerged over the past 40 years. The concept of organisational learning appeared much earlier than that of knowledge management. The first references to the former started to appear in the 1960s, becoming more common during the 1980s, whereas knowledge management only really emerged in the 1990s. Both took experience within and thinking about private sector organisations as their starting point, and shared an emphasis on improving performance, efficiency and effectiveness in what was seen as an increasingly dynamic and challenging corporate environment. Both see knowledge and learning as a source of competitive advantage.

Organisational learning refers to the study of the learning processes of and within organisations, largely from an academic point of view. The **learning organisation** is seen as an entity, an ideal type of organisation, which has the capacity to learn effectively and hence to prosper. Easterby-Smith and Lyle, 2003.

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Learning organisations discover what is effective by reframing their own experiences and learning from that process. They are self aware, introspective organisations that constantly scan their environments (McGill and Slocum 1993).

Whilst the ultimate objective of knowledge management and organisational learning might be seen as being quite similar, the paths and methods to achieve that end vary considerably according to the theoretical perspective within which thinking or practice is founded. The following list (drawing on Easterby-Smith 1997 and Scarborough and Swan 2003) highlights the range and contrast amongst

these disciplinary underpinnings which have been explored and developed at various stages over the past four decades or so.

- **Psychology and organisation development:** focuses on the development of the individual or group within the organisational context. It covers the areas of learning from experience (experiential learning or action learning), and how people build cognitive maps and modify or expand these in the light of new experience or insight.
- **Management science:** deals principally with the gathering and processing of information, the notion of organisational knowledge, and how information and knowledge impact on managerial decision making. The focus here is particularly on the utility of information technology for knowledge distribution within the organisation.
- **Sociology and organisation theory:** focuses on the social systems and organisational structures which may affect or enhance organisational learning. It addresses functional issues (structures and hierarchy that limit learning) and sees the management science perspective as naïve for ignoring issues of power.
- **Strategic management:** centres around the ways in which improved learning can increase efficiency and competitiveness principally in private sector organisations. Exchange of technical information is key in order that technological advances are made and organisations can adapt in the face of changing environments. Organisations need to learn in order to survive.
- **Cultural perspective:** brings to the table both organisational (i.e. meanings, values and behaviours) and national manifestations of culture as significant influences on learning.
- **Information Science / Information technology:** more practice- than theory-driven, with a focus on codification and storage of knowledge through decision support tools, databases, intranets, etc.

A further dimension of difference highlighted in the body of work on OL and KM relates to levels of analysis, i.e. whether learning happens at an individual, group, organisational or inter-organisational / network level, and how these different levels of learning might relate to one another. Some authors view learning as only happening at the individual level with no additional organisational benefits. Others see organisational learning as adding up to more than the sum of individuals' learning, i.e. the learning and changes amongst individual members become encoded within the collective mind of the organisation, resulting in more persistent changes in organisational memory, behaviours, norms and values.

Knowledge management is the explicit and systematic management of vital knowledge and its associated processes of creating, gathering, organising, diffusion, use and exploitation. It requires turning personal knowledge into corporate knowledge that can be widely shared throughout an organisation and appropriately applied. Skyrme, D.1997
www.skyrme.com/insights/22km.htm

Organisational learning and knowledge management, drawing from this wide range of disciplines and theoretical positions, now has a hugely diverse terminology

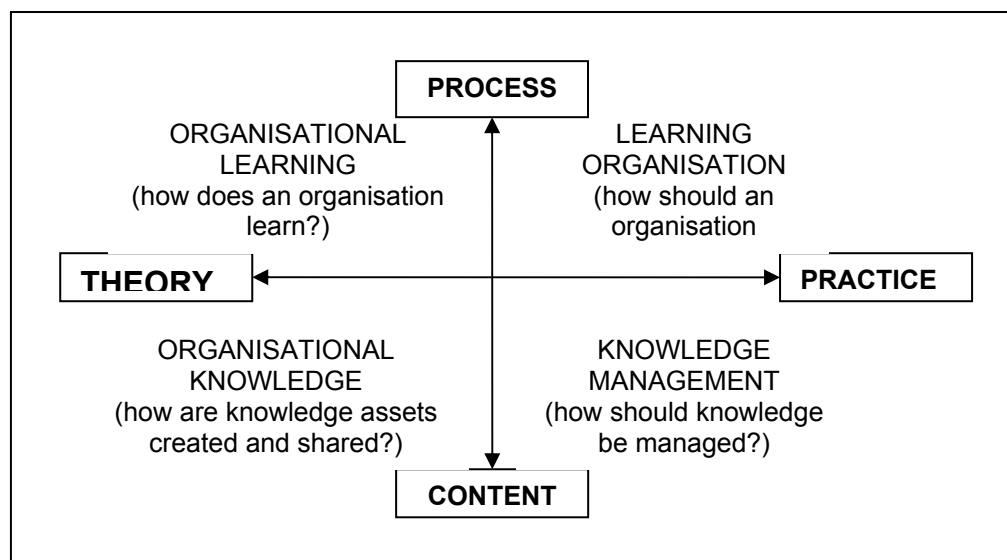
associated with the field. Until recently no-one had really brought these fields together under any shared conceptual framework. Easterby Smith and Lyle begin to do this in their Handbook of Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management (2003), as they seek to encourage more communication and cross fertilisation between the disciplines.

Learning organizations [are] organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.

In searching to define the key differences between Organisational Learning (OL) and Knowledge Management (KM), and other associated terms, we have found that Easterby-Smith and Lyle's (2003) framework (figure 1) is helpful for

locating the different focus areas of the broader literature around two axes. One axis draws a distinction between work that focuses on theory and tends to come from academic sources, and work that takes practice as its starting point, usually produced by managers or management consultants drawing on their personal experience. The difference between organisational learning and the learning organisation has been clearly articulated by a number of authors: the focus of the former being on the enquiry into the ways in which organisations learn; and the latter taking a more pragmatic and aspirational approach to describing the characteristics of an organisation which successfully learns. Easterby-Smith and Lyle draw a similar contrast between the more theoretical and more practice oriented approaches to understanding knowledge and how it is shared, terming the former organisational knowledge and the latter knowledge management.

Figure 1.



Source: adapted from Easterby Smith and Lyles, 2003

The framework further divides approaches according to their focus on process and on content. Reference to dictionary definitions helps to highlight this contrast, as each of the words “knowledge” and “learning” have both a process and a content angle to their definitions:

	Process	Content
Knowledge	"Awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation"	"Facts, information, and skills acquired through experience and education"
Learning	"The acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience or being taught"	"Knowledge acquired in this way"

Approaches that look at knowledge and knowledge management tend to take content as their starting point, viewing knowledge as an asset or a resource, a commodity which individuals and organisations can acquire (Vera and Crossan, 2003). The study of "Organisational Knowledge" therefore seeks to understand how knowledge is created and transformed (e.g. from tacit to explicit and vice versa), from a more theoretical standpoint. Knowledge Management, on the other hand, has been the domain of practitioners aiming to develop viable systems and processes by which to handle and use knowledge assets effectively. In general, the term Knowledge Management is used in relation to both of these two perspectives.

Viewing knowledge/learning as process or practice, by contrast, brings people into the picture and thus tends to be more cognitive and behaviouristic in approach. It aims to understand how people acquire and apply knowledge and under what circumstances they learn and affect change. For some authors this is a factor of abstract processes of thinking and reasoning, for others it shaped by their attitudes, values and incentives, and is influenced by their environment. Understanding and creating the conditions for effective learning have tended to be the domains of the OL and the Learning Organisation literature respectively.

Looking back at the quotations cited in the margins above, some patterns now become clearer. Knowledge Management (and Organisational Knowledge) is more concerned with creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing and using knowledge to enhance performance. Organisational Learning (and the Learning Organisation) relates to enhancing organisations ability to reflect on and reframing its own experiences, and has a stronger focus on allowing individual and collective creativity to flourish. This traditional divide in the approaches also has implications in terms of organisational roles, and the development of knowledge and learning strategies in isolation from one another: Knowledge Management staff tend to be more associated with IT departments or those that manage databases and systems; whereas organisational learning is perceived as the domain of human resources with a focus on training, interactive learning, and organisational culture (Vera and Crossan, 2003).

The Easterby-Smith and Lyle framework obviously simplifies the wide range of disciplines which do not all necessarily fit neatly into their four quadrants, however it does broadly capture the past trends and emphases of KM and OL in such a way as to help us to position our own thinking. But what of current trends in literature and practice? Do they still fall to one or other side of those divides?

2.1 Recent evolution and convergence

Vera and Crossan (2003:137) note that 'authors studying organisational learning and researchers studying knowledge acquisition, knowledge creation and knowledge development are likely to be studying the same phenomenon from different perspectives and with the use of different terminology'. However, increasingly it seems that the language and principles of OL and KM are being used interchangeably.

Since gaining mainstream acceptance in the 1990s, practical and theoretical understandings of knowledge and knowledge management have evolved, most notably into what is now being termed second- and even third-generation knowledge management (Snowden, no date). The driving force behind these changes has been an growing recognition of the accelerating pace of unpredictable, 'discontinuous' environmental change (Nadler et. al., 1995; Arthur, 1996). As organisations increasingly came to be seen as interdependent, complex, and needing to be responsive to external stimuli and conditions, new metaphors were added to the mix. Rather than rigid, mechanistic information processes and objectives ('error correction', 'information storage'), second generation KM embraces the concept of learning as a social process (i.e. one that involves collective human actions and interactions), now merely *facilitated* by information technologies. This shift in perspective is coupled to a more 'relational' view of knowledge that emphasises it as being more provisional and bound to particular social contexts (Orr, 1990; Barley, 1996). In this way, the social construction of knowledge highlights how knowledge is created and supported through processes of learning by way of human interaction and situational embedding. In such a frame, knowledge and learning are co-dependent and cannot be separated.

As the business world becomes more complex, joint ventures and strategic alliances have presented new challenges to learning, raising the question of inter-organisational learning and knowledge sharing to the fore. In the context of the corporate sector this is still rooted in motivations of efficiency and competitive advantage, and limits itself to simple, binary organisational relationships brought about by mergers, joint ventures or other contractual agreements. Other literature has started to raise some more challenging perspectives. Systems thinking, as outlined by Senge in his work on the 'fifth discipline' (1990) helps to highlight the important feedback loops between different parts of a productive system. Though he initially describes relationships of interdependency between different parts of an organisational system, this can be applied to process that involve multiple organisations working collaboratively or in sequence. Innovation systems theory posits that innovation and technology development are results of a complex set of interactions and relationships among actors in the system. Learning between these actors is the key to the success of such systems as it underpins the evolutionary dynamic that often creates the new institutional forms that allow the development and utilisation of new technology (Hall, 2003). A similar trend can be seen in KM thinking, where 'knowledge systems' approaches are often rooted in systemically-grounded concepts, e.g. in the domains of agriculture and natural resource management (e.g. Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems).

From a practical perspective, the divergence between OL and KM in terms of operational framings has becoming much more nuanced: it seems we're beginning to straddle a middle ground. Given the critical linkages between knowledge and learning both in theory and in practice, it is still helpful to see them as separate disciplines? The publication of Easterby-Smith and Lyle's handbook illustrates that there is finally recognition (at least amongst some of its contributors) that it is important to acknowledge and draw on the richness of the multiple literatures, to begin to integrate the vocabularies, and to ensure greater alignment of organisational roles and strategies which draw on both organisational learning and knowledge management under a unified framework.

3. OL and KM for Development

What has been the experience of doing organisational learning and knowledge management within international development? Concepts and practices of OL and KM are generally considered to have evolved first in the private sector, and then to have been adapted by the development sector. But there are also important origins and innovations within development practice, perhaps overlooked because they are documented with different language, often as unpublished reports, and have not always engaged with the management science literature and theory (Davies 1998). Here we will first briefly trace the origins behind OL and KM within international development, and secondly explore the underlying values that have inspired development organisations to use them, and assess the implications of these normative and sometimes contradictory motivations.

3.1 Origins of Organisational Learning in Development

Rick Davies (1998) identifies three major strands of OL that arose within the development sector during the 1980s and 1990s. All three respond or react to the increased attention given to institutional performance within the neo-liberal policy environment of the time, and to the related emergence and presumed effectiveness of NGOs as mainstream development players. The three strands are:

- the **learning process approach** which emerged ‘as an argument against blueprint approaches to development projects’ (Davies, 1998, citing Korten 1980, Rondinelli 1983, and Uphoff 1986 as key influences);
- the systematic attention given to the **evaluation of development projects**, much of which began to address issues of organisational learning (Davies 1998, citing Marsden and Oakley 1990 and 1994, among others); and
- the growing body of material ‘produced by NGO staff specifically on **organisational learning in NGOs**’ (Davies 1998, emphasis added, citing Howes and Roche 1996, and Edwards 1997, as key examples).

This third strand has continued to expand (e.g. Roper and Pettit 2002) and to include other aid organisations and their relationships, beyond NGOs (e.g. Groves and Hinton 2004, Eyben 2006). As in much of the private sector literature, the approach to organisational learning in development has been normative and aspirational, and much is written from *within* organisations about their own experiences promoting learning and change. Davies concludes, like Easterby-Smith, that ‘there is not yet a single theory of organisational learning that is dominant, either within Development Studies or in social science more generally’ and there has been a lack of ‘learning about organisational learning’ in the development field (Davies 1998). This has clearly begun to change with growing interest and research in this area.

In addition to these more recent historical origins, organisational learning values and experiences within development can be traced back to even earlier concepts and practices of learning in development practice and organisations, some of which continue today. Roper and Pettit note the ‘paradox of origins’ as private sector OL concepts and terms have eclipsed these existing traditions, and highlight some additional sources (2002: 261). These are:

- the idea of **transformative learning** as a means of fulfilling human dignity, consciousness and self-determination, often through methods of adult education and literacy, and connected with processes of liberation and structural change (e.g. Freire 1972; Fals Borda 2001);

- related approaches to ***participatory action research***, which recognise the value of people creating their own knowledge and learning as a means of individual and wider societal change – ‘and by extension the organisations and structures involved’ (Roper and Pettit 2002: 261); and
- the rapid innovation and spread of ***participatory development methodologies*** in the 1990s, also linked to the rejection of blueprint thinking and ‘learning process’ approaches, with emphasis on learning, respecting diverse sources of knowledge, and challenging professional assumptions, attitudes and behaviour (Chambers 1993, 1997).

Two additional strands of development practice which anticipate OL thinking in the private sector are the value given to embracing change (notably the structural and institutional causes of poverty) and long-standing practices of ***organisational capacity-building*** and ***institution building*** in development (Roper and Pettit 2002: 262), which have both contributed to the third strand of *organisational learning in NGOs* (above) identified by Davies.

In more recent years, approaches to OL in development have of course intersected and been influenced or eclipsed by private sector and management science thinking and practices. A notable influence has been approaches to *action research*, *action learning* and *reflective practice* within organisations (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). These traditions share some values and principles with *participatory action research* and *participatory development methodologies*, but also come in variants that are more concerned with enhancing performance and effectiveness than with social change and power relations. In development, there has been a growing interest in action research and reflective approaches to learning which can enable professionals to question their assumptions, think more systemically, and be reflexive about their own values, power and worldviews (Pasteur 2006). We return to the potential of these, and *social learning* approaches to OL, in the conclusion.

3.2 Origins of KM in Development

The origins of KM in development can be traced in a somewhat similar fashion to ideas and practices in place decades before the current fashions emerged. There are references to the role of knowledge in development dating back to the early post-war period, as noted by Ramalingam (2005: 7, citing a 1948 speech by Harry Truman on the potential of technical and scientific knowledge), and continuing through to the now infamous declaration by James Wolfensohn in 1996 that the World Bank should become a “knowledge bank”, followed shortly by a World Development Report on *Knowledge for Development* (ibid: 8, World Bank 1998).

The World Bank’s articulation was the beginning of a departure from contemporary private sector views of knowledge as proprietary and as a source of competitive advantage, to be developed internally but closely guarded. According to Ramalingam, KM began to include “...a set of practices geared around the notion of sharing knowledge with Southern counterparts and the poor, and a further set which addresses knowledge economies in the South and attempts to overcome issues of the ‘digital divide’ (Ramalingam 2005: 17, citing World Bank 1998). Knowledge was recognised as something to be made more freely available for the benefit of all, albeit from the Bank’s perspective of positioning itself as a central knowledge broker. Other proponents of KM for Development have seen possibilities for more networked, mutual and democratic sharing of knowledge through enhanced capacities in the South. This broader agenda is summarised by Ramalingam as follows:

Overall, it is clear that the analysis of knowledge strategies in development organisations needs to be understood in the context of ‘knowledge-based aid’ – which suggests firstly that development agencies develop knowledge strategies for dealing with IM and OL; secondly that partnership mechanisms are developed for the transfer of knowledge and learning to the South; and thirdly that work is undertaken to build Southern capacity to absorb, apply and provide knowledge.(Ramalingam 2005: 21)

There are clearly close overlaps between the origins of OL and KM in development. KM-related concerns are often noted as one dimension of the challenges of enabling learning in development organisations. For example, there are frequent references to creating systems for better management of information and knowledge in the context of organisational learning initiatives, including those cited by Davies (above), notably in activities related to the two strands of *evaluation of development projects*, and *organisational learning in NGOs*. With the rapid expansion of knowledge and information capabilities, most development organisations have used KM to develop their own internal systems for managing and sharing information related to various aspects of organisational performance. And as noted by Ramalingam, there has increasingly been a capacity-building, networked and inter-organisational dimension to this. But what are the motivations behind these OL and KM efforts, and how do they shape the ways in which OL and KM are applied in development?

3.3 Values and aspirations behind OL and KM

While there are clearly differences in scope and purpose of OL and KM within development, there have also been convergences akin to those outlined in Section 2. The KM agenda appears to be moving in the direction of facilitating learning, and so the two fields are increasingly discussed and approached in tandem. In choosing between OL and KM approaches, the key question may not be what the approaches themselves can offer, but what the values and intentions are of those who use them. Using OL and KM to enable change in international development implies a vast and diverse range of objectives and approaches. Much will depend on the actual people and organisations involved, and the kinds of change or development they hope to achieve. For example, a key lesson from the experience of promoting participatory methodologies in development is that they can take on quite different meanings and purposes for different users. Tools and methods don’t create change, it’s the people who use them that do.

If values and intentions are central to the ways in which OL and KM are used, how can these normative aspirations be more clearly identified and expressed? One part of the answer to this is to ask whether such values are held individually or collectively. Both OL and KM are essentially about learning and knowledge needs of *groups*, in addition to individuals within them. It is usually hoped or assumed that the methods being used will lead to some *collective* or *relational* improvements in performance or behaviour. So there is an assumption that at some level a number of actors are working from a shared set of values and purpose around which they learn and develop their knowledge. This could be within an organisation or some part of it, or within a broader community of practice, network or partnership. How values are collectively defined and shared is therefore very important.

Yet in the world of development, values are often implicit and assumed rather than explicitly clarified. People may operate with the same language, but will often have different understandings. There may not be agreement on the very purpose of learning and knowledge in development. Development discourses and policy

agendas often assume a shared purpose which in practice is so broad as to be meaningless, at least for the purposes of trying to select methods and strategies such as OL and KM. For some an obvious prerogative for implementing a KM/OL strategy could be to 'accelerate efforts towards poverty reduction' or 'meeting the MDGs', but these broad objectives do not help us in defining more explicitly how such a strategy could help in achieving these goals.

Similarly, for some development organisations are perceived as functioning essentially in the same way as private sector organisations. The pivotal World Development Report of 1998 stated that 'the balance between knowledge and resources has shifted so far towards the former that knowledge has become the most important factor determining the standard of living – more than land, than tools, than labor' (World Bank, 1998). The implication here is that knowledge leads to development. Yet in reality there are so many contrasting meanings of development, kinds of knowledge, hierarchies of language and differences of power and perspective. There is a huge diversity of development actors with different values, motivations and interests, and often with vastly differential power and access to knowledge and information. There are also contradictory priorities between upward accountability and knowledge flows and the need to respect and advance local knowledge, and to encourage downward accountability and transparency.

Development organisations are sometimes equated rather simplistically with the private sector, while in certain ways they behave according to quite different values and incentives. Development organisations seek changes and outcomes in society beyond the boundaries of the organisational and its bottom line. Barnard (2003:2) points to three important ways in which the KM for Development agenda diverges from KM in the private sector:

- First, because development organisations are not directly accountable to shareholders or customers, they don't depend for their very survival on sharing knowledge; so in effect, they 'can get away with not sharing their mistakes for longer';
- Secondly, private companies tend to value knowledge as intellectual property for their competitive advantage, whereas "development knowledge is (or should be) more of a public good" (although in reality many do guard information for competitive purposes);
- And finally, organisational cultures in the two sectors can be quite different: "What might work well as a way of motivating knowledge sharing in a fast-moving, well-managed multinational company will not necessarily be so effective in a development agency, where many individuals have a strong personal commitment to development, but are often operating within a slower-moving and more bureaucratic set-up" (ibid: 2).

At the same time, many development actors are essentially private sector companies and behave accordingly, so the distinction is not always clear. There are particular challenges faced by development agencies relating to sector wide approaches, departmentalisation, geographical separation between country offices and headquarters, and constantly shifting aid policies and procedures (e.g. donor harmonisation, direct budget support). This dynamic environment requires capacities for continuous learning and innovation, albeit different from market factors.

If values and incentives shape the way that OL and KM strategies are used, they will also determine the depth to which these strategies are used to effect organisational change. This is likely to be the case in both the private and development sectors, and

is illustrated by the simple contrast between 'adaptive' and 'generative' learning (Senge, 1990) or single- and double-loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978), as pointed out by Malhotra (1996). If an organisation is intent upon evolving in response to fundamental challenges or complexities in their working environment, this will steer them toward generative, double- (or triple-) loop activities. If on the other hand, they are seeking to adapt their ways of working to become more efficient within a context that is assumed to be stable, they will veer toward more adaptive and single-loop activities. The difference is that 'generative learning, unlike adaptive learning, requires new ways of looking at the world' (Malhotra, 1996). This underlying difference of intent will be there regardless of whether OL or KM methodologies are employed. For this reason, processes of learning and knowledge are in themselves seen as having intrinsic value in OL and KM thinking – because we may not know what we don't know. Those organisations using KM/OL to create deeper and longer-term changes – whether internally or with others – tend to inquire into their values and assumptions as part of the process.

The role of values as a driver of the kind of learning, knowledge or change desired is also underscored by the emphasis, in much OL thinking, on leadership. Without leaders who can help to articulate values and vision, and motivate people to understand basic principles and purpose at a collective level, organisations or teams will go adrift. While KM extends beyond the organisation, the same principles apply to KM initiatives, whether they are driven by organisations, consortia or networks. The values and vision of the group and its leadership, and how these principles are created and communicated, will determine how individuals in the organisation or initiative will respond to diverse OL or KM initiatives. For this reason, careful attention is needed to the *processes* by which values and purpose are defined and articulated so as to create an enabling environment for OL and KM to succeed. Without these processes, OL and KM will merely become toolkits and methodologies in a vacuum.

4. Conclusion

The exuberant uptake of KM and OL over the last decade or so by both private and public-sector organisations have led some to see these approaches as a 'silver bullet' or an organisational panacea. It should be clear to the more seasoned among us that this is an unlikely scenario. The literature has often mirrored this enthusiasm with embellished, metaphorical, and hyperbole-laden language, with a tendency toward an ever increasing discontinuity between scholarly musings and pragmatic and 'real' ways of working and communicating both within and between organisations.

How have theoretical advancements been captured by organisations, and translated and institutionalised into concrete actions? We feel that a serious 'operationalisation gap' may be creating a widening chasm between theory and practice. That is, organisations are having difficulty in effectively distilling lessons from the academic realm into routinised practices that bring about the flexibility, adaptability, dynamism and innovations that KM and OL approaches have long promised. Undoubtedly a big stumbling block is the complex, codified and the abstracted from empirical reality nature of theory. But it may also be a reflection of organisational and communicative failures at a much lower level. If a place of work, organisation, or community does not encourage an open culture of sharing, interaction, team work, informal spaces and times for learning and reflection, creative input and initiative, then any superimposed knowledge management or learning approach or is very likely to be met with internal resistance and thus fail.

What has tended to happen in development is that organisations have generally leaned towards linear and technocentric interpretations of KM/OL, more in line with the descriptive early traditions of knowledge management and organisational development or “institution building”. Few institutionalising ‘best practices’ have evolved to encompass the learning aspects of KM and key elements of OL probably because these have proved difficult to draw up, rationalise and concretise into reliable procedures and structured ways of working. This gap is also rooted in the complex challenge of facilitating learning for change. We tend to equate learning with the intellectual grasp of new knowledge, or the conceptualisation of experience, and to assume that this will lead in some rational way to changes in our behaviour.

Theorists of learning, and adult education in particular, have long observed that cognitive sense-making is only one dimension of learning and knowledge. Changes in behaviour are more likely to occur where learners cycle through a variety of learning experiences, usually including an iteration of action, reflection, conceptualisation and practice (Kolb 1985) or combining experiential, presentational, propositional and practical learning (Heron 1999). Yet learning is usually conceived and approached as a conceptual process, with the expectation that new thinking will change behaviour and practice. This after all is the key assumption behind the policy research industry, and its research communication and KM counterparts. Taking a closer look at how such multidimensional approaches to learning and change can be more effectively facilitated in development organisations is therefore a vital priority for taking forward OL/KM strategies.

Continuing somewhat in this vein, we further question whether development organisations have traditionally been too inward looking, focussing on internal KM/OL structures and processes rather than – speaking systemically – looking both within and beyond their institutional boundaries and examining how their work and communication interfaces with client-side knowledge systems and a plurality of networked ‘intermediary’ actors. We believe organisations must engage beyond their known ‘comfort zones’ if sustainable social change is to be effected and real innovation stimulated. After all, organisational innovation is the result of the combination of existing knowledge with new knowledge (Kogut and Zander, 1992). As in eco-systems, biodiversity and evolutionary change are usually highest at the boundaries and intersections of different ecologies, rather than in the centre of a single system. The pressing development issues of our time- meeting MDG targets, addressing global resource constraints and environmental degradation, require renewed recognition of mankind’s interdependence. Trust, equality of power and fostering mutual understanding cannot be built on the back of monopolised knowledge structures and systems. Crucially, development actors and their institutions must embrace the notion that innovations for sustainability are created at the interfaces between knowledge systems, which for the above reasons mean the KM/OL approaches must not be seen as being delimited to ‘the organisation’.

This will not be easy. Pragmatically, Barnard (2003) cautions that development organisations may have difficulty doing so, as “keeping the boundaries close...allows KM systems to be closely matched to institutional goals and agendas”. This is a bigger challenge than OL and KM, and goes to the heart of the challenges now facing development organisations as they seek to balance their own survival, branding and identity with the need to work collaboratively and in partnerships, with shared ownership of ideas and initiatives.

4.1 Ways forward

Perhaps a third generation of “KM/OL” for development, where values are made explicit and reflected upon, and which questions epistemologies and paradigms offer potential scope for learning and progress? We think this could mean becoming more client oriented, demand led, and requiring concerted effort to engagement on level platforms. In addition it implies mutual engagement in a systemic whole, reaching beyond organisational boundaries.

Ideas and practical resources for moving this agenda forward are readily available, both within and beyond the KM and OL traditions. But what can development organisations actually *do* to improve their KM/OL systems and structures? As noted above, there are potential benefits to be gained from action research, reflective practice and social learning as theoretical and pragmatic foundations for OL and KM activities and initiatives.

Building on the idea that we should work from a greater sensitivity to values and purpose, combined with a deeper understanding of how learning and change actually occur, the fields of *action research* and *reflective practice* are increasingly being used by individuals, teams and organisations to better define and align their values and motivations. Action research is a vast field with many traditions (see Reason and Bradbury 2001), but a key principle is that practical solutions to problems will best be achieved through a shared process of learning and construction of knowledge, leading to action and change in behaviour and norms. Everyone can potentially contribute to the process of learning, questioning purpose and practices, developing values, and acting to achieve greater congruence between ideas and practice, whether at an individual or collective level. Action research in organisational contexts, increasingly, includes an emphasis on reflexivity or reflective practice (ibid), and indeed these principles are central to some OL thinking (e.g. Argyris and Schön 1978).

Yet, with some exceptions (e.g. Chambers 1997, McGee 2002), these approaches to reflexivity have not been widely adapted within development work. We believe that there is great potential in bridging this gap, and in so doing, making OL/KM processes more meaningful and effective. Action research and reflective practice may also be vital in using OL/KM strategies to address power relations. If power is multidimensional and socially embedded, as many theorists concur, we need to understand the way it works not only conceptually, but to go through learning processes that can access and challenge these multiple dimensions. As noted above, learning can be designed to cycle through a range of activities that will allow learners to construct their own understandings and experiences of power, not just analytically but also in embodied ways, using the senses, emotions and diverse forms of knowledge and expression (Heron and Reason 1997).

Social learning situated in organisational contexts is not a particular new field of inquiry (see Elkjaer 2003 for a review), although it has not been fully articulated in development literature (Woodhill, 2002) In the former text, social learning is defined as a mode of learning beyond individual learning, and this adds the dimension of ontology. Because learning processes are embedded in social processes formed by culture and history, learning and knowing is inseparable from being and becoming (Elkjaer, 2003). Recognising this brings us closer to the level of reflexivity required for triple-loop learning (Argyris and Schön 1978) – the conscious questioning and adjustment of embedded values and paradigms. We also take cues from the application of social learning theory in NRM and environmental contexts. Röling (2002) emphasises that sustainability emerges from interaction, an appreciation of

human interdependence, and negotiated agreement. Crucially, this requires institutions to be built on reciprocity and trust. Without going into much detail here, R  ling's conceptualisation of social learning is couched in the properties of cognition. Cognition is the process by which knowledge (or knowing) is attained. This works through the *structural coupling* (Maturana and Varela 1987) between an individual and his or her environment. This coupling is continually maintained and adjusted through co-evolution and learning. Leeuwis (2002) extends these concepts to show how they actually relate to patterns of human interaction - what actors actually *do* or *don't do*. He develops a frame of reference which imparts a social contextualisation to cognition. Social interaction goes beyond just the biophysical, as actors are constantly assessing *perceived consequences*, *perceptions of likelihood and risk*, and the influences of *different sets of aspirations*. An important component of effective social learning is the establishment and facilitation of interactive platforms on which actors can meet, discuss, and learn. R  ling (2002) describes platforms as 'contrived situations in which a set of more or less interdependent stakeholders in some resource are identified and...invited to meet and interact in a forum for conflict resolution, negotiation, social learning and collective decision making towards concerted action'.

An interesting case illustrating interdependency and learning about values is provided by McDermott (2000) in an IT systems development context. In this analysis, he demonstrates the difficulty of thinking "outside an expert's own territory". He concludes that rather than sharing system documentation on a common database, the system designers instead needed to understand the logic the designers used in practice, including their rationale in selecting certain packages of software, hardware and service plans. He goes on to say that 'ideas are meaningful only in relation to the community's beliefs.'

There are myriad ways in which OL and KM initiatives can develop and deepen a clearer sense of purpose, which we do not have space to elaborate here. Perhaps a 'next' generation of 'KM/OL' for development offers scope for progress in this field. This would involve values being made explicit and actively reflected upon, questioning epistemologies and paradigms through perpetuated cycles of shared learning. We also think this could mean becoming more client oriented, demand led, and working towards engagement on jointly constructed platforms with genuine intent. Effort should be focussed on making visible some important elements of interactivity, such as political dimensions and power relations. These can all be made explicit through the use of deeper, multidimensional processes of action research and reflective practice, and by an operationalisation of concepts embedded in social learning.

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