

Knowledge Management: Another Avenue for HIM Professionals

Save to myBoK

by Gwen Hughes, RHIA

Having become increasingly familiar with the term knowledge management (KM) this past year, I believe that KM offers HIM professionals a host of career opportunities. But what is KM? And what makes KM a possible career choice for many HIM professionals?

Knowledge Management Defined

Knowledge is more than data and information. It is information enriched through context, analysis, and interpretation and reflecting understanding acquired through study, observation,

and experience. Some organizations describe knowledge as the collective experience and expertise of employees.

KM is a relatively new business initiative. It can be described as the systematic, effective administration and use of an organization's intellectual assets. KM encompasses identification, creation, storage, retrieval, and timely distribution of an organization's collective knowledge to achieve results. Properly executed, KM extends throughout an enterprise to people, technology, and processes. It becomes a hallmark of an organization's culture.

In today's environment, organizational success depends on maximizing every resource, including what a company knows. "Winning companies will out think the competition," according to a recent issue of the *Information Management Journal*. [1](#) Only by building on past experiences and reusing knowledge can organizations cost-effectively speed up the process of making decisions, implementing change, improving quality, and bringing new services to market. Sustained success will require a combination of learning, leadership, and agility—each supported by knowledge.

The Steps to Managing Knowledge

To successfully manage knowledge, organizations must:

Create a knowledge management vision. To support this vision, an organization must also develop principles to guide its expedition and strategies to realize its vision. To facilitate development of these principles and strategies and oversee implementation, organizations may find it useful to establish a KM project team and create knowledge leader positions, such as a chief knowledge officer or director of knowledge management.

Develop a knowledge management culture that celebrates diverse viewpoints and encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing. Knowledge resides in people, so strategies aimed at encouraging people to share rather than hoard knowledge is imperative. One strategy is to implement communities of practice among individuals with common interests to support information sharing. To reinforce the importance of information sharing, desired KM-related behaviors must be linked to employee performance appraisals, recognition, and rewards.

Provide materials that support KM. Examples include databases, communication, and Web technology; groupware such as white boards, online conferencing software, or videoconferencing equipment; job aids such as knowledge maps and computer-based performance support; and physical structures such as learning centers.

Establish and support staff in the acquisition of core competencies. Core competencies include technical expertise and knowledge as well as information unique to the particular organization. Additional competencies in a KM environment would

include skills necessary to identify, categorize, save, and share knowledge, as well as the ability to locate or mine knowledge from human and computer sources.

Develop and implement a mechanism to integrate knowledge residing in human minds with knowledge residing in documents. One of the major challenges in a KM environment will be to acquire knowledge that is unspoken or articulated in unrecorded conversations between colleagues and to glean from e-mails important knowledge appropriate for sharing.

Establish systems to communicate, structure, categorize, analyze, and locate knowledge. Due to its limited shelf life, knowledge will have to be continually renewed, replenished, and expanded. There will also be a need to structure, categorize, and archive information to be able to find pertinent knowledge while avoiding knowledge overload.

Implement systems that will protect the organization's knowledge assets. Just as HIM professionals protect patient health information, the organization's knowledge assets must also be protected from unauthorized access and use.

KM Opportunities and Challenges

KM presents HIM professionals with both challenges and opportunities. We can make valuable contributions to KM. We cannot afford to be perceived solely as data or information collectors but must adapt, fashion new roles, and move ahead. We must recognize the intellectual capital we control and identify opportunities to move beyond physical records and think in terms of "virtual" knowledge.

HIM professionals have certain advantages when entering the KM arena. We already have information literacy skills that enable us to find, acquire, manage, and share information. Many already understand the information flows that underpin a healthcare enterprise. We also have skills integral to change and project management, such as the ability to influence attitudes, work in complex organizations, cross boundaries, and navigate in political waters. Further, HIM professionals have team and consensus-building skills, plus training, coaching, and communication skills that are all essential to KM.

Charting a Course in KM

As with those interested in entering any new career arena, HIM professionals must prepare. Those interested in moving into knowledge management should:

- learn more about KM, strategies, and enabling technology by reading available literature and participating in KM courses or conferences
- get involved in existing KM initiatives within your own organization. If none exist, approach senior management about initiating a KM expedition
- visualize how HIM skills, concepts, policies, and procedures can support and be transferred to KM
- become more aware of how and when records are used and could be used. Create a knowledge inventory
- demonstrate the value of an HIM professional in the knowledge management environment. Be flexible in job assignments and responsibilities. Grasp opportunities to transfer HIM skills to the KM environment
- encourage classification when documents are first saved as e-mail messages and electronic documents so content can be captured in a knowledge base
- obtain credentials as a Certified Knowledge Manager (CKM)
- keep abreast of KM issues by visiting pertinent Web sites and participating on KM listservs

KM is an essential business asset that can result in organizational success. There are similarities between knowledge and information management disciplines: both strive to improve organizational effectiveness and encompass the identification,

creation, storage, retrieval, dissemination, and protection of an organization's information. HIM professionals have many transferable skills. For those who'd like to make the journey, the burgeoning field of KM presents real opportunities.

Note

1. Duffy, Jane. "Knowledge Management: What Every Information Professional Should Know." *The Information Management Journal* 34, no. 3 (2000): 10-16.

References

- Abell, Angela. "Skills for Knowledge Environments." *The Information Management Journal* 34, no. 3 (2000): 33-41.
- Allee, Verna. "Twelve Principles of Knowledge Management." Training and Development Magazine. Available at the American Society for Training and Development Web site: www.astd.org/CMS/templates/template_1.html?articleid=10595.
- Philips, John. "Will KM Alter Information Manager's Roles?" *The Information Management Journal* 34, no. 3 (2000): 58-62.
- Shams, Kamruddin, "Knowledge Management: A Future for HIM-How to get There From Here." Presented at the American Health Information Management Association 72nd National Convention, Chicago, IL, September 2000.
- Safady, William. *Knowledge Management: A Manager's Briefing*. Prairie Village, KS: AMRA International, 1998.
- Yakel, Elizabeth. "Knowledge Management: The Archivist's and Records Manager's Perspective." *The Information Management Journal* 34, no. 3 (2000): 24-30.

Knowledge Management Resources

There are numerous Web portals, magazines, associations, and businesses that publish knowledge management information and many can be accessed online. A few of the more popular sites are listed below:

- WWW Virtual Library for Knowledge Management is described as the Web's largest virtual library on knowledge management. From this site, visitors can access articles, information about books, discussion forums, communities, events and job posts: www.brint.com/km/.
- Insead's Centre for Advanced Learning Technologies provides visitors with a structured encyclopedia and links to a myriad of knowledge management resources on the Web: www.insead.edu/CALT/Encyclopedia/.
- Buckman Laboratories, a company that has implemented knowledge management, shares its definition and a recommended starter kit of books and articles: www.knowledge-nurture.com.
- KM News provides a free electronic magazine to keep readers abreast of news in knowledge management: www.kmnews.com.
- Knowledge Management Consortium, an association of knowledge managers, provides recommended readings, links of interest, registration for classes and conferences, and a means of becoming a certified knowledge manager: www.kmci.org.

Gwen Hughes is an AHIMA practice manager. She can be reached at Gwen.Hughes@ahima.org.

Article citation:

Hughes, Gwen. "Knowledge Management: Another Avenue for HIM Professionals." *Journal of AHIMA* 72, no.1 (2001): 70-71.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.