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Organización
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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UNESCO and Knowledge Sharing (5) : How Can UNESCO Become a Better Knowledge Broker ?

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The final session in this four-part series looks at some of the issues raised, asks how UNESCO can improve its brokerage role between creators and users of knowledge and explores possible ways to enhance its knowledge management.

Knowledge Sharing: UNESCO's Niche

Among UN Agencies, UNESCO has a unique mandate arising from the breadth of the areas in which it works, as well as the depth of specialisation within each area. These areas are highly strategic, as education, the sciences, culture and communication all interconnect and make up the very fabric of society.

UNESCO seeks to provide "knowledge services" that are non-prescriptive, inclusive and that draw on diversity. Rather than impose policy lines, the Organization's role is to gather information and knowledge, offer scenarios and propose agendas to its constituencies through different types of knowledge sharing processes.

This supports UNESCO's "upstream" role, developing its capacity for foresight, identifying trends early, exploring them with experts, capitalising on idea generation, acting as an expert authority on innovative implications of knowledge.

This could be its comparative advantage in a rapidly evolving competitive field.

Putting the Focus on Knowledge Sharing Processes?

From discussions on the case studies presented in the first three sessions (see previous fact sheets), it became clear that to comprehend knowledge sharing,

it is essential to identify and analyse, not so much the *content* of a programme or the *modalities* of programme delivery, but the *processes* used.

For example, UNESCO's meetings and publications on HIV/AIDS offer an example of knowledge sharing as a **learning** and **preventive** process. The Community of Practice for Curriculum Development of the International Bureau of Education operates as an open **collaborative** process. The General Histories offered the example of knowledge sharing as a **dialogue** process resulting in an authoritative publication. The "laboratory of ideas" function, illustrated by the overall work of the Institutes, confirms the generative/creative process. Each modality – for example, meetings – may involve entirely different and specific processes ranging from capacity-building to knowledge creation. The

publications modality may engage different processes ranging from simple information transfer to foresight (e.g. World Reports).

Crucially, the content of a publication may have to be offered in a whole variety of formats, lengths and languages before it achieves its purpose of sharing and increasing the knowledge of all its different target audiences.

Many excellent knowledge products have limited impact due to poor or inexistent knowledge sharing processes (which form the bedrock of good knowledge management practice). Lack of resources and/or lack of prioritisation for the multi-versioning of the product greatly diminish the effectiveness of the initial investment.

Some Key Concepts

The case studies presented in the first three sessions showed that there are no water-tight compartments between the core functions. A

programme activity may fulfil – simultaneously or successively – more than one function. It also became clear that a common understanding of these core functions, based on practical working definitions of each one, is essential for effective knowledge management.

Clearing House: gathering, transferring, disseminating and sharing available information,

knowledge and best practices in UNESCO's fields of competence, identifying innovative solutions and testing them through pilot projects.

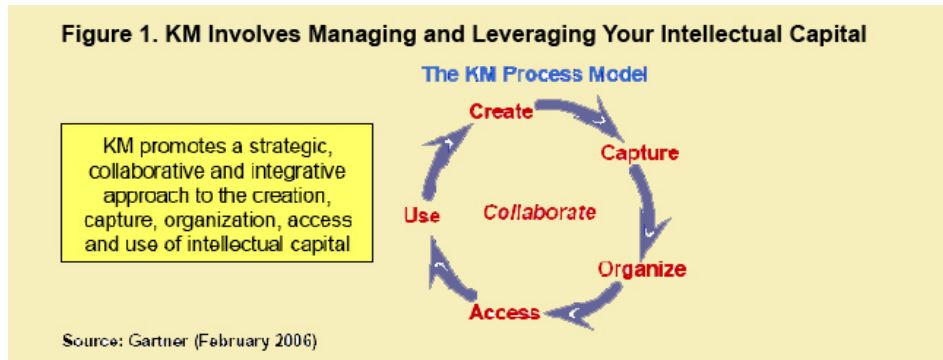
Laboratory of Ideas: creating the conditions for the generation of new knowledge in UNESCO's fields of competence – both innovative and even ground-breaking knowledge via foresight, to anticipate future trends, and assuring the effective transmission of current relevant knowledge to concerned publics and stakeholders.

Capacity Building: knowledge sharing processes in support of creating enabling environments in UNESCO's fields of competence including appropriate policy and legal frameworks, institutional development and community participation



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Figure 1. KM Involves Managing and Leveraging Your Intellectual Capital



Some Key Concepts (continued)

New knowledge: new to whom? UNESCO has a mandate to foster and disseminate newly created knowledge, but also has a duty to ensure that all its stakeholders have access to knowledge that is new for them.

Knowledge for reflection and knowledge for action: UNESCO's mandate covers both areas, with practical, technical and scientific action-oriented knowledge as well as open-ended, philosophical and social-science based reflection. It has particular added value when these two combine in a full knowledge process culminating in delivery of knowledge services tailored to meet Member States' needs.

Filtering and Endorsing Information and Knowledge: UNESCO's role as a filter and as an authority offering endorsement of valid, relevant and high quality information and knowledge takes on increasing importance, given the challenge posed by the sheer volumes of information available today.

Knowledge Systems

Expertise regarding knowledge systems (with their key components of policies, infrastructure, human resources and investment) enables UNESCO to tackle issues at the systemic level. For instance, it addresses the issue of brain drain as a consequence of problems within the knowledge system that allows brain drain to occur.

Issues Raised, Questions Posed

The following are a selection of the issues and questions that came up in earlier sessions.

- UNESCO needs to ensure a sharp focus and well-defined role in knowledge activities to give it a competitive advantage

- Conversely, there is a need to avoid mission creep and undue "spread".
- How to encourage knowledge sharing within UNESCO? The involvement of colleagues, recognition of their contribution, their ownership of knowledge sharing processes, professionalization of knowledge sharing (metadata systems, classification, licensing...) are all part of the answer and can help overcome "silo" mentalities.
- Quality and quality control are core issues: how can quality be recognised and supported?
- The exact location of UNESCO activities within the complete knowledge cycle needs to be well understood (see diagram above) to ensure relevance and effectiveness, notably through bench-marking and evaluation.
- Understanding of an activity's relative "upstream" or "downstream" nature, and its connection to other activities, upstream or downstream, is particularly important in the context of UN Reform which obliges each member of the UN family to revisit and redefine its value added.
- How can staff become better knowledge brokers?
- How should human resources be structured to achieve the right balance between substantive expertise and management skills?
- Are new organisational processes needed to improve knowledge sharing – e.g. workflows, management structures, technology?
- UNESCO's own history, including reflections on lessons learnt, analysis of the Organization's role, impact, successes and failures and the relevance of the Constitution in today's world, should feed into efforts to improve UNESCO's knowledge sharing role.

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