



Overview of two knowledge management frameworks

Australia was the first country in the world to publish a standard on knowledge management (KM): AS 5037-2005 Knowledge Management—a Guide. The standard was published in late 2005 and is a descriptive framework or “soft” standard, which aims to provide organizations and KM practitioners with a guiding framework and methodology, which can be tailored and implemented according to business needs. This new breed of standard does not require compliance, preferring to offer leading practice in KM and an insight into various KM tools and techniques.

The standard is the result of the collaborative efforts of the KM Standards Technical Committee, established in 2001 by Standards Australia. An interim standard was published in 2003 (AS 5037-int) and the committee obtained and considered comments and feedback over a two-year period before the final standard was released in 2005. The committee was comprised of members from government agencies, private industry, and academia.

Having recently been introduced to the APO KM framework, I found benefit in examining both as they provide a holistic roadmap of broad approaches to KM in both Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. Additionally, the two frameworks highlight common drivers behind the need for KM in organizations as well as challenges in measuring KM initiatives and sustaining KM programs.

The APO KM framework has a similar genesis to the Australian standard as it was the collaborative work of representatives from the APO, Republic of China, India, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. KM practitioners and academics wanted the framework to provide a simple introduction to the discipline as well as emphasize the importance of KM to organizational success. Both frameworks highlight the critical success factors for KM implementation.

The global financial crisis has impacted organizations heavily. Aside from natural attrition in the workforce, the knowledge base of organizations



has been eroded by retrenchments, redundancies, and retirements. Now more than ever, KM can provide strategies and targeted solutions that can contribute to retaining the organizational knowledge base and preserving the talent pool. This is why the Australian KM standard and the APO KM framework are important resources for leveraging KM for organizational and employee benefit. Both help to define “what KM is” and both outline how KM enables learning and innovation at all levels and areas in an organization.

Understanding the underlying notion of the aspects of KM is the starting point for both frameworks. Table 1 shows the definitions adopted. The boldface words show that both the Australian standard and APO definition share a common understanding and that KM fundamentally concerns:

- achievement of organizational outcomes through the use of collective intelligence to increase productivity, profitability, and growth;
- the importance of context, since organizational cultures and employees differ from organization to organization;
- a balance between people, process, technology, and content;
- increases in individual capacity and organizational capability at all levels through KM; and
- enhancement of learning while opportunities for innovation emerge.

Table 1. Definitions of KM

Australian KM standard
<p>“A trans-disciplinary approach to improving organisational outcomes through maximising the use of knowledge. It involves the design, review and implementation of both social and technological activities and processes to improve creating, sharing and applying/using knowledge.”</p> <p>“Increasingly, knowledge management is concerned with innovation and sharing behaviours, managing complexity and ambiguity through social networks and connections, exploring smart processes and deploying people centric technologies.”</p>
APO KM framework
<p>“KM is an integrated approach of creating, sharing and applying knowledge to enhance organizational productivity, profitability, and growth.”</p>

The Australian KM standard, in particular, recognizes the influence of complexity theory and views organizations as complex adaptive systems in which the observed patterns of behavior are not repeatable. This means that business needs to be adaptable, resilient, and comfortable with ambiguity and it also means that KM must help to accelerate the adoption rate of new ideas, the development of new products and services, and value creation for the organization and its clients. The two definitions show that KM incorporates ideas, techniques, and influences from other practice areas, such as information and records management, organizational learning, and psychology. This allows KM to be fluid and emergent as it copes with the drivers influencing an organization.

Both frameworks also adopt visual models that help KM practitioners to interpret the organizational landscape and analyze how an organization’s knowledge health can be improved. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the Australian KM standard’s ecosystem model and the APO’s model, respectively.

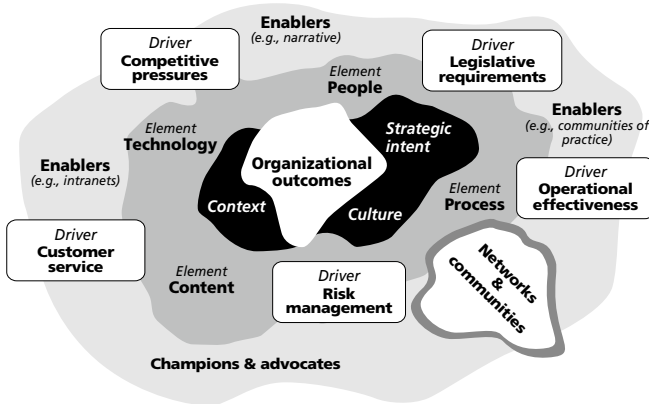


Figure 1. Australian KM standard ecosystem model.

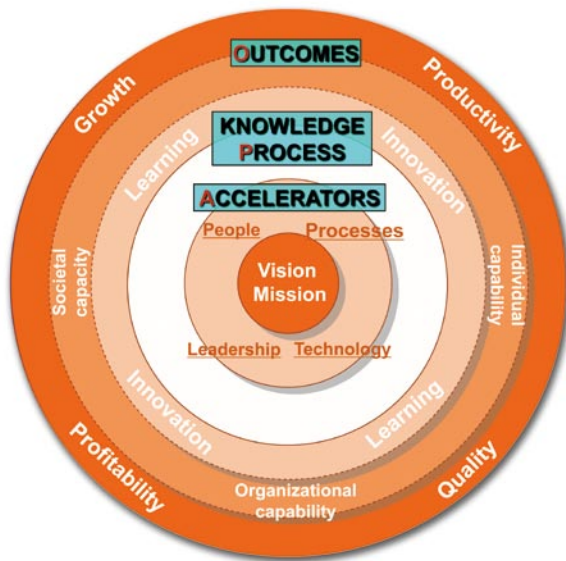


Figure 2. APO KM framework.

The starting point for both models is the vision and strategic intent of the organization, and alignment of knowledge activities with organizational strategy and drivers is viewed as crucial. The Australian KM model identifies external drivers that can affect an organization and its KM efforts with the primary ones being: competitors; customers; legislative pressures; and risk management. The APO visual refers to these drivers as “accelerators” and highlights four: leadership; people; process; and technology. Both models emphasize the importance of understanding internal and external drivers or forces that can have positive or negative impacts on the business environment and will inform KM initiatives. The notion of accelerators in the APO model signals that knowledge-focused leadership is a key success factor for KM, along with a knowledge-sharing culture, supportive technology, and knowledge processes (creation, storage, sharing, and distribution).

Supporting the visual models are methodologies that KM practitioners can use to plan and implement specific KM activities. Figure 3 shows the map-build-operationalize methodology of the Australian KM standard. In contrast, the APO relies on a “discover-design-develop-deploy” approach.

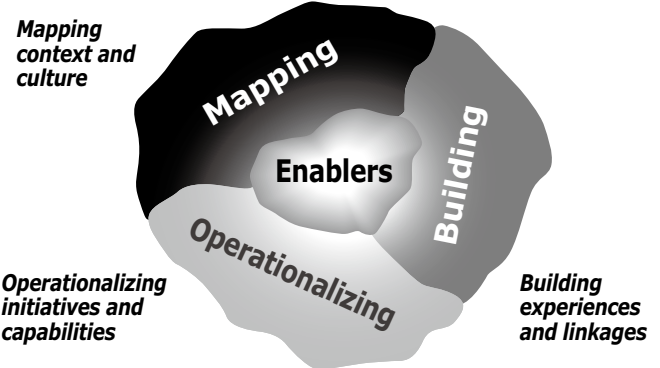



Figure 3. Map-build-operationalize methodology of the Australian standard.

The three-step methodology of the Australian KM standard focuses on the major phases in KM implementation:

- **Mapping**, or understanding the contextual landscape of the organization. This phase examines the current knowledge environment and asks the important strategic questions of “where are we?” and “where do we want to be?” Organizational knowledge gaps are identified through KM activities such as knowledge auditing and mapping, scenario planning, and social network analysis.
- **Building**, or framing answers to “where are we?” and “where do we want to be?” This phase identifies goals but achieving these goals most likely involves shifting the organization in terms of its knowledge maturity. This encourages an organization to try things it has not done before or explore new ideas and techniques. KM activities in this phase could be piloting and prototypes, creating knowledge champions, and fostering communities of practice.
- **Operationalizing (or actioning)**, or implementing an organization-wide KM initiative and developing a change management plan.

This methodology is a cyclical flow, which is similar to the APO methodology of discovering knowledge needs and gaps, designing KM pilot projects, developing or implementing pilot projects, and deploying KM initiatives throughout the organization.

One of the challenges for both frameworks, and for KM practitioners, is how to demonstrate or measure KM success. The Australian KM standard offers metrics around artifact-centered, activity-centered, and cultural or behavioral change-centered measurement. Perhaps the next phase for both frameworks will be to examine the emerging trends in KM including social media, narrative-based techniques, and reflective practices such as peer assists and action learning. These trends avoid focusing on knowledge as a “thing” to be managed and provide instead the right environment and conditions for enabling knowledge to emerge and flourish. 

With over 12 years' experience in industry as a KM practitioner, Kim Sbarcea is also the current Chair of the Standards Australia Knowledge Management Committee, which developed AS-5037 Knowledge Management—a Guide. She was an active member of the committee that developed the standard as well as the editor of it. Sbarcea's areas of specialization are knowledge and information management, communities of practice, social media, and leadership. She is also an Adjunct Professor at Hong Kong Polytechnic University and is heavily involved with the Master's in Knowledge Management program.