

Bangladesh hosts KM practitioners

Knowledge management (KM) is effective in driving excellence and growth in business and has the potential to make a significant difference in the performance of SMEs. Interest in KM among NPOs and APO member countries has been on the rise, as evident in an e-learning course on Knowledge Management Concepts and Practices organized by the Secretariat in February and March in which over 300 participants from 15 member countries enrolled.

As a follow-up, an in-depth training course on Knowledge Management for NPO Trainers and Facilitators was hosted by the National Productivity Organisation of Bangladesh, 9–13 May 2010. Twenty participants from 14 APO member countries gathered in Dhaka to acquire advanced knowledge of KM tools and techniques and consolidate specialist skills in KM facilitation and consultancy. The course was designed to provide guided assistance to NPO trainers and consultants in the application of a specific skill set under the APO KM framework in practical, clear steps.



APO Expert Praba Nair briefs participants during a KM training group exercise in Dhaka 11 May 2010.

Inaugurating the course, the Hon. Dilip Barua, Minister of Industries, Government of Bangladesh, said that the present-day knowledge economy demands highly trained, efficient, skilled human resources, which are critical in “improving the living conditions of our common people and building a poverty-free, stable, democratic, and harmonious Bangladesh.” He went on to commend the APO for strengthening the productivity movement in Bangladesh and its other member countries.

According to Secretariat Research and Planning Officer Kamlesh Prakash, the initial interest of the APO was in understanding what KM is and why it is relevant to member countries. However, the focus has now changed to how it can be implemented. For this reason, the APO developed an entire suite of KM training materials including the *KM Facilitators Guide*, *KM Case Studies*, and *KM Tools and Techniques Manual* and completed two KM demonstration projects in India and the Philippines. Another practical manual targeting SME owners is being developed.

An overview of the APO’s KM framework was presented by Elena Cruz, of

the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP). She also gave a detailed case study of Moonbake, Inc., a snack producer that is a member of the SME Benchmarking Group set up by the DAP. Moonbake’s KM results have been positive, encouraging other SMEs in the Philippines and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific to undertake similar efforts.

The e-learning course and the face-to-face training in Bangladesh were sufficient to prepare Noshaba Iftikhar, a trainer in the NPO of Pakistan in Islamabad, to initiate KM projects within the NPO and SMEs in Pakistan. She remarked, “I particularly liked the sessions on communities of practice and the knowledge café, and look forward to the opportunity to apply them in Pakistan.”

Aek-orn Pramotekul, of the Human Resources Department of Bangchak Petroleum Co., Ltd., Thailand, was grateful for being selected as a participant in the KM e-learning course in February as well as the Dhaka face-to-face course. “The e-learning was a blessing for me, and I acquired practical knowledge of KM tools like storytelling, communities of practice, and collaborative workspaces in Bangladesh. Now I can apply these techniques in my company and I can’t wait,” she commented. Aek-orn currently convenes four communities of practice in Bangchak Petroleum and plans to introduce more KM tools.

Collaborative workspaces were one feature of the presentation by Naoki Ogiwara, of Fuji Xerox, Japan. They are a low-cost yet surprisingly effective method of creating and sharing group knowledge. Ogiwara pointed out that while a formal meeting room is not necessarily a good place for team collaboration, small spaces equipped with simple devices like paper, magnetic strips, and magnets allow team members to organize, rearrange, and discuss ideas. One key to making collaborative workspaces effective is to give employees a reason to return there, which could include the placement of mailboxes, printers, or copy machines or the provision of drinks, snacks, and professional journals and newspapers.

The concept of the knowledge café, pioneered by David Gurteen, was explained in detail by Praba Nair, of KDi Asia, Singapore. He described it as “a group discussion to reflect and to develop and share any thoughts and insights that will emerge in a very nonconfrontational way.” The guidelines for a meaningful knowledge café are: 1) comprised of between 15 and 50 participants, with 30 being ideal; 2) taking one to two hours; 3) a focus on conversation, with presentations and feedback sessions not required; and 4) conducted at any point in time, depending on workloads and organizational culture. Ideally, after participation in a knowledge café, each member leaves feeling more motivated and inspired.

Dr. Rajat Sharma, Deputy Director, Economic Services of the National Productivity Council of India, stated, “I was excited to undertake the e-learning course on KM along with others from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and there was a lot of sharing among us. The course in Bangladesh offered the chance to meet fellow participants and experience real-time, interactive training. This made KM easy for me to understand and customize for our clients back home.”

As part of the course, the participants formulated individual action plans and were eager to implement them upon returning home. ☺