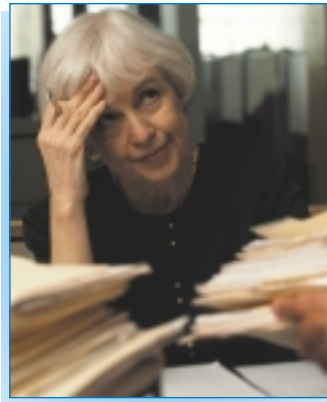


## Avoiding the “Gotchas” of Knowledge Management

For human capital management to reach its promise of contributing to mission achievement, an organization needs to take advantage of its intellectual capital through knowledge management (KM) processes that feed innovation, productivity, and cross-functional relationships. Knowledge management is the effort to identify, capture, and leverage the knowledge within an organization to reach tactical, operational, and strategic goals.



As in any complex project, detailed planning and analysis must be completed prior to designing and implementing a solution. However, there are potential problems, or “gotchas,” that are common in managing a KM engagement. Some—and strategies for avoiding them—are listed below.

### Gotcha #1 - “Whose idea was this anyway?”

Demonstrated commitment and ownership of the project by the organization’s leadership are crucial to success. Otherwise, it is unlikely that the project manager will have access to the resources needed, or receive the attention and involvement of the organization’s frontline knowledge managers (all of which are needed later during implementation). The trick, of course, is engaging managers without compromising solution development, and obtaining their buy-in and support, not “solutions” defined in a top-down manner by them.

At what level should the organization’s leadership be involved in the project? A quick rule of thumb is “2 Levels Up.” Ensure there is buy-in “2 levels up” the organizational chart from the highest point in which the project is engaged operationally. Support from the information technology leadership also is essential.

### Gotcha #2 - “I didn’t realize that’s why you do that...”

It seems a statement of the obvious, but it is surprising how often this is ignored: If the business goals and objectives of the affected group(s) are not completely understood, it is impossible to design a knowledge management system to help meet the organization’s goals. Conversely, understanding in detail which operational outcomes are desired provides insight on how to approach the effort (as well as a solid basis for the project’s evaluation design).

### Gotcha #3 - “Is that how you do that?! That’s not what I was told.”

It is very important to remember the tension between process and practice in organizations. This means you have to understand the REAL business processes the project will affect. Small work-a-rounds, shortcuts, or examples of daily “winging it” are sometimes difficult for people to commit to paper or describe in a workshop. However, the knowledge management solution must be aware of and consider these ad hoc processes and the factors that make them necessary.

### Gotcha #4 - “I’ve been doing it this way for years, and it works fine.”

This is the flipside to “Whose idea was this anyway?” Workers have found ways (however arduous) of delivering required work products with an acceptable level of accuracy and predictability. Implementing a KM solution juxtaposes a set of promised benefits with the cold reality of current uncertainty. (This is a bargain most of us resist.) If workers and/or management perceive this effort as a

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“solution in search of a problem,” the chance of project failure is very high. Uncovering this perception will afford the project team and the organization’s leadership a chance to regroup, reassess the problem definition and approach, and clearly define the benefits for all involved.

## Gotcha # 5 - *“Let’s worry about evaluation in the evaluation phase.”*

Project design and evaluation design should be done simultaneously so that the evaluation can be engineered into the project plan. This will strengthen implementation by helping establish a “virtuous cycle” of iterative development using evaluative data generated during implementation. It also will allow an opportunity to design an evalua-

tion of the project’s implementation itself. This last point is important since evaluating the implementation assures that the outcomes evaluated at the project’s end are related to a project that, in fact, was implemented as planned. Without that assurance, it is difficult to definitively tie project outcomes to the project.

There are many more potential gotchas. We have discussed only a few. However, for organizations to realize significant returns from their knowledge management efforts, avoiding these common mistakes becomes all the more important.

For more information on developing or refining a knowledge management system, please visit [www.icfconsulting.com/km](http://www.icfconsulting.com/km).