



Prof. Suliman Hawamdeh,
ICKM General Chair

"It gives me great pleasure in sending this message of congratulations on the 5th anniversary of the Knowledge Management Development Centre (KMDC). We are honored to have this occasion coincides with the 6th international Conference on Knowledge Management (ICKM) and we are proud to be part of the knowledge exchange banquet that brings together KDMC and ICKM2009 participants. We wish KMDC continued success and hope that they will continue to play a leading role in knowledge management development in Hong Kong and Asia".



Dr. Sam Chu
Associate Professor, University of Hong Kong
ICKM 2009 Conference co-chair (Academic)

*It is an honor for me to write a message for
KMDC on the occasion of its 5th birthday!*

My collaboration with KMDC started 4 years ago, when KMDC and HKU-CITE worked together to develop a Knowledge Management Postgraduate Diploma Program. I enjoyed working with KMDC executive committee members at that time (Ms. Daisy Chou, Mr. Trevor Lui, & Mr. Michael Liang). Not only did they have profound expertise on KM, but they also had an overwhelming enthusiasm to help professionals in Hong Kong gain high-quality education in KM.

Besides helping professionals enhance their understanding and skills in KM, executives of KMDC are also keen contributors in ensuring that university education is relevant for the industry. Mr. Trevor Lui and Mr. Eric Chan have served as advisors for the BSc Information Management program of the University of Hong Kong. They have provided insightful views for the development of the program.

The most recent venture that I have with KMDC is the organization of the 6th International Conference on Knowledge Management (ICKM). Led by Mr. Eric Chan, Chairperson of KMDC, about 10 KMDC members serve ICKM as Organizing Committee members, track chairs, and/or reviewers for conference presentations. With the able support of KMDC, the 6th ICKM conference is on track to being a successful endeavor.

Interviewee: Edward Rogers, Chief Knowledge Officer, NASA
Interviewer: Michael Liang, Vice Chairman, KMDC



Edward Rogers

1. What brought you into the Knowledge Management field?

I had an early interest in cooperation and collaboration among people. As a youth I lived in the Middle East during several wars and I wanted to work for world peace! Later I got involved in issues that motivate people at work and studied quality management and organizational learning. Finally, I went to Cornell to pursue a Ph.D. combining game theory and strategic human resource management. There I was able to draw upon all my interests and bring them together under the new field of Knowledge Management.

2. Over the past 5 years, what changes have you noticed in people's view on KM in the US?

Knowledge Management is a label and like other business practice labels it is sometimes an awkward fit. The debate about defining KM continues on KM blogs and chat-threads without much resolution. I do think people are beginning to accept that KM is many things and what is important is not your definition but whether you are doing things appropriate and effective for your organization. If you are making sense and making a difference than people aren't so concerned with what you call it. Like other management trends, KM probably suffered from excessive hype and unrealistic expectations even though KM was never going to solve all the unsolvable management problems. I think that KM can be thought of as a rifle scope—it helps you aim better but you still need to know your target, how to use your rifle, how to load the right ammunition etc. the scope just helps frame the target for you. If you look in the wrong direction, focus on the wrong things or don't pull the trigger, the scope isn't going to help you hit the target.

3. How is Knowledge Management practiced at NASA? Is it a well received management practice across the organization? Could you share 1 or 2 specific examples?

KM is widely practiced across NASA though it may not be called KM in many instances. NASA is a phenomenal learning organization. People have developed many practices and behaviors that enable us to learn and reapply knowledge pretty well. Fundamentally, KM is distributed as a function but that fits NASA because we are a distributed organization 10 field centers and many programs. At NASA we have databases of lessons learned, near-misses, safety anomalies and mishap reports. These all contain valuable information. We also have learning activities like seminars, workshops, interactive training, retreats and job rotations that enhance the richness of the organization. What we are trying to do is avoid looking for a magic KM solution and instead work to make all these activities synergistic elements of a broad approach that will make us a smart and knowledgeable organization. I think this goal is well-recognized and supported because it is essential to our success. We try not to do KM for KM's sake. It is not a drill or fad or technique—it's a way of working smarter that is much deeper than efficiency tactics. Smart people welcome these kind of efforts because they are seen as worthwhile—not diversions from the important work they signed up for when they came to work at NASA.



Successful KM is like a good pair of shoes: it has to be comfortable to wear (fit the organization) and it has to take you someplace interesting.

4. With the recent business down turn and the financial tsunami, organizations are facing challengers from all sides. How does KM help these organizations in the midst of uncertainty?

The government like industry has some belt tightening to do. Clearly these budget constraints can be a challenge to on-going KM programs. I try to demonstrate that our KM activities are really investments in our people and capabilities that we are going to need for the future. Leaders recognize that—but you have to be able to demonstrate that it's true and not just a pet program you are trying to protect. In this sense I think a solid KM program gives leaders an opportunity to do something smart for their organization when other leaders are cutting and downsizing because they don't know what else to do.

5. Many organizations are going through reorganization, restructuring, and even changes of leadership. How can a KM programme continue to flourish in these situations?

If any program needs transparency it is a KM program. As soon as KM leaders try to play corporate games and bureaucratic tricks they lose all credibility. KM people advocate sharing and collaboration so anything that smells like corporate politics makes you a hypocrite. I took my budget at NASA and went into senior management and offered it back to them to do other things with during a recent budget challenge. They refused to take it back saying it was too important of an investment. I think KM leaders need to accept the challenge of making their programs relevant and resist trying to justify KM based on hypothetical calculations or vaguely supported ROI figures.

6. Did your organization embark on the KM Journey in the past few years? If yes, can you kindly share a few programmes and tools that are effectively practiced and used in your organization today?

NASA embarked seriously on KM within the last ten years so like most of the Government we are a little behind the commercial sector. That's not bad if we can learn from the commercial side and apply KM lessons effectively. Government agencies in general struggle with the temptation to centralize everything and make it efficient—I think because governments feel threatened to not become bloated and wasteful in the eyes of taxpayers. That's fine as long as we keep a clear perspective on KM that centralized knowledge is not necessarily useful knowledge. NASA HQ doesn't design spacecraft or instruments. All the technical work is done or supervised from the field centers so it makes more sense to aggregate the knowledge close to where it is being used. To help this effort we have supported a number of local learning activities that help people learn from their work and share their knowledge within their teams and work groups. We practice our own version of learning after, we write case studies and translate our lessons into learning activities so the knowledge is attractively packaged and we involve leaders in the learning programs. What we have is not a unique new tool or technique. Successful KM is like a good pair of shoes: it has to be comfortable to wear (fit the organization) and it has to take you someplace interesting. This simple yet profound foundation can help a KM program stay relevant and effective.

7. According to Laurie Orlov, an analyst from Forrester, KM is a broad term that frames a firm's desire to do a better job in the creation, transfer, and codification of what employees, partners, and customers know. If KM has such a broad application, how would you present the value of KM to an organization?

KM is a broad term. What academics or consultants call it is not as important as what organizational leaders recognize it to be. Some KM programs have failed from oversell—trying to put a bottom-line dollar figure on specific activities. KM is an inherently a long-term investment. What is the ROI of a certain pre-school program? The answer—if knowable at all—would only be apparent many years later in that person's career. KM should be a long-term investment in people, practices and pursuits. The challenge is to help leaders understand the long-term value of KM and that compared to other long-term things they could invest in, KM is a good choice. Too often we have framed the KM value in short-term payoffs to compete with other short term budget priorities. I don't think KM can win that game very well because KM is not a short-term value instrument.

8. How would you predict local KM development in the coming 5 years?

I see three trends in the next few years for KM. First will be the recognition that much of what successful organizations and smart leaders do is what we are now calling KM. In other words they help people learn, they invest in long-term value and they build organizational capability. This will make it easier for internal KM leaders but harder for outside (consultants) KM practitioners. Packaged KM solutions will not look so attractive since leaders will recognize they already do many KM things and don't need to change all their systems or implement a grand KM scheme. Instead they need to fit a KM plan to their organization (like shoes) and walk the talk. Second, KM will become more of a local issue for the branch, division, plant etc. where each organizational unit comes to realize how they need to organize their knowledge and learning to be productive. Most effective knowledge sharing is very local—among a surgical team, a police or army unit, a flight crew or design team. That's where the biggest payoff is and more energy will be focused there than on enterprise-wide solutions that have promised much more than they have delivered. Third, organizations will struggle again to keep up with information and knowledge. The difference will be that organizations are recognizing it is not their job to amass all knowledge but to facilitate organizational units learning and knowledge application. Interoperability of systems and people will be more important than building large-scale singular data repositories. These new challenges will require new thinking and support from all of the people involved in this field so there will still be plenty of KM design work needed. Like any other management field KM keeps evolving. It is still an exciting and rewarding time to be involved in this field. We've made a lot of progress but we are not done yet—maybe not even half-way!