

## **EDITORIAL**

### **Challenges and opportunities in measuring knowledge management results and development impact**

We are pleased to launch this first of a two-part issue of the journal on ‘Challenges and opportunities in measuring knowledge management results and development impact.’ The topic prompted a lot of interest and we received 16 abstracts in response to our call for papers – many more than we had expected. We would like to thank all Guest Editors who reviewed and provided feedback on the abstracts and papers, as well as other colleagues who kindly agreed to peer review papers and provide feedback to the authors. We would also like to thank the contributing authors for their papers and for their patience – it has taken considerably longer than we had anticipated to finalize this issue. Finally, we would like to recognize the dedication and hard work of the Editor-in Chief, Sarah Cummings. It has been a pleasure to work with her on this issue and we look forward to contributing to and supporting the journal well into the future.

#### **This Issue**

As a discipline, knowledge management (KM) is subject to the immense pressures produced by radical information technology developments. The value of knowledge itself is being severely tested by such present-day phenomena as fake news and the rise of social media platforms. These factors make it all the more vital to develop a defensible and objective approach to KM. In the private sector, KM and organizational learning are enjoying something of resurgence, but the public sector may be lagging behind, partly because knowledge as a core asset is still not fully recognized. Without a clear and convincing way of assessing the impact of KM, it is difficult to justify the activity in the face of shifting organizational, societal and development priorities. Unless there are recognized methods and indicators for making such assessments, the value of KM can be easily challenged. It is also through assessing KM impact that KM principles and knowledge life cycles can be made visible.

In an organizational context, KM is a distributed activity and can impact diverse groups, programmes and initiatives. While some KM activities are obvious and easy to measure – typically process indicators such as the number of knowledge products or the number of downloads of a particular document – subtler KM activities often defy measurement, and it can be difficult to establish cause and effect. Activities which defy measurement include, for example, measuring the influence or impact of knowledge activities on policy makers,

demonstrating the improved skills of employees, and assessing the successful retention of knowledge despite retirements and other staff departures. Also challenging is measuring links between KM activities and improved effectiveness and efficiency, and thus value for money. Moreover, how can it be shown that changes in any of these areas can be attributed to KM?

KM performance measurement is a challenge largely because most knowledge is tacit in nature. For example, how can you measure a person's expertise and experience when accumulated specialist knowledge is difficult to codify. While it is easy to argue that there is a link between knowledge, learning and organizational or development effectiveness, it is far more difficult to demonstrate it. This is just as relevant in the management of knowledge outside the walls of organizations. In society, knowledge and its application are catalysts for any development and progress (Brander and Cummings 2018). What are the theoretical and practical considerations and opportunities of taking a more systemic approach to KM, applying it to sectors and other broader concepts, such as 'knowledge cities', 'the information society' and 'the knowledge economy'?

From a range of perspectives, the papers in this Special Issue examine the challenges and opportunities in tracking and demonstrating the impact of managing knowledge both inside the walls (in organizations) and outside the walls (in the broader development context). Due to the high number of papers received, they have been divided into two issues, based on their completion dates. The second issue will be published early in 2020. In the first paper, 'Measuring KM: evidence essentials in purpose-driven organisations', Silvia Capezzuoli and Ruth Jolly start with the view that organizations define their best intent and direction based on a central purpose and supporting value – and that indicators for KM naturally emerge from these. They argue that KM measurement is therefore less about 'proof', return-on-investment and value for money, and more about trends and patterns that point to evidence. The second paper, 'Baselines for knowledge management and organizational learning initiatives' (Carl Jackson) presents a theoretical approach and methods for describing, measuring and assessing change from a baseline for KM and organizational learning within a group, for example a team or organization. It outlines how the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice survey approach can be adapted for the purpose of formulating and measuring proxy indicators of performance. He concludes that such indicators can substantially address the challenges in measuring the impact of KM and organizational learning initiatives.

In the next paper, ‘Visual sense-making as an appropriate indicator for KM when dealing with complex environments: first stage of a longitudinal case study of a non-governmental organization, Brazil’, authors Rui Martins and Laura Rodríguez Ortiz introduce the SenseCatcher software. They use a case study of a Brazilian non-governmental organization (NGO) to show how this tool, combined with communities of practice, enabled the NGO to manage the complex environment in which it operates. They propose that visual sense-making can be an ideal measurement and assessment tool in contexts where there are high levels of uncertainty. In ‘How USAID is building the evidence base for knowledge management and organizational learning’, Stacey Young describes work at USAID to explore hypothesized links between the agency’s Collaborate, Learn, Adapt (CLA) initiative and improved organizational effectiveness and development outcomes. Initial findings are positive. This work builds on USAID’s 2011 KM Impact Challenge, which explored solutions and challenges to measuring the impact of investing in knowledge management (KM), which was documented in a special issue of this Journal.<sup>1</sup> Initial findings indicate links between CLA and improved organizational and development outcomes.

The final paper ‘Advancing the measurement rigour of organizational and programmatic knowledge management in health and development’ (Saori Ohkubo, Tara Sullivan, and Luis Ortiz Echevarria) provides an overview of the development and use of ‘The guide to monitoring and evaluating knowledge management for global health.’ This guide addresses the complex challenge of measuring the contribution of KM to achieving programme goals by offering a standard practice and comprehensive guidance to measure the process, reach, engagement, and usefulness of KM as well as the learning and application of knowledge. The paper outlines the collaborative effort to produce the guide and its theoretical basis, and provides a case study demonstrating how the guide has been used in organizational (internal) and programmatic (external) KM initiatives to advance the measurement rigour of KM in health and development.

In the ‘Tools and Methods’ section, the final contribution, ‘Guidelines for carrying out a citation analysis: following evidence from production to use’, describes the steps taken in Hankey and Pictet (2019) to carry out a citation analysis of a sample of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) document base. The analysis followed evidence from production to use in order to assess what kind of evidence is produced, and the degree to which it is taken up in other documents. These guidelines outline the steps taken to carry out the analysis and discusses theory in relevant parts.

*Helen Gillman, Chris Zielinski, Charles Dhewa, Juergen Hagmann and Kim Martins*  
Guest Editors

## References

- Brandner, A. and S. Cummings (Editors) (2018) *Agenda Knowledge for Development: Strengthening Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals*. Vienna: Knowledge for Development Partnership. Xiii + 93 pp.  
<https://k4dp.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/agenda-knowledge-for-development3rdedition.pdf> (Accessed 20 December 2019)
- Hankey, W. and G. Pictet (2019) Following evidence from production to use at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies: where does it all go? *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* 14(1): 38-66  
<https://km4journal.org/index.php/km4dj/article/view/380> (Accessed 20 December 2019)
- Cummings, S., E. Le Borgne, I. Kulis, L. Lamoreux and D. Senmartin (2012) Special Issue on The value of learning: understanding and measuring the impact of knowledge management in international development. *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* 8(1): 1-84 <https://km4journal.org/index.php/km4dj/issue/view/43>(Accessed 20 December 2019)
-