

# R&D Knowledge Management - Technology Initiative or Business Fundamental?

## INTRODUCTION

Ask people about knowledge management and the responses are amazingly diverse:

*"We are currently exploring a new technology."*

*"We tried that, and it failed."*

*"That's our translational medicine program."*

*"We're building an R&D wide data repository."*



*"We're developing a search engine that can tap our data repositories."*

Technology driven responses are the norm. From an executive perspective, knowledge management might be better defined as the collective information and know-how needed to carry out the business. How it is

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done and where knowledge resides depends heavily on organizational maturity.

Across the industry from large Pharma to small Biotech's, the way companies manage their knowledge is as varied as a palette. Assessments routinely identify inconsistent processes, informal systems, research by spreadsheet, results documented in MS Office tools, and ultimately data and reports archived in PDF or paper systems. None of these addresses tacit knowledge that is not explicitly stored. What is knowledge management in this context? The needs of any organization depend on their present state, including organizational construct, processes used to advance work, technology, and often specific people employed to execute on the business plan.

## KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

All three of these taken together with the people involved characterize the know-how to carry out the business of R&D.

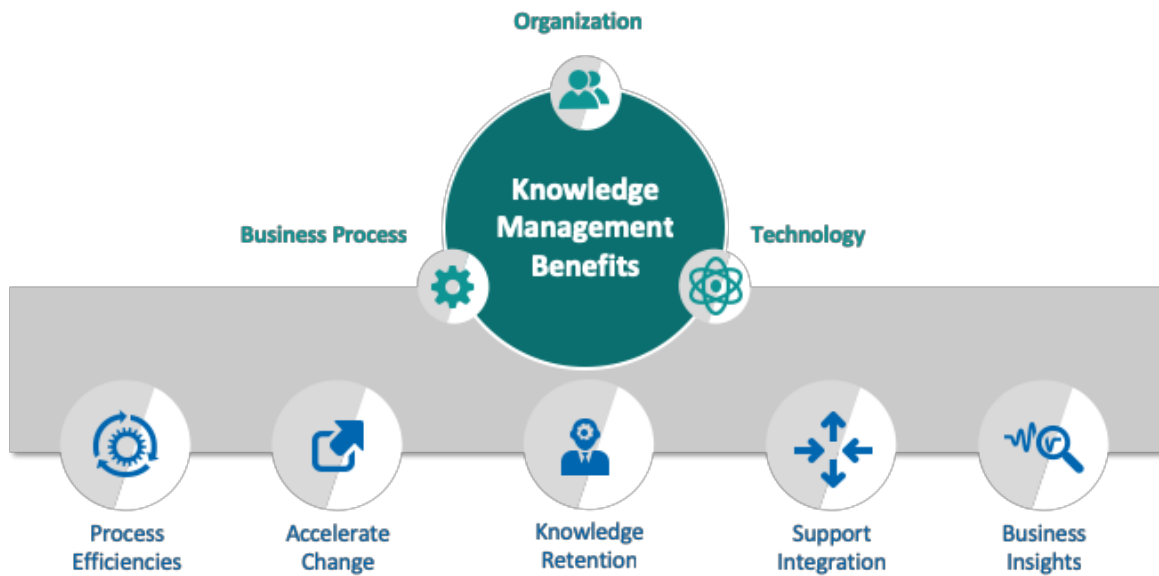
Presumably the organization, business

process, and technology have been optimized for any given R&D area.

Frequently that is not the case. External drivers change the business. Organizations change to respond to the business drivers and changes in people as they ebb and

## DRIVERS FOR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Small organizations are typically focused on day to day concerns about data and results management. They are focused on the immediate project, study, or experiment,



flow. Critical changes in either one often requires business process changes. Technology that supported the business years ago may be out of date. As the business evolves, know-how evolves often embedded in the people responsible for generating results. Fundamental to an effective business is balancing knowledge and know-how among people, the organization, business processes, and yes, technology.

tests required, analyses required, generating reports, and moving on to the next activity. Even large organizations tend to operate this same way and experience many of the same issues. They are a collection of smaller organizations with some process, some systems, more interdependencies, and more challenges.

As R&D organizations try to do more with less, they need to adapt. Business drivers point to the need for improved knowledge management which will:

- Achieve shorter product development cycles
- Increase knowledge content and access across R&D
- Manage the proliferation of information in complex R&D environments
- Facilitate and manage organizational innovation and learning
- Leverage expertise across the organization
- Increase networking among employees and ext. partners to improve information flow
- Manage intellectual capital and assets as the workforce changes

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With R&D organizations heads down on identifying new compounds, completing study reports, formulating new products, or generating other results, senior management must sponsor initiatives to change course. Knowledge management should be a focus of any R&D strategy. That strategy should encompass organizational dynamics, optimized business processes, and well-placed technology. With clear

objectives and alignment, knowledge management can:

- Unleash business process efficiencies
- Accelerate the pace of change
- Facilitate retention of knowledge during staff attrition (voluntary or involuntary)
- Support globalization and integration
- Enable new business insights

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Knowledge management is more than the latest technology applied as an informatics initiative. More broadly, it is a framework that includes people, process, and technology; the collective know-how to conduct the business. R&D leaders need to embrace knowledge management as part of their business strategy. Doing so will enable clearer trade-offs and decisions regarding business processes, application of informatics solutions, as well as alignment of organizations. It is fundamental to the business of R&D.

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