

Change Management Successes and Lessons Learned in Creating a Knowledge Sharing Culture across the Department for Municipal Affairs, Abu Dhabi

by

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Executive overview

Background

Abu Dhabi's Government is implementing an ambitious programme to support major growth in the region. Initially, as part of this plan they have selected the Dept for Municipal Affairs (DMA) to be the pilot for implementing a Knowledge Management (KM) Framework. The longer term plans will involve the roll out of the framework to all Govt Depts to enhance connectivity and knowledge sharing.

The priority for the project at the DMA is to change behaviours so that employees, customers and partners can work in an open and collaborative knowledge sharing environment.

The DMA is a regulatory organisation providing support and guidance to the municipalities of Al Ain, Abu Dhabi and the Western region which are responsible for providing municipal services to citizens in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. With circa 4000 employees across the system the key services provided include: Town Planning, Infrastructure, Parks and Recreation facilities and Construction permits.

The DMA employed Mouchel Management Consulting in Nov 2008 to design and implement a Knowledge Management Framework based on leading practice and tailored to meet the specific needs of an Abu Dhabi Government Dept.

Study objective

The objective of this report is to demonstrate the change management approach currently being deployed on the Knowledge Management Project. We will focus on the approach and methods coupled with the resulting lessons learned, key successes and how we have dealt with challenges faced in

changing behaviours whilst working within the local UAE culture.

Specific project, change management and client teams are involved in the change management approach and we will review how these groups have worked together on a journey towards the creation of an open, knowledge sharing culture.

Summary of Topics

This case study will demonstrate and highlight the way in which Change Management activities are supporting the implementation of the KM Framework at the DMA and the municipalities by changing behaviours and creating a stronger knowledge sharing culture.

Topics to be covered are as follows:

- Project Overview
- Change Management Approach
- Cultural Barriers
- Leadership Alignment
- Knowledge Management Teams
- Knowledge Champions Engagement and Effectiveness
- Communications
- Recognition
- Training and Knowledge Transfer

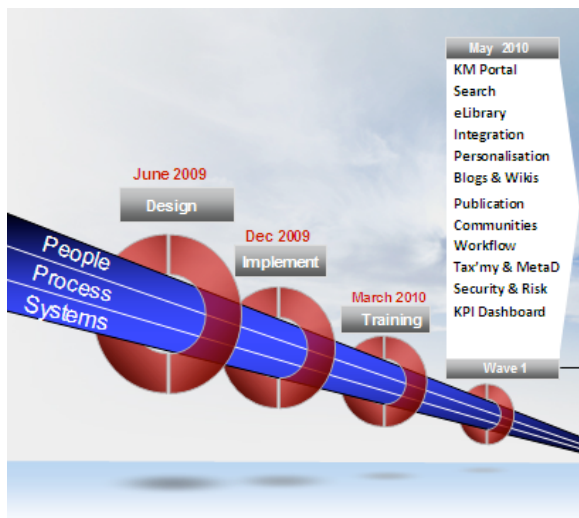
Project Overview

The ultimate goal of the project is to unlock improvements in productivity by providing easy access to information so the municipalities are equipped to work more efficiently, share knowledge across the

municipal system with ease using new technology and to provide excellent customer service to meet increased citizen service demands.

The project consisted of three stages: Assess Design and Implement. The project is currently in Stage 3 – Implementation Phase and is fast approaching a Go Live date for the new KM system in May 2010.

Figure 1 – Project Timeline (Design – Implementation)



At the end of Stage 1 – Assess Phase the KM Framework Components were defined based on the four pillars:

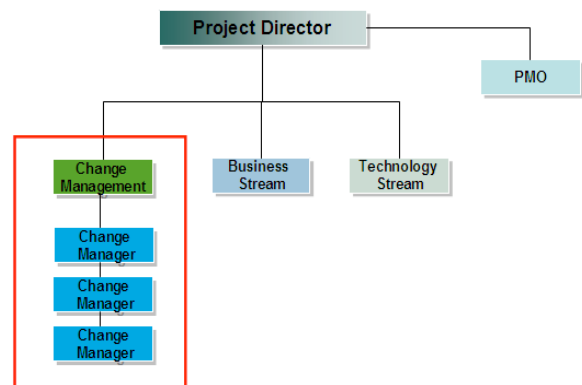
Figure 2 – KM Framework



Change Management initiatives were required to support the following key components of the KM Framework:

- Set up and operate **Knowledge Management Offices (KMO)** in each municipality.
- **Implement an Intranet Portal with Knowledge Management features** including: Document search, Document publication mechanisms, collaborative workspaces, a Directory of People and Skills, Comms and News, Communities of Practice pages, FAQs, external links and RSS feeds.
- Create **11 Communities of Practice** prior to Go Live to facilitate information exchange around core professional disciplines e.g. HR, Land Management and Customer Service
- Design **core HR components** to ensure the sustainability of knowledge sharing including: a new Induction programme, a buddy system for all new joiners, training in the KM system and associated soft skills and a directory of people and skills.

Figure 3 – Mouchel Team Project Structure



In order to deliver these Change Management initiatives we allocated 50% of the project budget to Change Management activities.

Change Management

The successful implementation of the Knowledge Management Framework is dependent on changes in behaviours i.e. getting employees working in the municipalities of Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and the Western Region to work in an open and more collaborative way. If we look at organisations that are exemplars in Knowledge Management we can see one clear theme emerging: successful KM is about people and information first and technology second. It was important, therefore to build essential change management activities into the KM implementation.

Our approach to change management incorporates four key steps in our change toolkit: Align, Define, Enable and Sustain change. We have used this model to ensure that we are conducting change management activities which represent the cyclical nature of change.

Figure 4 – Mouchel KM Change Management Approach



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The Change Management approach started with building leadership alignment and putting knowledge management teams in

place to oversee both the technical and business related components of the project. Leadership alignment, stakeholder management and clear, concise communications are instrumental along the journey of change leading to a new knowledge sharing culture.

Cultural Barriers

Key to ensuring effective change management is a deep cultural understanding of both the society and the organisation in which change is to be effected. The European consultants working in the team quickly realized that some of the barriers to change in an Arabic workplace are very different to those typically encountered in Western environments.

For example, we discovered that the strong hierarchical nature of the organisation can lead to employees not wanting to speak up and in some cases information is not always shared down the hierarchy. Another challenge was that it is not part of the culture to admit mistakes therefore conducting Lessons Learned sessions were challenging when trying to identify what went wrong in order to improve in the future. Finally, in certain parts of the organisation the level of English was not always proficient enough to grasp some of the concepts, so the inclusion of Arabic speakers in our team to assist in presentations and interviews was essential.

We have learned that keeping things simple and visual will help to stimulate people along with the use competitions to recognize significant achievements and games to generate interest. There are currently a large number of projects going on and there is a sign of change fatigue amongst the employees so we need to make our approach as interesting and engaging as possible and bring the employees along the journey.

Leadership Alignment

The project team recognised that transformation programmes are most successful when leadership is fully aware, engaged and supportive of their employees.

As part of Stage 1 a stakeholder map was developed for the team to assess the current level of influence and support for the project from the leadership team. The analysed results allowed us to develop a plan to focus on leadership support gaps as well as ensuring all leaders received awareness and one to one sessions on the aims and objectives of the project.

The main aim of the Leadership alignment activities was to ensure the following:

- To ensure leaders in the DMA and municipalities have an understanding of the project and benefits, contribute to the project and share knowledge well at all levels within the organisation.
- To gain a solid platform from which leaders can effectively communicate with and lead their divisions and encourage the use of Knowledge Sharing practices.
- To provide leaders with a common understanding of the values and behaviours that support the organisational culture
- To help them understand the key KM Components and competencies required to achieve organisational success through Knowledge Management activities.

Additionally, early in the design stage, a leadership workshop was conducted to engage all executive directors and division managers. The primary objectives were to:

- Develop a common understanding of what KM is and could be for the municipal system
- Design the KM framework by reviewing and prioritising opportunity areas

- Outline plans for delivering the KM framework in each entity, including “quick wins” – short projects to help build momentum and generate interest as early as possible.

Key success factors of the event included:

- High attendance of 60 Executive Directors and Division Managers from across the municipal system.
- An innovative approach to facilitating the event. Unique features included an artist drawing key points and phrases on whiteboards during the discussion. This allowed participants to process the key messages using visuals. This approach has not been used at this client before and the range of interactive activities and techniques proved successful in designing the KM framework. .
- Participative and engaging. One of the main purposes was to bring the leaders on the design journey in shaping the future state of KM initiatives across the municipalities.

Figure 5 – Design Workshop for Leadership



“My main priority for the KMO is to help each division become self-sufficient in managing their knowledge. I’ve even added a tagline to all emails that says, Knowledge Management is going to change the future of Abu Dhabi Municipality.”

Knowledge Champion Engagement and Effectiveness

One of the challenges faced was how to ensure we can motivate 100 Knowledge Champions across the municipal system to remain engaged.

Knowledge Management Teams

A foundation for implementing the KM initiatives and facilitating cultural change was establishing a knowledge management office (KMO) in each entity, four in total. Each municipality and the DMA created a KMO with a Knowledge Manager, Knowledge Coordinator and a Portal Administrator.

The Knowledge Manager is responsible for overseeing the implementation of knowledge management initiatives in his/her entity, and training and coaching others in knowledge management practices and works with designated Knowledge Champions in each division. Across the municipalities, over 100 Knowledge Champions are responsible for managing the collection and submission of knowledge within their specific business area, assisting colleagues in knowledge related activities and promoting knowledge sharing practices. In essence the Knowledge Champions are acting as change agents within their divisions. Through a series of coaching and training sessions, Knowledge Champions are being equipped with the tools and information they require to become super users of the system and strong advocates of knowledge management practices.

Abu Dhabi Municipality’s Knowledge Manager, Mohammed Al Sabbagh explains,

How did we overcome this?

- Weekly meetings with all Knowledge Champions to share experiences and best practices;
- Setting tasks for champions related to knowledge capture;
- Launching a “Best Document” competition and a “Best Document Spotlight” Newsletter every month;
- Capturing 2000 documents representing good knowledge assets from across the municipal system;
- Regular Knowledge Champions Events involving group exercises, outside speakers, training, collaborative working and awards ceremonies;

Figure 6 – Knowledge Champions Event



- Transferring knowledge and coaching;
- Conducting a Knowledge Champions Effectiveness Assessment to ensure we had the right people in position to drive the project forward.

Prior to the implementation of the KM system we were focused on implementing business related quick wins with the Knowledge Champions e.g. Inductions, Buddy Schemes, Knowledge Sharing Seminars and Communities of Practice. These have all been successful and once the KM system is in place to support these activities the employees will reap further benefits from combining business activities and innovative technology.

We have faced challenges in keeping the Champions engaged and having a good understanding of the changes that will be taking place to the ways of working. To combat this we worked with a number of divisions to create “Day in the Life” scenarios to highlight the effects of KM before and after to enable employees to visualise the impact KM will have on their daily jobs. We have also conducted real life role plays as part of the awareness sessions showcasing an employee who needs help finding important information on the new KM system.

Communications

A phased communications plan has been implemented to inform audiences about the KM initiative. It started with branding the initiative “Musharaka,” which means “Participation” in Arabic. The tagline “Excellence through Knowledge” immediately conveys the linkage of knowledge to achieving the government vision of excellence.

In the early stages of the project, the primary focus was to create leadership and Knowledge Champion awareness. As key sponsors and agents of change, having a shared vision of the project was critical. In addition to the briefings and design workshops introduced above, key documents were posted to a Musharaka shared drive in each municipality to share knowledge. For the key project members, a collaboration site was created which contains the project toolkit, presentations on quick wins and project status updates.

The Musharaka project logo below was created to ensure all employees would identify with the project and what it is trying to achieve.

Figure 7 – Project Logo



This logo is used on all branded merchandise and a mascot named “Arif” has been created to bring to life the project. Arif will be used as part of a promotional film to ensure employees can relate to the concept directly.

Figure 8 – Musharaka Screensaver

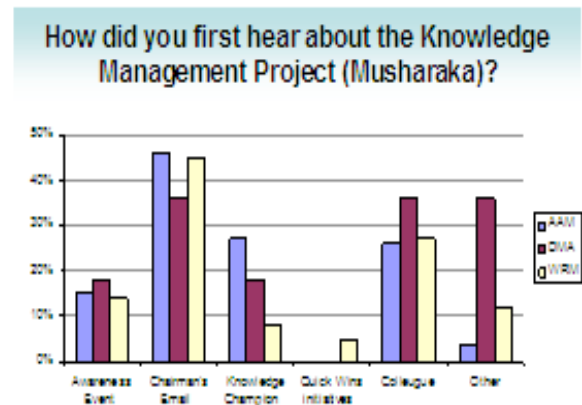


Throughout the awareness phase of the project a series of communications have been launched, including:

- Booklet and Chairman’s letter to launch the initiative and provide an introduction to the project.
- Articles in the DMA e-newsletter
- KM Awareness Sessions
- Branded promotional materials (e.g., roll-ups, screen savers, post-it notes, etc)
- Press Release in National Press
- A News clip shown on Abu Dhabi TV, which showcased the Knowledge Champion’s Event.
- A promotional film is currently being developed to motivate employees to adopt KM practices.

In order to ensure the Communications plan was effective and that the employees were becoming more aware and engaged with the project we conducted an online survey using Zoomerang. The results allowed us to pinpoint areas where we need to adapt our approach, in certain cases we needed to tailor our approach to each municipality due to varying levels of engagement.

Figure 9 - Example Comms Survey responses



Recognition

To begin reinforcing knowledge sharing behaviours and creating cultural change, the project team is recognising Knowledge Champions for their contributions. This has ranged from verbal recognition during the KMO meetings, to presenting trophies, and even awarding a laptop computer to the Knowledge Champion that contributed the most valuable document to the KMO.

These competitions and awards have been essential in gaining support for the project from the Knowledge Champions and ensuring that their hard work has been recognised. In the first Knowledge Champions Event the Chairman of the DMA awarded four Knowledge Champions for their Best Documents, to have this kind of recognition from the Chairman was excellent in building up momentum for the project.

Irene Corpuz, interim Knowledge Coordinator in the Western Region Municipality, stated that the “contest we held for the Knowledge Champions to produce the best document was very successful and built the Knowledge Champions’ enthusiasm for sharing.” Additionally, states Mohammed Al Sabbagh, “As a result of the document competition, I have seen documents that I had never before,

documents that are essential to every employee.”

Rewards and recognition will continue to play a key role in business as usual activities for KM.

Training and Knowledge Transfer

Training and Knowledge Transfer are essential elements in the success of this project. Training in both the KM system to all 4000 users and the soft skills required for the KMO to be successful Knowledge Management Champions will ensure the sustainability of the project.

A key part of knowledge transfer has been to focus on learning through observation and participation, i.e. the first time we do something, we do it ourselves with the client observing, then we get the client involved in hands-on work the second time, and then we have the client take the lead with us observing the third time. For example, the organisation of the third Knowledge Champions Event will be organised entirely by the client team.

An intensive training schedule is planned to be delivered from Mar - May 2010 to all users and a more intensive training plan has been designed for members of the KMO. Knowledge transfer has been carried out throughout the project from consultants to the client, and has entailed the sharing of KM tools and methodologies built up from industry best practice and other client engagements to produce specific knowledge items. These items will be handed over to the appropriate staff for ownership in running the KMO.

Conclusions

This has been a really successful project and is recognised as being the first of its kind within Abu Dhabi Government. Some key change management lessons from this project include:

- Gaining a clear understand all the cultural aspects when designing communications and engaging with senior stakeholders
- Utilising a number of different Communications methods over a long period to ensure the project gains recognition amongst employees
- Clearly articulating the benefits for the employees and ultimately the citizens of Abu Dhabi.
- Recruiting “Champions” to act as change agents and advocates for the new ways of working early in the project.
- Involving employees as much as possible from the start of the project in workshops and awareness sessions.
- Bringing the project to life through day to day scenarios so the employees can understand how this will change their day to day working behaviours.
- Receiving feedback on the project progress and methodologies being used e.g. Communications tools
- Utilising Best Practice where possible and tailoring to meet the specific needs of the organisational culture.

The implementation phase of the project will pose new Change Management challenges but the approach of providing close support up until Go live at all levels of the organisation will ensure the success of the project as the skill of the KMO team will continue to drive this forward so that Knowledge Sharing becomes second nature and part of business as usual for all employees.