Knowledge Services: The Practical Side of Knowledge Management
How KD/KS Creates Value
With Knowledge Services, Information Professionals Are
“Putting KM to Work”

by Guy St. Clair and Dale Stanley

Part One.

Introduction. Today’s information professionals find themselves in a unique position with respect to their future. Some knowledge workers may be concerned about whether their talents, skills, and educational preparation will continue to be relevant as the well-chronicled “information age” of the later 20th century evolves into the glorious knowledge age of the 21st, but information professionals and specialist librarians are not worried. They have their future well under control. They are responsible for delivering knowledge services to their parent organizations, and while they may not necessarily characterize what they do as “knowledge services,” today’s information professionals are in fact practicing a profession in which information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning converge to provide the highest levels of service delivery for their identified clientele.

In doing so, information professionals position themselves for intellectual leadership, moving the organization to a knowledge culture and ensuring that the enterprise-wide intellectual infrastructure is used to its maximum potential. Expected by their organizations to deliver excellence in the management of information, knowledge, and strategic learning, these knowledge workers partner with enterprise leadership to utilize knowledge services in providing service delivery. Many organizations, of course, have well-established and relatively successful operational functions providing service delivery in information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning, but in most cases these disciplines are practiced as independent, stand-alone operational functions. It is when they are converged as knowledge services that the enterprise can at last support its organizational mission with an enterprise-wide knowledge culture.

As it happens, the ranks of knowledge services practitioners include not only specialist librarians. A wide range of other information professionals do this work, and even more will do this work in the future. Many of them are – or will be – employed in a workplace that has neither a specialized library nor an employee title that refers to librarianship. These information professionals are nevertheless providing library-like (or specialized library-like) services to their employing organizations, and together with specialist librarians identified as such, they are the professional knowledge workers and knowledge leaders of the future. Their ability to understand and manage the connections that link information, knowledge, and strategic learning make them indispensable to their parent organizations.

The Information Professional in the Knowledge Culture. Why is their role secure? Because enterprise leaders recognize and understand that achieving the organizational mission requires developing and sustaining a knowledge culture. How well research can be managed, contextual decision-making supported, and innovation facilitated will be the keys to the organization’s success in achieving its goals. Absent an organizational knowledge culture – an environment in which knowledge development and knowledge sharing (now generally referred to with its acronym KD/KS) – those goals will slip beyond reach and corporate frustration will cause more damage than anyone wants to envision. In providing a level of quality delivery in their areas of expertise, employing the management and service delivery methodology they identify as knowledge services, information professionals establish themselves as the organization’s knowledge thought leaders (some are referred to as the organization’s “knowledge coach”). In converging information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning to help employees make use of the organization’s knowledge assets, these information workers are the backbone of the organization’s knowledge culture, the very organizational attribute that (whether using the term or not) their leaders recognize must be in place if success is to be achieved and sustained. It is a powerful, very powerful paradigm, and today’s information
professionals understand perfectly that the requirements and demands and – not to put too fine a point on it – the rewards of working with knowledge services is their key to future job security.

**KM or Knowledge Services?** Can not knowledge management (KM) do the job? Why must KM converge with information management and strategic learning to support enterprise success? There are two reasons. The first is that in today's business and research environment, the management of information, knowledge, and strategic learning as unconnected activities (even when these activities are recognized as related) is insufficient. The problem has to do with the standard “silos” or “stovepipe” issues we hear so much about in organizational management. For several years, leaders in the three disciplines have each been doing a good job of establishing their credentials and proving the viability of providing an organizational focus on their respective disciplines. The engineers and technical professionals were making great progress in resolving the issues connected with managing information (with no small assistance from many, many intellectual leaders in librarianship). Likewise, in many organizations the development and provision of strategic learning as an operational function was being given much attention and very successful tools and techniques for managing strategic learning were being created and implemented. Unfortunately, these efforts were not enough.

The second reason why information management, KM, and strategic learning must be converged is that in order to provide the highest levels of service delivery, people have to understand what they are doing and what they are talking about when they describe what they are doing. In this case, it is a problem of semantics, and while it might seem to be a little superficial in some conversations, it has turned out to be a very real barrier to enterprise acceptance when the subject turns to KM. As everyone knows, knowledge cannot really be “managed” and any attempt to do so – however structured – is hampered because there are so many different definitions for KM. Indeed, every information professional is familiar with the statement with which Thomas A. Stewart introduced the concept KM in 1991 (although it was not called KM at that time, of course): “Intellectual capital is the sum of everything everybody in a company knows that gives it a competitive edge.”

What followed was a long decade of attempted definitions for KM, with one of the most practical points of view put forward in 2001, when SLA member Larry Prusak was interviewed in this magazine. Prusak made it clear that, as desirable as it might have been to come up with a descriptor for dealing with how an organization might manage its intellectual capital, what organizational leaders really needed was to figure out how to work with knowledge, and “working with knowledge” became a valuable construct for those who wanted to take an organization’s intellectual infrastructure to a higher, more effective new level.

Still, until the early years of the present decade, KM alone did not seem to be having the universal impact in organizational management that we wanted it to have. While many organizational leaders devoted much time and effort to developing and implementing KM initiatives, others chose to “wait it out,” hoping that some magic formula would appear on the scene. That was not going to happen, but some information professionals were beginning to realize that bringing information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning together into a single, over-arching function would provide tangible and measurable results, enabling the development of a management and service-delivery methodology supporting an enterprise-wide knowledge culture. Having discovered the value of converging the three disciplines, information professionals took up the challenge to help their organization move to a knowledge culture, thus giving birth to “knowledge services” (although – truth to tell – there were some organizations and companies with departments and business units referred to as “knowledge services” but in most cases, the unit’s role was often less about convergence than about customized service delivery of one or another of the disciplines that make up knowledge services as we know it).

**Knowledge Services.** Thus the solution for many information professionals, both for alleviating the “stand-alone” structure of each of the three disciplines and for giving organizational management a framework for discussion, has been to combine KM with what is already being utilized and identified as productive. We all understand the value and contributions of information management and strategic learning to organizational success. If we link them to KM in a functional arrangement that acknowledges knowledge management as one of a group of services, we position the organization to put the theoretical and not always clearly defined KM to work, moving to the practical side of KM and in doing so, enabling research, contextual decision-making,
and innovation and, through knowledge development and knowledge sharing (KD/KS), leading to a knowledge culture for the larger enterprise (Fig. 1).

This is not to say that we dismiss or minimize the contributions of knowledge management to our professional success. As we accept that knowledge management is working with knowledge or — as some of our colleagues see it — working with the knowledge eco-system (that is, identifying and leading our customers in utilizing the research assets that make up our organization’s intellectual infrastructure), we come to the quick recognition that specialist librarians have been doing KM all along. As we look back to the very beginnings of specialized librarianship, when the identification and utilization of “practical and utilitarian” information resources — regardless of format — became established as the next step forward in supporting the organizational quest for success, our professional history is distinguished by its progress forward toward knowledge management and knowledge services. Indeed, specialized librarianship has long characterized itself as knowledge centric, and at SLA the value statement that guides our members – adopted in 1916 — was and continues to be “putting knowledge to work.” Is it not appropriate then that we – information professionals and knowledge thought leaders in our organizations who have been working with knowledge management all along — should move to knowledge services and, in doing so, put knowledge management to work?

Knowledge Services: The Practical Side of KM. So it is an easy connection for us, this linking of information management, KM, and strategic learning. Indeed, it is so natural that one of the present authors — himself a scientist — finds in the sciences an analogy for what happens with knowledge services, which he describes as knowledge catalysis. With knowledge services, the process to identify, manage, and utilize the organization’s intellectual infrastructure — its knowledge resources — enables the creation of knowledge value through KD/KS. It is a process that allows the information professional to find and leverage otherwise inert opportunities to produce wholly new products such as higher-level research, strengthened contextual decision making, and accelerated innovation. In doing so, knowledge services becomes the natural embodiment of the respected Peter Drucker’s famous pronouncement to managers who aspire to be leaders in their organizations:

One of the tasks of leaders is constantly to make sure that we put scarce resources of people and money where they do the most good. We have to be results-focused and opportunity-focused. Good intentions are no longer enough.3

This finding and leveraging of opportunities to provide the organization with the results it requires is the central purpose of knowledge services. For most who work in specialized librarianship, the disciplines of information management, KM, and strategic learning are already in effect linked in their minds. They use them every day in their work (albeit, to be fair, they do not always think of the disciplines in these terms), and these information professionals and knowledge workers understand information management because they deal with it all the time. In doing so, they become established (or should be established) as the organization’s greatest asset when it comes to organizing and managing information.

The same is true with respect to strategic learning. These employees are strong here too since they long ago learned that strategic learning is something else they do all they time. They understand that “strategic learning” is any learning activity through which any employee becomes better qualified to do his or her job, and they are experts at providing or leading colleagues to strategic learning opportunities. It can be as sophisticated as leave time for pursuing an advanced degree in a subject that will strengthen workplace performance, or as uncomplicated as working with the colleague in the next cubicle to learn how to tweak an application to make it more relevant to one’s work. Just as they understand information management, information professionals understand strategic learning because it has always been part of their work. In embracing knowledge services, in converging information management and strategic learning with KM, information professionals and other knowledge workers become empowered to perform at a higher level. Bringing that enhanced performance into a workplace ambiance that acknowledges and supports knowledge development and knowledge sharing, we have the framework of a knowledge culture for the larger organization.
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Part Two

In Part 1 of this article, Guy St. Clair and Dale Stanley defined knowledge services as the convergence of information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning, describing how today’s information professionals use knowledge services to provide the highest levels of service delivery for their identified clientele. In Part 2 the authors describe how, through the application of established change management procedures and the development of the organizational knowledge nexus, knowledge services – as a management methodology – enables the practical side of knowledge management and creates business value for information, knowledge, and learning in the larger organization.

Knowledge Services: Creating Value through KD/KS. Information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning converge in knowledge services, enabling the highest levels of service delivery for the identified clientele of the information professionals who lead the effort. Indeed, it is through knowledge services that the business value of knowledge is established in the company or organization, resulting in higher-level research, strengthened contextual decision making, and accelerated innovation, the natural and on-going building blocks (we might call them) of organizational effectiveness. Not so coincidentally, the role of the information professional is strengthened as well, as that knowledge worker finds himself or herself performing in a workplace that acknowledges and provides the foundation for knowledge development and knowledge sharing (KD/KS) in the organization. It is a much-desired leadership role for the information professional (Fig. 3), one that supports – with the highest values associated with that term – the framework of the knowledge culture for the larger organization.

How does this happen? What role does the information professional/knowledge worker play in establishing this knowledge culture, and what are the specifics of using knowledge services as the methodology? As we move from the theoretical of KM to the practical of knowledge services, a first example might look at the much-described embedded information specialist approach, a KD/KS technique which in the early days of knowledge services was called “insourcing.” First identified as a specific technique in the pharmaceutical and mass entertainment (read “theme parks”) industries, insourcing happens when a specific product development team or other working group brings a member of the information staff on the team. The embedded information professional is identified as and performs as a regular member of the team, working as the team’s information/knowledge/strategic learning specialist. He or she works with all team members and at all levels to ensure that they are using the best applications for managing the information they need to use, that they understand how to share that information, and—as strategic learning comes into the picture—not only sharing the information but working with fellow team members as the information transitions into practical, useful, and tangible knowledge for the success of the team in completing its work.

Another example takes us to the other end of the knowledge services spectrum, to a large multi-national organization that has, through a variety of iterations, evolved from the rather unsophisticated but well-meaning (and well-funded) organization it was sixty years ago, when it was created to support research in its field. As it happens, much of the organization’s present work continues to require many of the same approaches that were required throughout the organization’s history. For this organization, it has been clearly established that without a combined structure for managing information and knowledge related to prior projects (without, for example, a single entry point for similar projects completed over the years), and without a commitment to strategic learning to ensure that prior knowledge is available, the organization is facing an unwieldy and awkward future. Whether that prior knowledge is structured knowledge (i.e., captured in published documents, project reports, organizational archives, and the like) or unstructured knowledge (i.e.,
informal documents, digitized files, correspondence, the memories of people who worked on the projects, and the like), it is an important organizational asset and it needs to be available for the future. In this situation, the convergence of the three elements of knowledge services – working together as an over-arching management methodology and service delivery framework – enables the organization to provide a single methodology that will, in fact, enable the company to avoid that difficult future and continue its good work with developing societies.

In a third example, we have a very different organization, a medium-sized specialty chemical firm that has taken advantage of a structural re-organization to create an operational function that combines the corporate library, a knowledge sharing group, a strategic learning group, and a function devoted to internal communications. While still new, this combined function is finding opportunities for integrated approaches, with “integrated” in this case having two distinct aspects. First, the combined efforts of the library’s expertise with external information and its very good customer approach were put together with the organization’s knowledge-sharing technology expertise. Then, in a second integration, that combined activity was further matched up with knowledge delivery expertise in the learning and graphics production groups. Together, this integration activity results in a comprehensive and high quality application for the customer. Additionally, there are even more benefits, for in this case the integration approach has been structured to connect this knowledge-sharing expertise with the business processes of the client group, resulting in the design of a knowledge-sharing system for process development that involves recommendations for changes in the actual workflow of individuals. Thanks to sponsorship from management, to ensure that the changes were actually undertaken and not simply talked about, the inherent synergies of the combination of functions – integrated together in a package that provides high-value realization and quality – ensures adoption with the customer.

We can see the value of an enterprise-wide culture in these examples. When the role of knowledge as an organizational asset is recognized and exploited and the successful implementation of a knowledge services solution can lead to the success enterprise management is seeking, we are in that desired state Kenneth J. Hatten and Stephen R. Rosenthal refer to with their version of the knowledge culture (which they describe with a slight semantic twist as the “knowing culture”). As shown in the illustration published in the first part of this article, Hatten and Rosenthal (Fig.2) urge individual knowledge workers – among whom we would include information professionals, particularly those with the leadership capacities – to “prepare for change by increasing our awareness of what we do or do not know.” In doing so, knowledge workers and information professionals learn to deal with the two types of knowledge that enable that preparation: “the knowledge you need to boost your performance when you know your organizational objectives [and] the knowledge that will help you define new objectives and the strategies to pursue them.”

In these examples, in the embedding of knowledge workers into specific projects, in the development of single points of entry for enterprise-wide access, and in the integration of information, knowledge, and strategic learning delivery for higher-value service delivery, it was recognized that in the larger scheme of things in each parent organization there was a need to “do something” about knowledge transfer, that KD/KS as an operational function was not performing at its best. As various discussions among the several stakeholders were initiated, and with everyone understanding that the solution would of necessity be context-specific, the intellectual explorations began to unfold. In most cases, the discussions would have suggested a number of practical, “real-world” ideas, goals, objectives, solutions (even, perhaps, a few desiderata—“wouldn’t it be nice if we could…?”). As these were winnowed down, and as resource allocation, staff time, and other enablers and/or barriers were identified, it would have become clear that there were solutions that could be pursued, solutions which would involve attention to how information, knowledge, and strategic learning are converged and how, in that convergence, practical and workable solutions could be sought.

**Making the Change.** On the printed page or computer screen, these situations look nice, and the apparent ease of transition from idealized and theoretical KM to the practical, day-to-day workings in each situation appeal to the tidy and methodical perspective that many of us bring to our work. But there is a different side to the story, and it must be given attention.

Organizational change is hard. While it is often not too difficult to articulate a new strategy or a re-structuring, or to demonstrate the potential value of a desired result (as described earlier in those references
to the pleasant intellectual discussions that take place), bringing any change into an organization is going to be difficult. Hopefully concepts and ideas like those described in essays like this are helpful, but even when they are, we are forced to wrestle with dealing with change management and change implementation in our specific organizational environments. What is hard – indeed, the hardest part – is getting the larger organization to understand the value of the change and to then accept the change as it becomes part of the organizational effort. As we speak about so often – almost unendingly in the management community – people and organizations just naturally seem to resist change. Nevertheless, if information professionals and knowledge workers truly desire to participate in the process of moving the organization to a knowledge culture, and indeed, to lead the process (which they should do), there are steps we can take:

1. Define the change. If we are not sufficiently clear and precise about what will be required (not just the desired end result but the activities that will be needed to achieve that result), it will be far too easy to resist or passively avoid any desired change. In terms of moving to a knowledge culture, to establishing a KD/KS framework for the knowledge transfer process in your organization, let the concepts and specific roles described here provide you with talking points, a basis for articulating the specific changes you desire to the people who can help you initiate change. This leads to...

2. Find your sponsor. Before you begin, ensure that you can establish strong sponsorship for whatever change will be required. Despite the verbiage that supports “grass roots” ideas and discussions about “demonstrating feasibility,” there is a strong need for an advocate or champion (or several) to take a stand. Additionally, that person or group of people is going to be required to move from simply championing the change (“that’s a good idea”) to actual participation (“what you’re proposing will impact my work—I’ll support it, I’ll tell people how this helps me and the company, and I’ll reinforce the change”). Usually there is a point in the change process where people’s behaviors and decisions need to be influenced on a substantial scale. That can’t happen unless there is leadership buy-in and a commitment to buy-in that is expressed in the words and actions of enterprise leaders.

3. Create alliances and change agents. The organizational shift to a knowledge culture is initially the result of an alliance (or in many cases a group of alliances). Utilize the various elements of the many definitions of KM that fit your situation, match them with information management and strategic learning in knowledge services, and work to establish a KD/KS environment with knowledge services as your management methodology and service-delivery focus tool. Then integrate those alliances. Start with like-minded functional leaders and thought leaders in your organization and join with them, with all of you working as change agents and identifying areas where you and they share concerns related to the full range of information/ knowledge/strategic learning interests. Look for areas where knowledge sharing is needed but is not taking place or not working well, and engage with these colleagues to come up with integrated solutions. The end result will benefit all business units in the organization, realizing an enterprise-wide holistic solution.

4. Finally, be wary of quick fixes and reactive responses. When there is an established desire for improvements in the knowledge transfer process within the organization, leading, perhaps, to the beginnings of a knowledge culture, many of the players (including sponsors) naturally start to look for mere tools or techniques. What you will hear is “Ah, hah! Now we are ready for KM/knowledge services. Find me the best software application and let’s make this happen!” Be careful. It’s not just about software. (Fig.4)

Keep in mind that at this juncture in the knowledge services process you will be required to reiterate to your colleagues and your organization’s leaders that culture shifts require new ways of doing work and new ways of relating to stakeholders in the enterprise, and in addition to strong reinforcement from sponsors, you will require a variety of approaches and tools. Understand clearly that you will need a comprehensive approach that involves the spectrum of KD/KS solutions and the integration of appropriate functions and approaches. With such an approach, you can position yourself to ensure higher value realization and smoother change management, resulting in real, sustainable change for the larger organization. This is the hard work of

* Not to be confused with quick wins as incremental steps towards the overall objective, as these can be powerful change forces.
knowledge services. Putting knowledge management to work and using knowledge services to enable your practical solution is hard. But it can also be said that putting knowledge services in action is the most rewarding part of the entire effort.

The Knowledge Nexus. We conclude with a cautious prediction about knowledge transfer in the future, envisaging an organizational structure for knowledge transfer that is successful in aiding the organization in achieving its organizational mission. This knowledge transfer process will occur in an organizational environment that of necessity will be established as a knowledge culture.

We also predict that in this environment the role of specialist librarians, information professionals, and other knowledge workers and their services to the organization will be one of knowledge leadership, based on their knowledge expertise and their willingness to assume a knowledge leadership role for the larger organization, that of managing the organization’s knowledge services function. However that function is currently structured or otherwise implemented in the organization, it will be strengthened if it is shaped to serve as a centralized function, a knowledge “nexus” or a knowledge “hub” for the larger enterprise (Fig. 5).

Today’s knowledge workers/knowledge leaders are the professionals who are best qualified to manage this function. Ideally, this operational function will assume formal responsibility for all information, knowledge, and strategic learning development, management, and delivery for the larger enterprise. This centralized “nexus” function will be, indeed, a function. It will probably not be a space or a “place” (unless as an operational function it has responsibility for maintaining a collection of artifacts such as books, bound journals, and the like, but that is another story). In our ideal scenario, the knowledge nexus — the knowledge services delivery function — plays a comprehensive and holistic role for the entire organization and makes a tangible and measurable contribution to mission-critical success. Even in complex organizations, or in organizations that cannot support such a commanding role for a knowledge-focused operational function, the power of such an integrating and visionary philosophy can effectively move traditional “reactive” service delivery (and even “proactive” service) to higher levels of organizational impact. It is a strategic approach that not only allows the natural synergies among the service functions that are the elements of knowledge services (information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning) to succeed. Indeed, with this approach there is the added opportunity of taking on a more interactive and integrated function across the larger enterprise and (perhaps more important) an integration opportunity with specific business processes. In fact, the more of this latter integration there is the more progress the enterprise can make towards building that knowledge culture to which so many organizations aspire. It is a scenario that today’s information professionals and knowledge workers can envision for themselves and, with considerable enthusiasm, work toward achieving.

For information professionals, specialist librarians, and other knowledge workers, the future looks bright. They are — or will become — the knowledge thought leaders, knowledge consultants, and knowledge coaches for their parent organizations. They recognize that putting KM to work is critical to their and their organizations’ success, and they delight in bringing a practical approach to their work through the convergence of information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning. As organizational leadership and management come to understand the relationships between quality in knowledge transfer and organizational success, knowledge services — as an operational function — becomes the route to that success, and these information professionals are prepared and ready to play their part, leading their organizations in the creation of knowledge value through KD/KS.
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Figure 1. As a management and service delivery methodology, knowledge services enables new roles for information professionals.
Figure 2. Hatten and Rosenthal identify two types of knowledge that lead to success in the “knowing organization.”

- Prepare for change by increasing awareness of what we do or do not know.
- Knowledge to boost performance when you know organizational objectives.
- Knowledge to help define new objectives and strategies to pursue them.
Figure 3. Knowledge development/knowledge sharing (KD/KS) provides a critical leadership role for information professionals.
Leading the Move to the Organization’s Knowledge Culture
The Info Pro’s Knowledge Management Steps

- Define the Change
- Find Your Sponsor
- Create Alliances & Identify Change Agents

BUT...
Be Wary of Quick Fixes and Reactive Responses – It’s Not Just About the Tools

THE KNOWLEDGE CULTURE

Figure 4. Specialist librarians and information professionals can lead the move to an organizational knowledge culture… if they understand the basics of change management.
Figure 5. Regardless of the type of organization, the development of an organizational knowledge nexus ensures enterprise-wide knowledge services delivery.
Sidebar:

To Learn More About Knowledge Services

When Guy St. Clair became president of SLA in June, 1991, Stephen Abram, now the association's president, invited Guy to “take us on an adventure – take us somewhere we've never been before.” We do not know if it was Stephen's intention to send Guy on an exploration of knowledge services, but that appears to be where the journey took him. Members wanting to read more about Guy's adventures into the realm of knowledge services can read the following articles in Information Outlook, all available on the SLA publications website (http://www.sla.org/io/):


“Knowledge Services and SLA's History: Nearly One Hundred Years of 'Putting Knowledge to Work.’” (interview with Guy St. Clair) September, 2003.

“Information Management: From Special Library to Organizational Knowledge Nexus” January, 2006.

Knowledge services as a management methodology is described in Beyond Degrees: Professional Learning for Knowledge Services by Guy St. Clair (New York and Munich: K.G. Saur, 2003), available in print and as an e-book.

The role of knowledge services and role of specialist librarians in the knowledge culture is explored in SLA at 100: From Putting Knowledge to Work to Building the Knowledge Culture, to be published in 2009.

Published e-Profiles of leaders in knowledge services are available at the SMR International website (http://www.smr-knowledge.com/eProfile.htm).

– Editor

5 Ibid.
6 The techniques offered here are standard human change management principles. For example, interested readers might refer to Conley, Chip. How great companies get their mojo from Maslow. Wiley, 2007, which relates Maslow’s hierarchy of need to change management, a connection with particular resonance as information professionals and other knowledge workers seek to prepare themselves for their profession’s future role in society.