

At Acquisition Solutions, knowledge is an intellectual asset, valued in the same way as a physical or capital asset. Capturing, sharing and reusing knowledge is simply the way work is done there. In many organizations, there's a great deal of emphasis on just one or two KM initiatives, perhaps CoPs or forcing knowledge reuse. But what about employing several different strategies? Here, Bill Kaplan, explains the Acquisition Solutions knowledge convergence framework.

# DEPLOYING A KNOWLEDGE CONVERGENCE FRAMEWORK

## Four key elements for building a performance learning culture

By Bill Kaplan, Acquisition Solutions



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At Acquisition Solutions, continuous learning, collaboration and teamwork are critical to improving our own and our clients' performance by helping everyone work smarter and more productively. Successfully capturing, transferring and reusing knowledge is critical to this strategy.

### The knowledge convergence concept

We focus on a concept we call knowledge convergence – the disciplined adoption of a systematic framework to capture, transfer, and reuse information, experience and insight. This article shares some of what we've learned about building and deploying a knowledge convergence framework. Some building blocks of the framework have origins in KM principles developed at British Petroleum (BP) by Kent A. Greenes, then BP's chief knowledge officer (CKO), with whom I've worked for several years. The framework approach enables us to:

- apply our knowledge in ongoing operations to immediately improve performance;
- improve our ability to learn from past failures and successes in strategic decision making or client solution delivery; and
- create long-term value from knowledge, experience and insight held by employees.

### Acquisition Solutions, Inc.

is a specialist acquisition consultancy supporting government agencies in the procurement of best value products and services. The company is at the forefront in identifying and implementing innovative acquisition and performance management practices that enable its government clients to achieve superior mission results. [www.acquisitionsolutions.com](http://www.acquisitionsolutions.com)

### Understanding some building blocks

Our strategy and implementing framework rely on several learning points:

1. Technology and information management alone cannot be relied upon for success for two reasons:
  - people typically want to just get their work done and they may not go through the extra steps required to learn how to use what are often claimed as KM technology or tools; and
  - there must be a well-thought-out process for defining capturing and reusing relevant knowledge in the company. Knowledge is more about people and what they know than technology.
2. Knowledge capture and knowledge reuse must work within the context of workflow – part of the way people do business. When knowledge is captured within the context of a business process, it's more meaningful and easier to integrate. When organized and accessible in a way that makes sense to the knowledge users, it then adds value. Technology and tools cannot themselves provide effective “context of use” and add this value. The value of knowledge enablement comes from the ability of people to effectively and efficiently reuse knowledge to improve performance, individually and organizationally.
3. Knowledge capture and knowledge reuse must work within the context of organizational culture. Collaborative cultures provide a better foundation for knowledge convergence than highly competitive cultures. In Acquisition Solutions,

learning and sharing knowledge in and across teams is a routine part of the way we work, resulting in open behavior and trust, an acceptance of change and immediate improvements in our operational and organizational performance.

4. Finally, continuous improvement in our business and operational processes in a sustainable manner must be tied to enterprise performance measures of success (for example, the balanced scorecard is what we use in Acquisition Solutions).

### Building a knowledge convergence framework

Our strategy is implemented through a straightforward and effective knowledge capture-transfer-and-reuse framework that is indeed part of the way we work. In this framework, we view knowledge as comprising all the information in the company and all the experience and insight in the company. We apply and focus this knowledge – in context – to improve our individual, team and corporate performance. This enables our collective workforce to make the best decisions and provide the best solutions. Figure 1 (below) illustrates this view.

The knowledge convergence strategy integrates an ability to connect, collect and collaborate with a discipline of learning before, during and after process execution to provide our professional acquisition workforce with the ability to access in real time not only codified knowledge (effective practices, relevant documents, templates), but also the most current tacit knowledge (experience and insight) that is the know how and know why of their practice and subject matter areas.

To enable our workforce to access this knowledge for reuse, we developed a proprietary, web-enabled Acquisition Solutions Knowledge Center™.

The knowledge center, accessible 24/365 by our workforce, is continually updated with lessons learned captured from the use of straightforward and effective learning processes, insights captured on video and knowledge we have rated based on its effectiveness, using the most current workforce knowledge and experience. Figure 2 (overpage) expands on the view outlined in Figure 1 to reflect the detailed framework we have implemented.

### Deploying a knowledge convergence framework-focusing on the four diamonds

Creating a knowledge enabled organization with a culture of performing and learning and performing requires a balance of four elements (shown as diamonds in Figure 3, overpage):

- Learning processes.
- Communities of practice

## KEYPOINTS

- Acquisition Solutions employs a knowledge convergence concept to enable fast, simple knowledge capture, transfer and reuse.
- The convergence concept uses four key elements: communities of practice, learning processes, enabling technologies and knowledge assets. Creating a knowledge enabled organization with a culture of performing and learning and performing requires a balance of these four elements.
- Failure to recognize the context in which the framework must operate, or failure to focus on all the elements, or both, will likely lead to marginalizing of the organization’s investments and efforts at best and failure at worst.
- Such a strategy integrates an ability to connect, collect and collaborate with a discipline of learning before, during and after process execution.

- Knowledge assets
- Enabling technology.

This balance will be necessarily different depending on the context and culture of your business or company. Failure to recognize the context in which the framework must operate, or failure to focus on all the elements, or both, will likely lead to marginalizing of the organization’s investments and efforts at best – and failure at worst. The elements are reflected in Figure 3 and described in the text that follows.

### Element 1 – learning processes

The learning processes enable us to capture knowledge and make sense out of it before, during, and after we execute or deliver. These processes provide the content for the knowledge assets (knowledge repositories with knowledge artifacts) which reside in the Acquisition Solutions Knowledge Center™.

- *Learning before* (peer assists): “Learning before doing” is supported through the peer assist process which targets a specific challenge, imports knowledge from people outside the

Figure 1. How Acquisition Solutions views knowledge



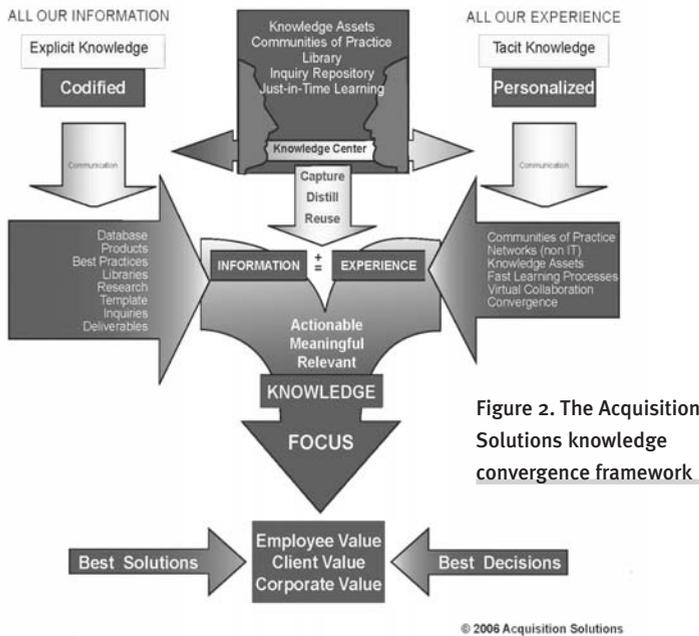


Figure 2. The Acquisition Solutions knowledge convergence framework

- ◀ team, identifies possible approaches and new lines of inquiry, and promotes sharing of learning with each other through a facilitated meeting.
- *Learning During* (action reviews): The US Army technique called action reviews aims to get people to “learn while doing” by answering four questions immediately after and activity or event:
  1. What was supposed to happen?
  2. What actually happened?
  3. If different, why are they different? and
  4. What can we learn and immediately apply?
 An added benefit is that, if done well and if people answer honestly, trust builds within the team.
- *Learning after* (retrospects): “Learning after

doing” is supported by a facilitated process called a retrospect. Immediately after the end of the project or project phase a retrospect encourages team members to look back at the project to discover what went well and why and what could have been done differently, with a view to helping a different team repeat their success and avoid any pitfalls – “learning after doing.”

- *Interviews*: Targeted interviews with individuals can further elicit critical knowledge, experience and insight when used as follow up to the learning processes or as a stand alone way to harvest this knowledge.

**Element 2 – communities of practice**

One way to describe communities of practice is to view them as groups of individuals who share common interests and objectives in addressing challenges, problems, and striving for solutions and whose goals are to improve the individual performance of their members. They’re best when voluntary, when people informally build a practice together and collectively decide which processes, tools, and procedures work best in the context of a given situation. They’re the guardians of competence in that practice or subject matter area within the company and often codify their collective know-how in a form (knowledge asset) that can be reused and adapted by their fellow practitioners. They help each other develop the competence to contribute individually and collaboratively within their business teams while focused on the objective at hand.

There can be vertical and horizontal CoPs. In Acquisition Solutions, an example of a vertical CoP could reasonably be thought of as a line of business.

An example of a horizontal community of practice might include all the acquisition specialists from across the company who focus on what they know and are learning about consulting and delivery of acquisition knowledge and expertise. You can belong to one or more CoPs. Key to the success of communities is the support of the leadership in terms of time, investment, and resources to participate, maintain and sustain the communities.

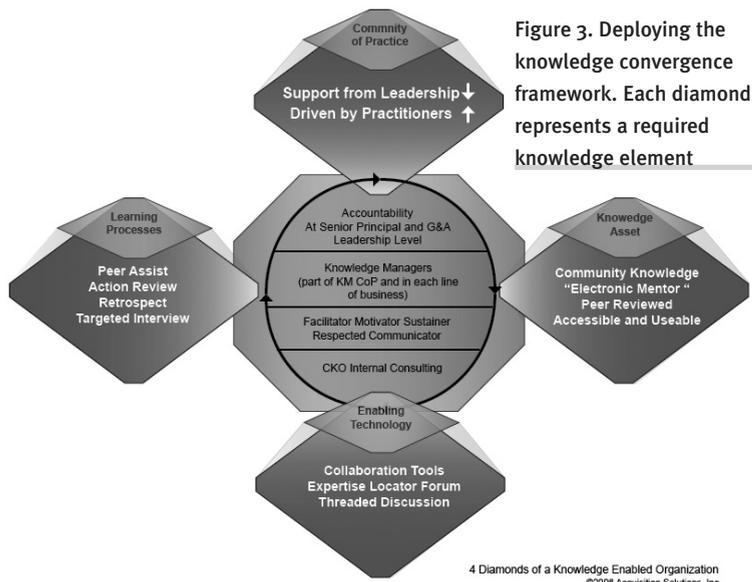


Figure 3. Deploying the knowledge convergence framework. Each diamond represents a required knowledge element

**Element 3 – knowledge assets**

A simple way to describe a knowledge asset might be to call it simply a repository of knowledge. But it’s really more multidimensional than that when constructed and applied effectively. A knowledge asset is:

- A repository of key insights, learnings and advice in the form of guidelines, checklists, effective practices and first person told stories in the form of short vignettes that highlight critical learnings, insight or experience.

- The business context in which the learning occurred.
- An electronic mentor with an index of the available knowledge.
- A link to a reference library of documents that can save you time.
- A catalyst for finding the person(s) who knows what you need to know and their contact details.

#### Element 4 – enabling technology

Enabling technology is the IT infrastructure and applications that enable “connection, collection and collaboration.” The idea is to provide the means for accessing the knowledge and communicating effectively and efficiently with members of the community and others outside the community.

#### Champion the deployment with executive support

Development and deployment of our knowledge convergence framework requires executive-level support and cross-company collaboration. In Acquisition Solutions, the president and the board of directors have committed to an investment in this strategy. The chief knowledge officer (CKO) reports to the president and provides an internal consulting capability supporting both the vertical and horizontal leadership and the knowledge managers.

The knowledge managers, trained by the CKO and then deployed, support the vertical and horizontal leadership in the execution of the framework by providing the facilitation, prompting and sustainment activities necessary for long-term success (maintenance of the CoPs and the currency of the knowledge assets, for example).

As we deploy our framework in Acquisition Solutions, the focus for capturing and reusing knowledge will reside at the operational level since this is where most of the practitioners operate. The knowledge managers, supported by the CKO, will perform the following roles:

- Ensure members of a community or operational unit have access to the knowledge they need to do their job, wherever this knowledge may have originated (within the business unit, or outside).
- Encourage adoption and application of this knowledge in the business activity in a sustainable manner.
- Ensure that any new knowledge gained through business operations is captured and then shared (current and future) in a way that will improve our ability to deliver to our business goals (think balanced scorecard).

#### Final thoughts on knowledge convergence

Knowledge, an intellectual asset which we value the same as a physical or capital asset, is one of the

#### Eight vital steps to a successful convergence strategy

To effectively develop and implement a successful knowledge capture, transfer and reuse framework, we believe the following are key:

- There must be senior leadership advocacy for the strategy.
- Transformational change, and it is transformational change for many in the company, requires experienced change agents.
- Delivering specific, tangible, business-driven performance improvements must be a goal.
- The real cost and the most difficult effort lies in maintaining and sustaining the strategy and framework we are executing.
- Embedding and integrating a common, simple set of core capture, transfer and reuse practices which are easily understood, supported, and performed “on the job” and “in the job,” is necessary to embed a sustainable way of working.
- It is important to leverage any existing investment in the organization’s technology base before you look for outside technology or applications.
- Know that, with the right leadership and strategy, it doesn’t have to take a long time to show results.
- And most importantly, the framework must be focused on the concept of connection, collection and collaboration. It’s most critical to connect people ... then nurture a culture that will get them talking and sharing in order to leverage their insight and experience across the workforce. Success rests in focusing on that most important “people” part; failure to focus on people is one of the reasons that many knowledge initiatives do not succeed.

primary assets of our company. The flow of knowledge into, within and out of our company, and the embedding of critical knowledge into the company, is a shared responsibility.

We recognize that knowledge must move within our company on two levels. The first level involves the peer-to-peer interaction reflected through our ability to learn before, during, and after project or process execution (learning processes). This in itself is critical, but not enough.

There is a second level. We must continuously characterize what we know and are learning for reuse in the context of the reuser of the knowledge so that what is learned between the peers is made available and then accessible (enabling technology) when needed by others (knowledge assets and CoPs). It’s this sustainable ability to connect, collect and collaborate that enables us to create the long term value required for continued company success. 

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