WHAT DO WE MEAN WITH THE TERM “KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT” ?

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1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of the work conducted by the working group Training and Knowledge Management (TKM) is to improve education and training in safeguards and non-proliferation for students and professionals in the European Union. The TKM was created by ESARDA in 2004 with the aim to set up an annually course in safeguards and to develop course syllabus to reduce the education deficit in the safeguards area. The scope of the task was very clear and well defined from the beginning. However, what was and still is not clear is why a part of the WG’s name is “Knowledge Management”. The term “Knowledge Management” has never really been problematized and in the beginning of 2011 during a TKM meeting it was decided that the term and its meaning should be a central issue to be addressed at an ESARDA symposium. I was given the task as the chair of TKM to prepare a presentation of the topic in order to enable an informed discussion and to define what TKM means with the term.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, the intention is to give a general background of the term knowledge management, its roots and emergence as an academic discipline and how it is used by practitioners in the field. Secondly, based on how knowledge management has been used in academia as a theoretical discipline and in the work life as a practical tool-box, the intention is to discuss how TKM ought to deal with the term. In other words, how could knowledge management be an integrated and natural ingredient of TKM’s activities and thereby contribute to the overall goal of ESARDA to enhance the management of safeguards within Europe.
2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE DISCIPLINE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

"Knowledge Management is the discipline of enabling individuals, teams and entire organisations to collectively and systematically create, share and apply knowledge, to better achieve their objectives"

Ron Young, CEO/CKO Knowledge Associates
International

There are many definitions of knowledge management and as the above quotation indicates the term has its roots in management thinking and practices. In a broad sense, the subject deals with organizations and their resources and how they work and how they can perform better. In another definition taken from Wikipedia, the emphasis is on organisational behaviour and especially how certain strategies and practices can be used “to identify, create, represent and distribute and enable adoptions of insights and experiences”. In this interpretation of the term, the knowledge process and its capability to spread the gained knowledge and experience within the organization, are key elements.

The above definitions of the term – there are plenty more in the vast literature on knowledge management - beg for an obvious question: is it really dealing with something qualitatively new or is only a new variation of an old theme? The answer is both yes and no. It can be argued that the issue how to make organizations to perform better is an old and classic theme in the management literature. A central question in the academic and non-academic management literature has long been obsessed with the issue how different approaches and methods can be used to improve the performance of staff and organizations. On the other hand, it is also possible to defend the standpoint that the knowledge as it has been defined and handled over the last twenty years is in fact a creatively new phenomenon. In 1991, knowledge management was introduced as an academic discipline by the Japanese scholar Hirotaka Takeuchi at the Hitotsubashi University. The same year courses in knowledge management was given at New
York University. The Swedish company Skandia was the first corporate organization in the world to have an employee with the title “Chief of Knowledge Management” when Leif Edvinsson was hired in the beginning of 1990s. Whatever school of thought or definition preferred, KM has a common ground or consists of a couple of key aspects that are viewed in an holistic approach: people, processes, technology (or) culture, structure, are all necessary parts that constitutes an organization wholeness (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_management). Another interesting school of thought is analyzing and dividing knowledge in mainly two dimensions, tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. In this framework tacit knowledge is identical to internalized knowledge that each individual or staff member is not aware of, for example how certain work tasks are carried out. Explicit knowledge, on the other hand, is form of knowledge that is used in an aware and often learned way that can be communicated and explained to other individuals inside and outside the organization. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_management). According to conducted research, successful organizations are successful because they have been able to transform internalized tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and vice versa if needed with the result that the organization is performing better. Through different process where the organization’s different resources are aligned in such a way that an interrelated dynamic is created. There are of course other KM models where other specific interrelated main forms of knowledge are stressed.

With a risk of oversimplification, KM encompasses a set of theoretical approaches and best practices models whit the ambition which can be summarized in a couple of central points.

- What is an organization and how can an organization align its resources in order to achieve certain goals?
- How can an organization perform better? – maximize the (intangible and tangible) assets of the organization
- Knowledge is central: share information, combine tacit and explicit knowledge, combine knowledge in a system (organization) and individual capabilities to learn, transfer of new knowledge (innovation).
- Strategy and technology (or culture) are important tools in KM processes.
After this brief and perhaps too simplifying overview, it is easy to draw the conclusion that TKM has not whatsoever been dealing with knowledge management.

3. HOW CAN TKM DEAL WITH KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT?

Generally speaking, I see three different answers to the question how TKM should react to knowledge management. The first solution is maybe the easiest way out: we shouldn’t deal with KM at all since it is rather a task for each individual company or governmental organization to decide how they could perform better since they know best what they possess in terms of financial, technological, staff resources. TKM has neither the competence nor the organizational and financial resources to play a role in such ambitious efforts. By taking away “Knowledge Management” from the name of the WG and just call it “Working Group for Training and Education” the problem is solved.

The second solution would be to admit that the KM is too important to ignore for ESARDA given its central goal to assist and help nuclear organizations within EU to improve the capability and capacity to manage safeguards and non-proliferation tasks. But how is of course then the vital question. What should and can the ambition be for ESARDA? One way could be to establish a new WG with the goal to deal specifically with this issue; organize conferences and workshops, analyze the needs for KM in different organizations etc.

A third approach – which I personally prefer – would be to deal with KM within TKM but with limited and well defined tasks. In this context, I will give two examples of tasks which could be characterized as typical KM activities and simultaneously would not be too ambitious for TKM to deal with.

**Maintaining historical knowledge/Information gathering.**

In this task the aim is not only to carry out courses in safeguards and non-proliferation but also to systematically produce and update course material – text books, course compendium and digital versions. Another task within this scope could be to disseminate course material to
regulatory authorities and universities which are planning or running courses in safeguards. Even if it could be argued that TKM is already doing this since a text book has been published (Ed. Greet Janssens-Maenhout, *Nuclear safeguards and Non-Proliferation*, European Communities, 2009). However, the point here is that this goal can be enhanced to include a more systematic assessment of the present existing literature on safeguards and non-proliferation in terms of what can be used in training and education. In addition, the TKM can present these assessments on the NuSASET’s web site to reach out to universities, companies and organizations.

**Collaborative efforts**

Another task which could be characterized as a TKM activity could be to create and deliver courses in collaboration between ESARDA, EU regular authorities and universities. A good example is the 8th ESARDA course in Nuclear Safeguards and Non-Proliferation held at Uppsala University 12-16 September 2011. The course was conducted as a collaboration between ESARDA, the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority (SSM) and Uppsala University. TKM could present the one week course that has been designed and developed since 2005 in cooperation with SSM that joined the project with staff members and experts. The SSM staff members set up a team which contributed with everything from financial means to teaching. Uppsala University contributed with teachers and conference room. This course was by and large identical to the ESARDA course in Ispra, but the idea here is to take a step further and design *specialized training courses* for certain targeted groups that could be of interest. For example, one course could be focused on *Diplomats*, especially EU diplomats, who want to learn more about the connection between peaceful nuclear energy and nuclear weapons programs and especially how the safeguards mechanisms are working in practice and about other tools within the NPT regime as export control and physical protection.

Another targeted group could be to give specialized courses to *States* with limited or no nuclear experience which have plans to build nuclear power plants or start nuclear energy programs. TKM could in cooperation with other organization tailor-fit a course that would suit the state per se in their early ambitions to learn more about safeguards and non-proliferation.