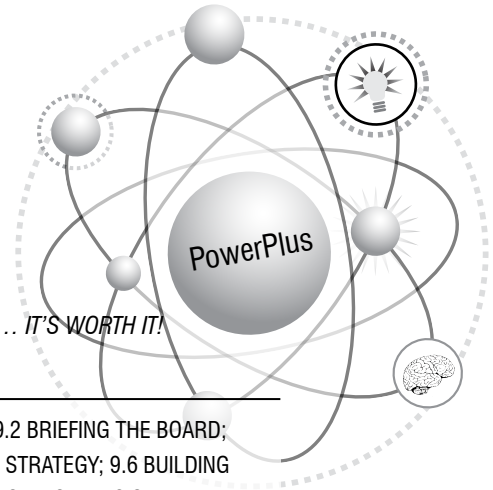


CHAPTER 9

POWERPLUS COMES OF AGE

THIS CHAPTER IS NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART, BUT READ IT ANYWAY ... IT'S WORTH IT!



THIS SECTION INCLUDES: 9.0 INTRODUCTION; 9.1 THE SITUATION; 9.2 BRIEFING THE BOARD; 9.3 UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM; 9.4 GETTING STARTED; 9.5 THE KMB STRATEGY; 9.6 BUILDING THE KMB TEAM; 9.7 STILL LEARNING; 9.8 DEVELOPING A STRATEGY; 9.9 A CRITICAL INSIGHT; 9.10 WHAT KNOWLEDGE DO WE NEED?; 9.11 MEASURING THE OUTCOME; 9.12 IMPLEMENTATION.

9.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers a potential application of knowledge mobilization in an area outside of the social sciences to demonstrate the applicability of KMB in areas related to organizational development, and perhaps other complex situations. While much can be done to further develop the concepts and processes of KMB, there is no doubt that the product of knowledge mobilization, that is knowledge and its application, will play an increasingly important role in dealing with complex situations, or what Russel Ackoff calls “messes.” (Ackoff, 1978) Some have called these “wicked problems,” situations where one knows there is a problem but does not know exactly what the problem is or whether a good solution exists. (This idea was introduced in chapter 1).

When considering the application of KMB to a situation, it is best to remember that the heart of KMB is knowledge, not information. Although the KMB process extensively uses information and data, its focus and challenge is to *get the right knowledge to the right people* in a way that they can, and will, take effective actions that will help solve a problem or improve their world. The lens of perspective is knowledge and through knowledge-action. Knowledge (understanding, insight, meaning and comprehension) leads to prediction and anticipation, which in turn results in a higher probability of good decisions and effective actions. Knowledge surfaces through statements, questions, dialogue, intuition, judgment and behavior. Thus KMB centers around people, their interactions, perspectives, histories, competencies, frames of reference, limitations and strengths. With this quick review in mind, the following episode is provided.



Anyone can make a messy problem; only knowledge mobilization can clean one up.

9.1 THE SITUATION

PowerPlus is a public Utility with 800 employees governed by a Board of Directors composed of citizens elected by the two million member community. Many of its employees joined the organization in the 1970's when PowerPlus was expanding to

meet the energy needs of the baby boomers. This group of workers, ranging from senior managers to foremen and senior technicians, now represents a major retiree exodus. PowerPlus' Chief Executive Officer John Marcus has been watching this trend for several years, and has now decided that something must be done. He sees two major issues: The first is the lost knowledge and experience from senior people who are retiring. Over the years these people have developed a *deep knowledge* of their work and a *strong understanding of the purpose* of PowerPlus and its contribution to the community. John believes that much of the performance of PowerPlus is due to the leadership and tacit knowledge of these senior people.

The second issue is with the difficulty his HR people are having hiring younger employees who are willing to work hard. Although these new employees are very bright, they seem to live in a different world. He has heard many comments from his foreman that these young people cannot stop asking questions and insist on understanding *why* things are done the way they are. His foreman finds trying to answer these questions very frustrating since the new hires have neither the experience nor the context in terms of language to *really understand what is going on*. In addition, these younger employees have a very high turnover rate. It is proving a real challenge to keep them in the organization! Although these two problems might appear not to be related, John felt that they probably were.



*Before you simplify
a problem, you had
better understand its
complexity.*

9.2 BRIEFING THE BOARD

The CEO's first act was to brief his Board of Directors to bring them up to speed on how he saw the issues and their importance to PowerPlus. In particular, John wanted to make sure that they understood the downstream implications of not addressing these situations now. The briefing went well, and John hired an organizational development consultant with strong experience in the power industry to work with Nancy, his HR manager, to look into the situation and make recommendations on what needed to be done. It was also decided that the new entry turnover issue would be addressed first because of its cost and the concern over possible mistakes, accidents or loss of service. The consultant, Kerry Morris, was brought on board and met with John and Nancy to brainstorm possible causes of the turnover problem, and the extent of its potential consequences. John insisted that they not jump to solutions too quickly. Over the years he had seen too many quick reactions result in failed attempts to solve problems, reinforcing employee skepticism concerning management organizational projects.

9.3 UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

After the meeting, Nancy set up a one-day exploratory workshop that included the majority of the supervisors working with the new employees. Throughout the day there were numerous views, ideas, and solutions expressed, and some participants left with hard feelings. Ideas ranged from bringing in foreign workers who would be willing to work hard, to raising the pay scale of new employees, to putting new employees on probation for six months. Several of the supervisors complained that they did not have time to answer all of the foolish questions that these new hires were

asking. The supervisors were used to workers who just followed orders and did their jobs. By the end of the day one thing became clear: no one really understood the issues, much less the root causes, and it would be wrong to assume the problem was due to the only to the attitudes or laziness of the new hires.

As often happens in workshops, at one point Mike, a young foreman, told the group that at a recent conference he had heard a speaker talking about complex organizational problems. These kinds of problems required both a systems perspective and the recognition that the answer—whatever it ended up to be—would probably be found in knowledge and how knowledge is created and applied. Kerry jumped in to describe the importance of the perspectives, feelings, attitudes and goals of employees in a complex system, and how much they were willing—and allowed—to learn and apply that learning in their own areas of responsibility. Kerry suggested that the group look into what it might mean to consider PowerPlus as an organic system, and, building on their ongoing knowledge management efforts, look at the potential of knowledge mobilization for understanding and resolving their issues.

At the end of the workshop John authorized the creation of a team led by Nancy, Mike, the outside consultant Kerry, and other organizational representatives as needed to dig into these issues and find out more about what was going on. As this new team began their work, they realized that taking an organic perspective required shifting their own frames of reference. They began by thinking about PowerPlus as a complex adaptive system embedded in a community and world within which they continuously interacted, which they both influenced and were influenced by, and which was—at the same time—subjected to unpredictable forces and demands from governing bodies and external parties. This new frame of reference meant that they could no longer see the problem as *due only to the external source of workers*.

After talking to several people who had studied complexity, the team knew that the problem was indeed complex, that it would include their own people, and that the solution would not lie in any one specific action. They were also reminded of the old management adage: *if you are a manager and you're not getting what you want, the first thing that has to change is you*. They began to realize that they must look first within their own organization.

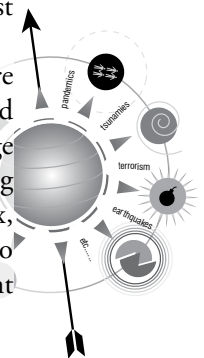
Nancy had heard about the KMB process from several employees who were working on small knowledge management projects in PowerPlus. She also recognized that knowledge was significantly different from information, and that knowledge was much, much harder to share among employees, yet it was the primary driving force for decision-making and taking effective action. Thinking outside the box, her team looked at the possibility of using the knowledge mobilization process to guide their understanding of the problem as well as to help generate and implement potential solutions.

9.4 GETTING STARTED

After reviewing the recommendations of the team, John, and Nancy briefed the Board of Directors and got approval to develop a strategy and a plan of action and a set of milestones for measuring progress. There was some discussion at the board meeting



*Everything is exactly
as it should be, yet
nothing is what it
seems.*



of the potential cost of the effort. John made it clear to the Directors that, while no one knew what the actual costs would be, it was not going to be cheap in terms of time or dollars. He pointed out that they were dealing with unknowns, the current cost of their turnover rate was quite expensive and, most importantly, performance was beginning to suffer. In his own mind, John intuitively felt there was a connection between the brain drain and the turnover problem. The common elements seemed to be culture, structure and how employees were viewed by management. In conversations with colleagues, John had heard about the need for organizations to change the way they dealt with knowledge workers, and the increasingly important role these workers played in organizational success. But he had never had the time to consider this deeply.

John began to think that PowerPlus might need to take a serious look at themselves in the mirror to see if they were keeping up with the future. He hoped this project would shed considerable light on the critical success factors that would propel PowerPlus to achieve high performance and, even more important, *sustainable high performance*. In fact, John had wanted to explore this area for a long time but felt too many of his senior managers were ingrained in their habits to change. The more he thought about it the surer John was that this problem with new hires was indirectly connected with the knowledge retention problem caused by senior people retiring. Complex systems seemed to have subtle and weird paths of influence.



Never ignore your intuition, gut feelings or hunches. They may be detecting patterns that your conscious mind isn't.

9.5 THE KMB STRATEGY

When Nancy got the go-ahead from John, she called Shelly, an organizational change agent who had developed several workshops on KMB. Following their initial meeting which included a quick overview of their situation, Nancy invited her to become part of the team. At the first meeting of the growing KMB team, Shelly explained what knowledge mobilization was about. In order for the team to get a handle on some of the key aspects of the KMB process, she suggested a seven step approach. As she presented the steps, she invited the team to jump in with their thoughts. She began:

KMB TEAM PREP APPROACH

1. *Identify and describe the situation as objectively as possible.* Everyone thought that this was a good starting point.
2. *Validate, to the best extent possible, that the situation and problem is as interpreted.* This made sense to the team.
3. *Analyze the knowledge areas needed to determine what expertise is necessary to bring into the KMB team.* Shelly suggested that as a minimum, they needed individuals with strong knowledge in theory, change management, organizational development and leadership.
4. *After filling all of the team's knowledge requirements, spend time building the group into an effective team.* Shelly pointed out that this step was often overlooked because it was assumed that senior professionals already know how to work effectively in teams. However, this was often not the case. It was suggested that one way to help the team get started was to set up a KMB workshop prior to commencing the project.

5. *Identify individuals with specialized knowledge who need to be available to the team on an on-call basis.* Mike wondered what specialized knowledge might be needed for this project. Shelly suggested that the KMb team itself would be in the best position to identify any gaps between their areas of expertise and what might be needed during the course of the KMb project. And, of course, along the way a need for knowledge in other areas might emerge. Nancy mentioned that a “Yellow Pages of Knowledge” had been developed of PowerPlus employees by the KM team, and they could connect to company knowledge resources as needed.
6. *Have the team review the situation to provide the basis for developing a strategy.* Nancy thought it would be useful to review the purpose, values, culture, structure, history and leadership of the organization. Reading policies, interviewing, reviewing past events, listening to stories and informally talking with all levels of employees could provide valuable insights and information. Observing the physical structure of offices, conference rooms and how people meet and talk to each other as they go down the hall would say much about the organizations identity and the feelings of its employees.
7. *Once the strategy is developed, a plan of action and milestones should be prepared.* It was agreed this would force all team members to look at and think about the anticipated schedule of the project. To identify the end goal, the differences between the current state and the desired state would need to be clearly understood. The POA&M would represent the actions needed to move the organization in the direction of the desired state. Shelly emphasized that since the situation was complex and adaptive, the team should not expect single actions to always achieve their anticipated results. It would be important to stay flexible as actions were taken and changes evolved. What Shelly proposed was an action-learning approach that would promote learning as they went.

At this point Shelly re-emphasized the importance of having the right people with the right expertise involved in the KMb process. Further, these needed to be people who would continuously communicate and collaborate with each other, and with other employees of PowerPlus. She described them as integrators with trusted networks. Some of these might be members of formal communities of practice or less formal communities of interest supported by PowerPlus. With these connections across the organization, the KMb team would be able to gain the respect and cooperation of other employees, and get the honest feedback needed to determine desired changes. Another critical factor in the solution process was to make sure everyone on the team understood what was going on and the impact their actions were having on the organization. To help ensure openness and objectivity, she suggested team members ask each other, and other employees throughout their individual relationship networks, a lot of questions. Then, through intense listening and keeping an open mind, team members could surface insights to guide the KMb process and create conversations that would help gain the employees’ trust and

*You don't know
what you don't know,
unless you ask
questions and
look for it!*



confidence in the KMb process.

Shelly reminded the team that each discipline has its own ways of thinking, terms of art, and value judgments, and that these could be very confusing and intimidating to non-specialists. Because several disciplines were involved and specialized terms could be easily misunderstood, she cautioned her teammates to use plain language when discussing the KMb process. Finally, Shelly made the point that senior management needed to be kept informed of progress, and should be prepared to participate in the project as requested. John agreed to see that this would happen. They all realized that PowerPlus could not change unless their senior management was willing to change and demonstrated that willingness through active participation in the change process.

9.6 BUILDING THE KMB TEAM

After interviewing a number of new employees, their supervisors and coworkers, the team realized just *how much they did not know or understand about their organization*. One member of the team, a sociology professor who had done extensive research in organizational cultures, knew a graduate student who had just finished his thesis on the new generation worker. They quickly invited him to the next KMb team meeting. Together, the sociologist and graduate student provided the team with a sound theoretical basis for understanding the generational conflict between the younger employees and their supervisors. Indeed, these two groups lived in different worlds; they thought differently, and had different values and frames of reference.

As a general rule, long-time supervisors worked hard, were control oriented and did not like new technologies. They were comfortable with stability and repetition, and comfortable within their local milieu. Conversely, the younger people new to the organization loved technology, expected to be respected, and liked to ask questions and challenge everything they heard and saw, and were often driven by the desire to make it better. They did not understand their supervisors. In fact, they did not like them, and since they were networked, they knew that they could find a good job somewhere else. So they did. No wonder PowerPlus was having problems!

The sociologist showed the team how a culture of control and knowledge privacy had prevented senior personnel from passing their knowledge down to the next level. This was not so much the intentional hoarding of knowledge, it was that senior leaders were very busy and didn't have the time or the incentive to teach others what they knew. These leaders had learned years ago that their knowledge (and hard work) was what moved them up the ladder, and this had led them to believe that every employee was expected to learn their own way on their own time. The organization did not have time to waste on learning because learning was lost work and therefore inefficient. People were focusing and working hard, as they had been doing in the past. The high output and cost had reinforced the senior managers' belief in this management policy. They saw no need to change. As the team listened, they could identify similar attitudes in a number of the senior leaders and mid-level managers. They realized that the mindset problem would not be easily solved. logic box of success had trapped them.

Whether among nations or generations, there is a knowledge gap in translation and understanding.



If you have been making decisions a certain way all during your career and you have become a senior manager, why should you change now? Clearly your past decisions have been the right ones.



A pragmatic knowledge of change management was provided by Shelly and Kerry, who specialized in organizational development. Nancy, together with several of PowerPlus' best supervisors, represented the pragmatic knowledge of implementation. As Shelly had suggested, when the team came together they took a look at what knowledge they felt would be needed to fully understand and resolve the emerging issues. Shelly further emphasized that the team needed to understand Kmeta or *knowledge about knowledge*: knowledge creation, attributes, flows and integration as it could be applied to their organization.

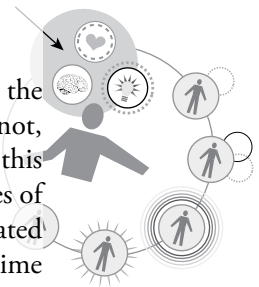
9.7 STILL LEARNING

After listening to the sociologist and the graduate student, the team realized that the issue was much broader and deeper than originally thought, and that it could not, and should not, be limited to the behavior of new hires. The more they dug into this situation, the more they became aware that the culture, perspectives and attitudes of current employees and their managers played a big role in the way the utility operated on a day-to-day basis. Nancy had always heard that neophytes spent more time solving problems than experts, but experts spent more time understanding problems than neophytes. While this was perhaps a generalization, the team recognized the importance of taking time to develop a good and cohesive understanding of the situation (see Figure 3-1.)

The team suspected that the issue of the turnover of new hires and the knowledge retention of senior people retiring were *symptoms* and not *causes*. Even though the word from the CEO was to “get on with it,” the team gave John a detailed briefing of their insights and approach and noted that in this case *slow may be fast*. The team now suspected that the real source of the issues lay in the identity, culture, structure and leadership of the organization. They realized that since this was sensitive territory, they needed to be sure of their facts. Politics, personal sensitivities and differences in perspectives would all come into play. Nevertheless, this was their job, and their responsibility.

9.8 DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

Nancy and her team felt it would take at least six months to develop a strategy, plan of action and a cone of possibilities before starting implementation (see Figure 1). They also felt that implementation might take two to three years to be successful. During their briefing to the Board of Directors, the team addressed the current situation, the anticipated future environment, and the complexity and challenges of PowerPlus, its community and the broader environment. They emphasized that the organization needed a major internal transformation to create a Utility with the capacity to handle current and future challenges. They also noted that the Utility had many good employees who were doing the best job they could by *working around the system*. But in many cases these long-term employees had become non-learners who did the same jobs every day and were not aware of the impact the external world was having on their Utility. While they talked about new technologies, terrorist threats, changing customer needs and the rising costs of power, they could not relate



them to the work they did every day. It would be a challenge to change PowerPlus into the kind of intelligent complex adaptive system recent research had shown as necessary for a knowledge organization to survive and succeed in the present and future environment.

The team briefed the Board on what they envisioned the new PowerPlus might look like in order to achieve a sustainable high performance. They made it clear that this transformation was not guaranteed, and that there were risks. Further, there was only a good probability of success if, and only if, the CEO and Board actively backed the proposed changes and continued their support well into the future. The Kmb team representatives spent three days with the Board in briefings and dialogue covering every part of the project, making sure that everyone understood the approach, and was behind this effort. The team invited challenges, questions and disagreements, treating everyone with respect and using appreciative inquiry to move the group toward a mutual understanding. At the end of this process, while there were still some members with misgivings, the Board approved the project, and even agreed to participate in parts of its implementation. Now the real challenge began; how to move an 800 employee organization into the 21st century.

9.9 A CRITICAL INSIGHT



A stable, control-oriented bureaucracy within an increasingly dynamic and complex environment must either shrink, change or disappear.

A critical insight that the team passed to the Board was that even though their Utility was a large plant with a lot of machinery, because of its complexity and the need for adaptation, it was rapidly becoming a knowledge organization. As technology continues to explode exponentially and take on more artificial intelligence, and as the customer base becomes better educated and more dynamic, PowerPlus must become more knowledge focused, with its employees using their understanding and intuition to solve technical and organizational problems, and respond to external demands. This meant that the challenge of leadership was to build, nurture and sustain organization-wide empowerment, collaboration, adaptability, innovation and continuous learning—quite a tall order!

During the workshop with the Board, Shelly realized that there were actually two knowledge mobilization processes to be considered. The first was the challenge of mobilizing knowledge for the team to effectively implement its strategy of creating the new PowerPlus. The second was designing the new PowerPlus so it could continuously mobilize its own knowledge when needed to adapt to changing external requirements and emergencies. Since one could not forecast the specific knowledge needed in the future, the new PowerPlus to have a built-in capacity to create, assimilate, leverage, mobilize, target and apply the right knowledge at the right time and place. This was a tall order and would be considered as the transformation unfolded. While the knowledge management team had begun to tackle elements by connecting specific knowledge and the target audience related to that knowledge, a Kmb process could help ensure collaborative advantage. The relationship of the Kmb process to knowledge management was beginning to surface. While knowledge management had been around in PowerPlus for a number of years—and projects such as the Yellow Pages were proving valuable—the field had been difficult to bring

down to bite-size chunks. What it had done, however, was to spread an awareness of the value of knowledge, and since people were the source of knowledge, knowledge management had begun to seed ideas that would be supportive of using KMB processes in the transformation of PowerPlus.

9.10 WHAT KNOWLEDGE DO WE NEED?

After reflecting on the intensive three days with the Board of Directors, Nancy asked her team to identify any additional areas of theory and pragmatic knowledge they thought might be needed. Kerry, the organizational development specialist, suggested that theories of bureaucracy, hierarchy and complex adaptive organizations would be useful to the team. A number of theories related to individual and organizational change were also discussed. Since there was no single theory that exactly matched PowerPlus's structure, Kerry suggested several texts for team members to scan and look for ideas. These included: Kotter, 1996; Chawla & Renesch, 1994; Bennet & Bennet, 2004; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000; and Conger, et al. 1999. Kerry was adamant that real change must come from inside the organization, and from inside individual employees. The other team members nodded in agreement. They all understood that no one could successfully order change to happen, or even create rules and policies which would force people to change their behavior. In this day and age workers were smart enough—and independent enough—that they could and would decide for themselves how much they were willing to personally change.

Several techniques for creating environments for change, and motivating processes to encourage employees to change were discussed. For example, where individuals are concerned, the Bennet model posits that in order for people to willingly change the following should occur: they must be aware of the change, understand it, believe it, feel good about it, have ownership (responsibility) for it, feel empowered to execute it, and know how to do it. Similarly, where organizations are concerned, change from the inside will occur if employees feel ownership, understand the purpose and need for change, and feel that they will not be hurt by the change. Techniques such as social network analysis, specialized workgroups, event intermediation and small team task assignments have demonstrated their efficacy in specific applications.

Another area that was considered significant was learning. While there are numerous theories of learning, Mezirow's transformational learning, (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 2000) and Tough's theory of self-directed learning seemed to be the most applicable (Tough, 1971). Others suggested were Kofman, et al., 1994 and Merriam, et al., 2006. In addition, Blooms taxonomy might be helpful in assessing learning levels and communicating effectively with various members of the workforce (Sousa, 2006). Kerry brought up his favorite topic of systems and complexity theory and suggested they would be quite useful in designing and understanding the new vision of PowerPlus. He recommended the following reading for team members: Garvin, D. 2000; Kelly & Allison, 1999; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001; Bennet & Bennet, 2004; and Marion, 1999.

Last, but certainly not least, was a theory of leadership that would serve as a guide in describing and recommending roles, behaviors and responsibilities of the



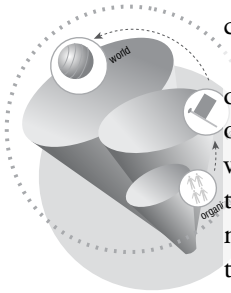
You don't have to know everything. You just have to know where to find it—and you have to understand it when you find it.

leadership in support of the transformation. While it was understood that there was no single type of leadership that would work in a dynamic, uncertain and complex environment, it was also agreed that it was useful and necessary to outline the basic ingredients needed to move the organization towards its goals. Several suggestions for references included: Hamel, 2000; Neo & Chen, 2007; Frick & Spears, 1996; and Tichy & Devanna, 1986. The team felt it would be best if the CEO would take an active role in developing and approving the leadership development needs of the organization. Not only was his involvement politically correct, but John was a critical thinker and closet academic who would jump at the opportunity to synergistically combine theory and praxis.

During the team discussions of relevant knowledge, the need for theories was questioned. One team member felt that action was what was needed to change the organization, and suggested that if the team knew the best actions to take, why worry about theory? After bouncing this idea around a few times, the team realized they and the organization were moving into uncharted territory. There would be many instances where decisions and directions would be unclear. During these times, theory would hopefully provide the background and understanding needed to guide the team's actions. From the change agent's perspective, theory would serve as an *evidence-based foundation* for what was being applied and as *guiding principles (offering limits and possibilities)* for its application. Of course, from the theoretician's perspective, pragmatic applications such as the PowerPlus situation would serve to validate, enhance or even negate theories. Nancy reminded the team that their approach was an action-learning process, and that every one of them would be expected to learn a great deal outside of their normal areas of competence.

Another topic of discussion was the concept of pragmatic knowledge, and how it could be used to support their KMB project. Specifically, the team developed a brief list of areas where pragmatic knowledge would be applicable. The following topics came to mind: communication via discourse and dialogue; values and their application throughout the organization; the application of KM strategies; the creation and implementation of teams; rewards and incentive structures; the informal networks operating throughout the organization; and leadership training and employee development. A final area considered highly pragmatic was when the organization implemented problem-solving or decision-making. The team agreed to stay sensitive to the need to stress action and application that yielded results in these areas, and not to spend time talking to employees about theory unless requested. However, the team needed to *understand why* their actions and decisions would lead to the desired outcome, and that would come likely from theory.

In addition to theoretical and pragmatic knowledge, the team also looked at the seven categories of knowledge to determine which areas they needed to understand and apply. For example, what kind of descriptive information would they need, and where should it come from to enable them to understand the current situation. The team would also have to decide which individuals could best implement the decisions and actions decided upon. For example, in understanding the culture and structure of the Utility, they planned to review the policies, the way the work gets done, the



Recall the seven
areas of knowledge:

- Kmeta
- Kpraxis
- Kaction
- Kdescription
- Kresearch
- Ktheory
- Kpragmatic



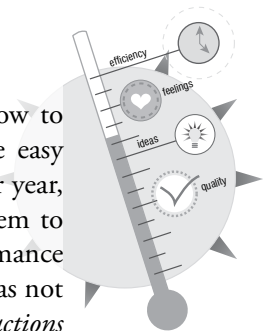
expectations of the employees, and how well they worked together. Who would be the best individuals to gather, understand and interpret this pragmatic knowledge? They knew that Klearning would become important because of the changing environment needed to keep up with new technology and a changing workforce. The challenge related to Kresearch was to find the best evidence-based theory and research with the principles and guidelines that would support PowerPlus' transformation.

Since each of these knowledge categories carries its own subtle nuances of language, interpretation, meaning and ways of perceiving issues, Nancy made sure that the team members understood the different perspectives of each category. This led to a discussion of the power of different frames of reference and the importance of each member being able to shift their individual frames of reference so that they could critically evaluate their personal beliefs, assumptions and habits of the mind. During these discussions it became clear that these same challenges would be faced by the organization's employees. While this was insightful, by far the most valuable result of these discussions was the recognition of the significant role that information and knowledge played in understanding a situation, developing an effective strategy, and implementing the changes necessary to create the PowerPlus of the future. After all of this preparation, the team had finally realized that the solution to their task would come from the quality of (1) relationships among all of their employees, (2) employee knowledge, and (3) employee actions.

9.11 MEASURING THE OUTCOME

A final of concern was how to measure the outcome of the project and how to monitor progress during implementation. The team knew there were some easy numbers to measure, such as employee turnover rate, number of accidents per year, power outages, etc. But even though these might be useful, they did not seem to represent the full spectrum of the organization's performance. While the performance of PowerPlus was determined by the actions of every employee every day, it was not possible—nor desirable—to monitor these actions. But, *the quality of their actions* did depend on the information and knowledge of each employee, their willingness to use their competence to support the purpose and mission of PowerPlus, and the amount of collaboration and support they gave each other. This led the team to think about, and look for, answers to questions such as: How effective were PowerPlus teams? Could they engage in creative dialogues? Were they willing to innovate and take risks? Did employees feel they were growing and developing both personally and professionally? Were employees proud to work at PowerPlus? Did they believe they were contributing to a higher purpose than a salary or a job?

The KMb team believed that the answers to these questions would be strong indicators of project success. They also knew there was no perfect way to assess a project such as this. However, after the KMb project was finished, everyone would be able to recognize the differences and observe the results. Nancy laughingly noted that the organization would never really be finished, because in a changing world successful organizations had to continuously learn, adapt and remake themselves. The only real question became how often?



Focusing back on the task at hand, the team identified specific items that would provide some measure of *progress toward the goal*. They felt that the best technique for assessment was simply to talk with, and listen to, those employees who were directly involved in implementing the project. It was the employees and their managers who could, and would, feel the difference and appreciate the changes that the team was orchestrating. The team realized that they themselves could not possibly change PowerPlus, but that they could act as catalysts, guides, and mentors as PowerPlus changed from within.

9.12 IMPLEMENTATION

The KMb team decided not to visibly approach their task as a major reorganization. All too often management projects start with a big bang and end up gradually fading away, causing employees to become skeptical and thinking, “OK, here we go again” or “I wonder how long this one will last?” So, instead of making a big deal of the KMb project the team initiated a number of local actions at several levels, even though they knew this multiple approach to change was counter to most proven management approaches. Simultaneous multiple changes do not provide good cause-and-effect tracking, and somehow control is often lost when too many changes happen at once. That was just the point. Complexity theory indicated that causal tracking was not possible anyway, and that the intersection of multiple changes had a good chance of synergistically moving the organization forward. The catch was that while they knew the direction these changes would take, they could not be sure exactly where the changes would end up. Changes that take hold do so because the organization is comfortable with them, and these changes have a good chance of lasting and expanding their influence. Some people call this change strategy “seeding.”

During implementation the team observed a variety of responses from the managers, and eventually about 50 percent of the senior managers left the organization. Nonetheless, because of the CEO’s personal interest, all of the managers cooperated, and many became actively involved in reviewing, assessing and objectively studying their departments from the viewpoint of the KMb program. This included a close look at how well the departments were cooperating and supporting each other. This was the shift in perspective that broke down the silos that had maintained a local control mentality for many years.

As the KMb approach was implemented, one progressive department manager became frustrated at not being able to get his workers to suggest ideas for better ways of doing their work. He found a simple but elegant solution. After talking to his division managers about how important it was to rethink their operations and the need for innovation, he told all of his people that he wanted them to think out of the box and come up with new ideas and new ways of getting the job done. He then emphasized that “he was the only person in the department who could say ‘no’ to any idea they proposed”. He was amazed at the number of ideas that were generated. Instead of having a chain of people who could stop an initiative before it was ever fully voiced, there was a single point: him.

*If you want to change
employee behaviour,
get them involved
in organizational
change, give them
direction, and get out
of their way!*

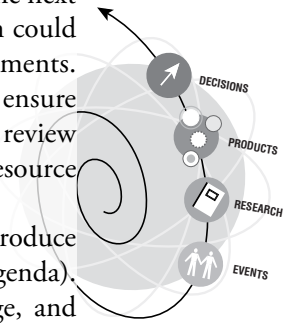


To get all levels of the workforce involved, Nancy asked John to let her charter 15 teams, each comprised of seven to nine volunteers from different levels and departments of the organization. Each team would select one task from a proposed list, with each task representing an aspect of the desired future PowerPlus. These tasks were the ones that had been determined by the KMb team to be the significant issues, concerns and opportunities. For example, one task was to research and prepare a briefing on what new technologies the Utility would need during the next 15 years. Another team was tasked to identify 10 ways that the organization could better communicate and collaborate internally among divisions and departments. A third task entailed developing specific actions and processes that would ensure that PowerPlus became a learning organization. Another team's task was to review and make recommendations on employee career growth and human resource development.

To help the teams get started, Nancy set up a three-day workshop to introduce knowledge and knowledge mobilization (see appendix F for the workshop agenda). The workshop would help them understand the overall strategy for change, and allow them to begin thinking about the role of knowledge and its importance in building the PowerPlus of the future. When they were ready to start their task, each team was given authority to talk with anyone inside or outside the organization as they felt necessary. They were assured they would have the full cooperation of all employees. The KMb team would serve as a knowledge resource on the KMb process and coordinate resources, information, and lessons learned across the teams. They would also jump in as needed when any issues emerged that the team felt required additional clarification. A directive was issued to all employees to ensure support of these teams. At their first meetings, the teams were to self-organize, selecting their own leaders and, guided by the KMb process, plan their approach. They were expected to complete their work in six months, and were asked to make recommendations for actions and brief the CEO and Board of Directors on their results. Following that briefing each team would be scheduled to provide briefings to representative groups from across the PowerPlus organization.

The task-team approach got the employees directly involved, provided them ownership of solutions, and give them an opportunity to contribute to the future success of the Utility. Further, since the people who volunteered for these teams were typically go-getters who were most interested in improving the organization, they were influential and, in talking with their coworkers over the life of the task team, the entire organization would become aware of the KMb project from the inside out. Learning about the project from their colleagues, rather than their bosses, gave the project much more credibility and support. This approach provided a second advantage because the employees knew the internal workings of their organization and had a stake in its success.

During implementation of their team assignment, each team member gained a broader perspective on his/her work and an appreciation for the importance of coordinating and communicating with other departments. In addition to the KMb workshop, at the kickoff of each team, the KMb team spent time discussing the over-

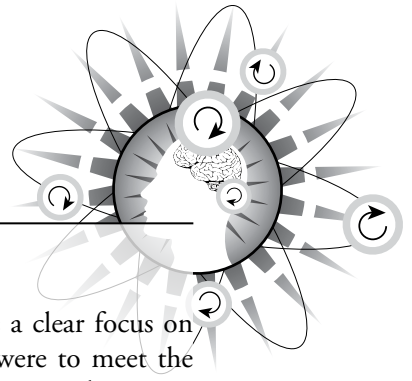


arching objectives and providing training on systems and complexity thinking as it applied to PowerPlus. They also provided information and knowledge on how to improve performance and create a collaborative, empowering, flexible and learning environment.



The most challenging and exciting part of KMb is the implementation. There will be surprises, uncertainties, ambiguities, and roadblocks that will challenge everyone's patience, intuition, confidence and judgment. Welcome to the new world of complexity!

During the implementation process the KMb team worked with many managers and supervisors to get their views and assistance in trying out new ideas and relationships, passing information on to the task teams if it was related to their area of focus. The KMb team's philosophy was to let everyone know that they did not have all of the answers but that everyone working together could figure out what made sense for PowerPlus. There was very little information withheld from anyone, and the KMb team worked hard to develop trust and openness in all of their communication and actions. They set up an Intranet to support the KMb team and the task teams, and provided regular updates on progress. The Intranet also made research material available to all of the teams—and other interested employees. It also provided a mechanism for feedback and new ideas. A blog was added to allow employees to ask questions and provide comments on the process or any issues they felt needed to be addressed. The KMb team and task teams rotated managing the Intranet in order to keep all the teams actively aware of the transformation to a learning organization and a complex adaptive knowledge-centric utility.



REFLECTIVE THOUGHTS

In the KMb implementation process at PowerPlus, there was a clear focus on how people could work together and what the best actions were to meet the organization's goals and objectives, with the continual questioning: *Why are we doing it this way?* There were many tough questions from the workforce that had to be answered honestly and openly. This was, of course, not without challenges, difficulties, misunderstandings and some setbacks. However, the KMb approach, using appreciative inquiry and action-learning, led to creation of a common vision and collective understanding of—and appreciation for—the mission of PowerPlus, something that had not previously occurred. This served to bring people into closer working relationships. Organizations do not change quickly. As in the story above, *slow can be fast*; patience and perseverance do pay off. Knowledge has to be nurtured, shared, reflected upon, allowed to simmer, and *sometimes even discarded*. But when *knowledge is mobilized* it becomes one of the most powerful assets of the organization.

Those teams, organizations, and leaders who can envision, feel, create and apply the *power of knowledge* are the true leaders of tomorrow. By learning to mobilize knowledge, a synergy and focus is created that brings forth the best of actions *and* values. When knowledge is mobilized and used for the greater good, humanity will have left the information age and entered the age of knowledge, ultimately leading to compassion and—hopefully—wisdom.

