



What would you do if there's no clear purpose? Say No?



A colleague and a fellow director of Mind Fit is also a Professor of Innovation and is regularly requested to present on innovation related subjects to variety of institutes, public and private sector organisations.

One such recent request was for a programme to be delivered on Knowledge Management. You might have had similar experiences, but how many would say no?

Here is Victor's story:

"I was contacted back in June for some opening discussions about the role of Knowledge Management in a global R&D business unit.

The first discussion was really about the potential customer (the head of R&D) gaining reassurance that I understood their type of business, had lots of experience of useful implementation and robust models and tools which could potentially, once focused, help the customer. Once this reassurance had been gained, I was passed on to the leader of the R&D unit who began to talk about their wish to "implement" knowledge management.

I supplied 2 papers I had written on the subject and the leader commented by email on their interest in my points about the need for clear goals for any implementation.

At a second telecon, I was introduced to the wider senior leadership team and replayed much of the discussion from the first meeting. This led to a third teleconference, where I



found myself asking **what it was Knowledge Management was supposed to "do" for them? In other words, to manage knowledge with some specific purpose.**

There had been some expression in previous discussion of the need for this R&D unit to meet its customers' needs. I asked what these needs were, and suggested some simple systemic approaches for capturing these. This didn't go down well. I could feel the temperature of the discussion declining.

It turned out that there had been several half-hearted attempts at KM, and that these had followed the traditional cycle of purchase, launch, partial adoption and data-population by some enthusiasts, informal decline and ultimately a dead system. I began to realise that what was wanted was a lecture on the importance of sharing knowledge within a "scientific" culture, but how to do this?

I tried another tack: "**what would be different if we were "doing" KM properly in your R&D unit?"** This led to stunned silence. I tried again:

You guys are working in an innovation environment, your real issue isn't KM, it's innovation. What are your top 3 issues around innovation, and let's use the excuse of KM to focus attention on how we use knowledge to overcome these. We returned to the need to share knowledge as a good thing. I suggested some tactical methods for improving knowledge-share (primarily by using pull-methods to encourage enthusiasm, like skunkworks) and how to reduce reinvention.

I realised that for this leadership team, they didn't want an explicit focus on key issues and their resolution. This might suggest that they weren't in control and working optimally. I toyed with going through the motions and doing a session on building a knowledge-sharing culture, but my heart wasn't in it. I knew that it would be a waste of time for both of us.

I found myself saying that this had been an interesting discussion and that when the leadership team had identified a significant innovation issue, I would love to help them out.

The bottom line is - if there isn't a purpose, then what is the point of it all?"

Have you had similar experiences?

We've seen many where with the best intentions people have gone through the same process again and again, doing the same thing and expecting a better or different result?

Focus on the purpose

Of course it's a well-known fact that if we define a clear purpose then the chances of success are far greater, almost guaranteed! But if it's that well-known, why don't we start with it every time?

Is it time to think differently? Or maybe it's just time to think?

Whatever you do it's your choice.

Don't think you have a choice? [Click Here](#)