PUBLIC MANAGEMENT SERVICE
PUBLIC MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

KNOWLEDGE ENHANCED GOVERNMENT

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Context

For those of you who haven’t noticed, we had a General Election recently!

The results broke all records.

The previous government was returned to office with a second landslide majority.

The 167 majority which the government now has in the House of Commons is the largest majority ever secured by an incumbent administration of any political party.

So you might think that everyone would be happier than ever about the health of our democracy.

But there are worrying signs, that have already been acknowledged by ministers and pundits.

For example, turn-out was the lowest for 80 years – with turn-out lowest amongst young people.

Now it may be the case that young people have always been healthily sceptical of the political process.

However there is a growing global trend towards apathy that anyone committed to the health of the democratic process should watch with concern.

In the recent US Elections, for example, turnout was just 51%.

In this context, surely it is time to look at ways in which we can modernise the ways in which government and citizen interact and share knowledge and information.

Two modes of activity

We can start with trying to understand what makes government activity distinct from the pressures and locus of activity in the private sector.

Inevitably these are “ideal type” caricatures – and it may be that there are more similarities than differences between the government and private sector.

But they are intended to give us a framework around which we can start a discussion about how to harness the undoubted potential of what has come to be called “knowledge management” within the government sector.
A typically successful private company is concentrated in one or a limited number of distinct areas of activity – and is recognised as such by its customers – it is a retail company, a financial institution, a transport company, a restaurant chain, etc. - and is recognised as such by its customers.

Its decisions are largely transmitted and carried out through a clearly understood and accepted management structure which has authority to instruct.

If it requires changes in the financial, legal or regulatory environment, it actively lobbies for such changes – often lobbying the government.

In short, the ideal successful company is lean, mean, identifies its markets, beats its competitors and maximises market share.

It is akin to a successful hunter.

Government activity
In contrast, government is involved in almost all areas of activity – it is pervasive - and while citizens might see themselves in some respects as “customers” of government services, they also feel that they have more rightful ownership of what goes on in their name – they are more like “shareholders”.

A large number of government decisions are transmitted and attempted to be implemented by actors over whom the government has no formal authority to instruct, but only to influence.

Government is more the focus and arbitrator of competing lobbies, rather than a single lobby in itself.

And to a large degree, the success of a government is judged as to how well it balances and manages the competing lobbies and pressures of government.

It is more akin to a successful gamekeeper.

Size and complexity of delivery

We also need to understand the sheer size and complexity of government in its broadest sense – and the breadth and number of agencies, actors and influences which are involved in the successful delivery or otherwise of stated government aims and policies:

- central government;
- agencies and NDPBs;
- semi-autonomous public services;
- local and regional government;
- private and voluntary agencies;
- and ultimately, individual citizens such as YOU!

The role of knowledge programmes in embedding delivery and change

Given that complexity, we need to plan carefully when embarking on change and modernisation in the ways in which we harness and exploit our knowledge.

Knowledge and embedded long-term change are inseparable in an organisation.

That does not mean simply being able to access facts and figures, it means being able to tap into the wealth of experience, talent, skills and expertise that rests within any organisation’s personnel and history.

Without drawing upon that knowledge and experience, we run the risk of forcing change on an organisation for the wrong reasons – or worse still, for no reason at all other than change for change’s sake.

Without constantly interacting with that knowledge during the process of change, we run the risk of change becoming ossified and divorced from the organisation it is seeking to modernise.

And ultimately, the change will prove ephemeral.

What this means is simple.

Knowledge programmes and embedded long-term change are inseparable.
Programmes of long-term embedded change and knowledge programmes are like a spinning top.

An initial change programme begins to move the organisation…the knowledge programme captures initial lesson from that initial change programme…the enhanced change programme applies those lessons and real behavioural change begins to become possible…and the knowledge programme begins to embed long-term change.

Once that cycle is put in place and gains momentum, like a spinning top the organisation begins to transform itself…but take either of the two elements away and, like a spinning top which has lost balance, it will either peter out or it will spin off uncontrollable.

Delivering the “holy grail”
Within the realms of theory, there are four components to the “holy grail” of joined up knowledge sharing within government:

- departments joined together in a common system;
- collaborative working in real time beyond the departmental firewalls;
- mutual sharing of briefing and knowledge across government;
- rapid communication with all key ministerial offices.

Until now, these four aims have remained largely in the realms of theory – they have been a vision of the future.

But they are a vision no longer.

Now they are being built by the Knowledge Network team.

The British Government is the first government in the world to be building this capacity internally, joining up all government departments and allowing people to work together irrespective of departmental boundaries.

**What is the Knowledge Network?**

![Diagram of Knowledge Network]

At present we have Number 10, the Cabinet Office and the various government departments and agencies. Up until now they haven’t had the ability to electronically share information quickly and efficiently.

The Knowledge Network will allow them to do so.

Over the past 18 months, every major department of state has had an internal briefing and knowledge sharing system built for them by the Knowledge Network team.

The KN team have helped each department establish internal project boards and provided support to them to enable them to make their individual systems a success, including support on:
• application development;
• business process development;
• change management and training.

Up until now, these departmental systems have only worked internally – although the combined effort of all the departmental systems has already achieved a step change in the ability of government to access and share its knowledge and information.

But, at the same time, the Knowledge Network team have been building the central system to link all of these departmental systems together and allow their information to flow seamlessly and automatically throughout government – and by October this year to make as much information as possible publicly available to the world through the Internet.

**KN stages**

![Knowledge Network Stages](image)

There are four stages to the two-year KN project.

- The Project has now completed Stage 1 – the KN Internal launch.
- Stage 2 is now underway – running until July 2001.
- Stage 3 will take place between July 2001 and end 2001.
- Stage 4 runs until Sept 2002.

Stage 1 has now been completed, delivering everything that was promised – on time, on budget!

A study by the KN team showed that 93% of the target audience for the KN launch had been successfully made aware of the launch.

And we are now able begin augmenting the traditional collection of “explicit” data and information with which we have hitherto mainly concerned, with the more exciting and potentially radical moves to capturing tacit knowledge and begin the moves to community based working across and between departments – getting them working out of their departmental silos.
Facts and Figures Online

Here’s the opening page of Facts and Figures On-line – a pilot demonstrator for comment.

Facts and Figures On-line takes a range of key government outputs and breaks them down into local and regional levels.

You can, for example, enter your postcode and ask for local information.

So if, for example, I enter my postcode SE17 2EF.

Facts and Figures Online has told me that 1819 young people have started the New Deal in my parliamentary constituency since it started.

It’s told me that the number of infants in large class sizes in my local education authority has fallen by 48% since January 1997.
Other information is available, such as police funding and NHS waiting list sizes.

This is only the start of the type and range of information which we hope to make available via FAFOL in the future.

We have reached agreement with the Office of National Statistics that, from this Autumn, they will provide and maintain a comprehensive range of facts and figures through Facts and Figures Online – all able to be broken down to local level.

It’s not just postcode and/or parliamentary constituency breakdowns that FAFOL can show.

You can also select a government region-wide breakdown.

Harnessing storytelling

There is a great deal of interest at the moment in the power of storytelling as a device to harness knowledge.

We are well aware of this already and one of the aims of the knowledge we want to capture and share are the stories of how government impacts on citizens, not just the explicit data and statistics.

Take NHS Direct as an example.

Say that NHS Direct has a high statistical satisfaction rating and the message is relatively weak.

Tell a story of how an 83 year old woman was helped by NHS Direct and was so moved that she described it as “like having an invisible hand to hold” and the relevance and impact is far higher.

We intend to use the Knowledge Network to capture a whole range of real-life stories and examples of how government policy and delivery are impacting on real people’s lives and communities.

Enabling communities for delivery

One of the most exciting aspects of the momentum building up now within the Knowledge Network is the beginning emergence of cross government communities of officials, united in a common output, interest or area of activity, but who until now have been kept frustrated and isolated behind their departmental firewalls and within departmental systems.

Once the basic KN infrastructure is in place, from this Summer, the promotion and development of these communities will begin in earnest – the heart and soul of the Knowledge Network – and the real prospect for radical and innovative change.

Five early examples of the types of communities we are enabling are:

- CONNECT – the e-communicators’ community was launched on 2 February. It allows people working on e-communications throughout government to share information and contact each other.
- The Office of Government Commerce has established a cross-government project monitoring database via KN, allowing government-wide progress chasing and monitoring – for the first time ever.
• We are working with the Regulatory Impact Unit to allow departments to fill in Regulatory Impact statements and background information on-line – to make the whole government-wide picture available to everyone in one place.

• We will also be working with the Performance and Innovation Unit and CMPS to develop “knowledge pools” for policy officials to share knowledge and information.

• And the cross-departmental lawyers’ community will soon begin to work collaboratively on-line beyond their departmental silos, sharing legal support and advice with each other to the benefit of all departments.

There are a number of other communities and examples of government-wide information we are working to develop – including one exciting development to put all departments progress on their Public Service Agreements available on-line. These will radically modernise and improve the government’s collective ability to progress chase, monitor and work coherently.

KN Community

Here is the opening page of one of the KN applications – the KN Community.

The KN community is designed to be a one-stop shop for information, latest news, useful support material and cross-government knowledge sharing for everyone involved across government in introducing the KN.
Here is the KN team page of the KN Community.

From here, you can send an e-mail to any of the KN team.

You can download useful presentations from the KN Community – or even view them at your desktop without downloading.
Capturing skills – government-wide

The Connect application includes the first example of a skills database which we are looking to develop in a range of areas across the Knowledge Network.

This means that people throughout government can provide information about their background, skills, knowledge and expertise – whether relevant to their present job or not.

And that in turn means that people looking to recruit a new team or set up a new project can identify and contact possible recruits with the right skills and knowledge mix throughout government.

Up until now, this has been impossible.

Office of Government Commerce Project Monitoring
Here is the front page of the Office of Government Commerce “project monitoring” database we have developed and which operates across government.

This is an example of how we are using the Knowledge Network to deliver major improvements in core mainstream cross-government activity – in this case co-ordinated project monitoring – as well as involving ourselves in the less mainstream activities of KM.

The ability to co-ordinate project management in real time across all government departments was impossible before the Knowledge Network was introduced.

**PIU knowledge repository**

An example of something which would be more familiar to traditional “KM” audiences is the Performance and Innovation Unit knowledge repository which we are developing.

This allows discussion and development of myriad policy streams in one well-designed place.

The PIU repository is currently undergoing its final stages of testing before wide deployment.

We are even looking at the possibility of “Extranet”, working with the wider academic community to really begin to transform the policy discussion and development process between government and the outside world.

**Regulatory Impact**

A further example of the types of applications we are developing – this time, a cross-government database of regulatory impact – is the Regulatory Impact Unit database.

It is often said that knowledge management is about improving access to the widest possible breadth and granularity of information, knowledge and interests.

When you start to identify and share across government the regulatory impact of the “Addition of new ingredients to the UV filters preservatives ‘banned’ and ‘provisions’ lists”…you can guess your granularity and breadth is beginning to truly develop!

**What’s the big picture**

All of this might be terribly exciting in its individual component parts, but the real radical potential comes with the appreciation of what this might add up to in the big picture.

The possibility that the full KN knowledge programme holds out is for a totally new way for government to operate, out of the silos, with knowledge and information flowing seamlessly between and amongst the government community.

So that “working knowledge” will cease to be a descriptive noun of only basic aptitude and instead will change its meaning to become a verb, something which officials in government will DO every day in their working lives, accessing, harnessing and deploying their collective knowledge, talents and expertise.
The challenge we are meeting – Knowledge Enhanced Government

The challenge we face, and which we are addressing, is summed up in the following three slides.

Before the Knowledge Network project was started, departments had individual and isolated information-sharing systems – unable to talk to each other or interact.

There was no unified “knowledge network” to allow them to do so.

To traditional KM advocates, the British Government could be said to have little knowledge potential.

A mere 18 months later, we have already achieved much of which we can be proud.

All departments now have compatible information-sharing systems –developed by the KN team and now able to talk to each other or interact.

There is now a unified “knowledge network” being put in place to allow them to do so.
And we are beginning to see the first emergence of on-line interdepartmental “communities of interest and practice” -- the first steps towards community based working out of the silos.

As a result, the British Government now has growing knowledge potential.

Now we have to rise to a greater challenge, and a much more exciting aim.

We need to embed the joining-up process we have begun and allow the unified “knowledge network” to mature.

We need to develop and embed a whole host and range of self-sustaining communities across and beyond the departments.

We need to continue the transformation of the government which we have begun – into a true knowledge and community based organism.

We have a name for what we are striving to achieve.

That is “Knowledge Enhanced Government”.

**We need you**

And that’s where we need people like you.

People who are committed to developing knowledge management and have experience of the perils and pitfalls as well as the successes and benefits.

What we are attempting to drive forward in the UK is, we believe, truly revolutionary in the government sector.

But our vision goes beyond our own national shores.

We want the UK to be a beacon for like-minded modernisers across the world.

Only when we have together made the goal of Knowledge Enhanced Government a global reality, can we collectively as a global community celebrate a true and lasting achievement.